



The

person
Guildsman

#4

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The Guildsman #4

Gamers' Guild

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A Blurb from the Bard

Flirtacious felicitations gentle reader, and welcome to a funky fourth issue of The Guildsman, er... Guildsperson? Well, there's a minisaga behind that, actually. One of our more audacious readers of whom we hold most near & dear had the outrageous nerve (gag, choke) to actually accuse us (wheeze, sputter) of sexism (Aaaarrrrgh!) with respect to the title of our illustrious zine. Sexism! If I'd only known such a religion existed, I'd have joined years ago!

In any case, to reluctantly deviate from such a horridly, deviant topic, thanks for this issue goes to Wayne (lord_zar) Wallace, Brian (asmodeus) Saylor, Ray (Way Wrong) Wong, and Jason (tonto) Bishop for additional editing, proofing, L^AT_EX-work, and all the other silly things which go into producing our beloved zine (never-you-mind what those other silly things are!) as well as to our numerous contributors who art, of course, too innumerable in number to enumerate.

Before pressing on, however, apologies must be offered to all those talented & generous personages whose submissions did not find their way within this issue. If the truth be told, this is the first quarter that we've received more material than we could safely shake a ten-foot pole at, and with recent budget cuts, the situation is not likely to improve any time soon. What that means, in the future, is that we'll be looking at a heinously smaller Guildsman, so please send us your very best so that we can make the most of the little space we'll hopefully muster.

Thus, having once more successfully rendered the prospective readership stupified with his vacuous editorial verbiage, the Bard did finally spaketh such words as were very long awaited (and with muchly abated breath, I might add): "Let the show begin!"

— jimv@ucrmath.ucr.edu
ucsd!ucrmath!jimv (uucp)

Dungeons and Dragons: Cause of Suicide or Parental Scapegoat?

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Dungeons and Dragons was created in 1974 by Gary Gygax, an avid medieval, fantasy, and romance fan (Weathers 109). The game consists of rule books, guide books, manuals, modules, dice, maps, figurines, and reference books and has branched out to fill in more than eight worlds. The publisher, TSR, has become a major publisher in the fantasy and science fiction genre. In the seventeen years that Dungeons and Dragons has been on the market, more than eight million copies have been sold to three to four million people in the United States alone (Brooke D1).

According to Diane Weathers in Newsweek, college students are the biggest fans of this game (109). Even with the increasing popularity of the game, there are those who oppose the sale of this harmless game. These people argue that Dungeons and Dragons, along with all other similar games, lead to suicide and Satanism among teenagers. I've been playing the game for over ten years and have played with many assorted individuals, and have never once been around anyone who could not differentiate between reality and fantasy. Although role-playing games do create an intense atmosphere, there is no documented evidence that Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) or any other role-playing game leads to suicide among teenagers.

John Eric Holmes, a staff physician at Los Angeles County Hospital and associate professor of neurology at the University of Southern California School of Medicine, writes in Confessions of a Dungeon Master that one of his players, another doctor, invented a character called Grog. One day the doctor brought his girlfriend to a game, and when Grog went into action, the other players said to her, "That's Grog. You've probably never seen Grog before." She replied, "Oh yes. I think I've been in bed with Grog several times." This shows that players do not live out totally separate lives in fantasy or take the fantasy home with them, but include a part of themselves into each of their characters (87-88).

Dr. Holmes' current gaming sessions started after he edited a rule book for Dungeons and Dragons

and his coworkers at the hospital found his interest in the game and asked him to be their dungeon master. He has not always refereed for adults, though. In his earlier years, the doctor refereed a group of teenagers. He said of them that there was seldom a problem that could not be solved by blowing the enemy to bits. After the teenagers started to mature, though, they started to get less into the pure bloodthirstiness and more into the other aspects of the game such as romance and heroism. But the teenagers enjoyed the game for several reasons. One of which is that the universe of Dungeons and Dragons is "produced by its social reality." It is something that teaches people how to act together and not how to act alone. It is something that teens enjoy also, because it is something that is new to explore. Dr. Holmes said it best when he said "You always wanted a world of magic and mystery to explore, and now a group of your friends gathers every two or three weeks to explore it with you. For a few hours, everyone agrees to accept that world, to accept your pretense that you are a magician who can throw exploding balls of fire from one hand. The fantasy has become a reality, a sort of giant folie a deux, or shared insanity."

Gaming session can be very intense as problems pile up on the players. As more and more actions are taken by the players, the Dungeon Master, or the person who controls the game, must keep track of every single move and remember what will happen at a given point down the road. Even though the DM has trouble keeping things straight, the players never erupt into bloodshed (even if tempers are short at the time), only the characters do, and that is very frequently. The game is also a great stress reliever, because "In real life, you can't cleave the IRS man with your broadsword." (Holmes 87)

The Brotherhood Against D&D (B.A.D.D.) disagrees with the argument that role playing is a healthy outlet for violence, anger and imagination. They cite several suicides that, according to preliminary investigations, were caused solely by the game of Dungeons and Dragons. They argue that if even one

suicide is caused by Dungeons and Dragons, that the game should be removed from the shelves. B.A.D.D. has even sent propaganda to police departments citing the link between suicide and Dungeons and Dragons and asked the departments to find the link if it looks like Satanism is present in a teen suicide case.

B.A.D.D. was established by the mother of a suicide victim who, at the time of his suicide, had been a player of Dungeons and Dragons (Shuster 64). The founder, Pat Pulling, said that the game manuals give "detailed descriptions of killing, satanic human sacrifice, assassination, sadism, premeditated murder, and curses of insanity." The National Coalition on Television Violence, accompanying B.A.D.D. in its efforts to get the game banned, has petitioned the Federal Trade Commission and the Consumer Protection Agency to require TSR Inc. to put labels on all items sold relating to D&D and to put warnings on the cartoon "Dungeons and Dragons" aired all over the country on Saturday mornings (Shuster 64).

Opponents to Dungeons and Dragons have been trying to get the game banned from school districts all over the country. With some help from the media, they succeeded in some communities. One such example is the Putnam School board in Putnam, Connecticut.

After a student in the Putnam school district committed suicide, his parents attempted to get the game banned from the local schools. A school board member, Raymond Leduc, responded by saying that "There are more important things on the agenda than Dungeons and Dragons — mathematics, reading or smoking, for example. My daughter played D&D since she was 16, and she is now happily married. There is no evidence that links D&D to suicides." At this board meeting and several others afterwards, the school board rejected the idea of a ban. After a petition finally went around the community, the board had to accept the ban, but did not support it. Before the ban went into effect, the local reverend, Robert O. Bakke, stated that "You have authorized Russian roulette." (Brooke D1)

Investigations into whether the Putnam suicide was related to Dungeons and Dragons may surprise you. Although the parents adamantly blame the game of Dungeons and Dragons, the boy's friends blame the suicide on his use of drugs. Erik Bergeson, one of the victim's friends, said "I'm sick of them saying that Roland killed himself because it was D&D — it was drugs." (Brooke D1) His friends were not the only people to come to this conclusion. The police officer who conducted the investigation, Paul Roy, stated that "Dungeons and Dragons [in] no way killed this kid." He went on to say that the kid had gotten

involved with drugs and had fought with his mother (Brooke D1).

Several studies have been done to determine whether or not people who play Dungeons and Dragons are mentally different than "normal" people. One of these studies, reported in *Psychology in the Schools*, gave players a 16-point test at a convention to see if gamers were "normal" or not. Results came back normal in all respects (330). In another study, players were administered three tests to measure alienation and anomie. They were specifically tested to see if the following were distorted: alienation, powerlessness, normlessness, estrangement from work, cultural estrangement, and meaninglessness. Cultural estrangement was taken as watching television or some other nonproductive chore around the house. The results were staggering. Seventeen percent of the players had feelings of meaninglessness as opposed to forty-six percent of non-players. Forty-nine percent of players felt they watched too much television, while only twenty-three percent of non-players acknowledged that they might be culturally estranged. No other fields of study had any major differences (De Renard 1221).

Still, with all these facts against the fact that suicide is caused by Dungeons and Dragons, people still blame suicide on the game. Case in point happened in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Two U.S. marines held up a gun store, stole over \$900 cash, and killed one person and seriously wounded another. The marines had been friends for quite a while and had been on shore leave when they committed this "senseless act." The two nineteen year old marines were arrested at one of the boys' mother's house. What disturbed many people from Las Cruces was the attitude of the marines. They appeared to be totally nonchalant. The two were arrested on charges of: first degree murder, attempted murder, and armed robbery. The defense for the murderers was originally built around the scenario that the marines were entering the store much the way characters in D&D enter a dungeon. The defense was dropped and the two plead guilty not long into the trial. After the trial, no one, not even the authorities or psychologists blame the game as the cause of Mieritz' diagnosed paranoid schizophrenia. Both the Marine Corps and Dungeons and Dragons further put the case behind them by further impairing the two boy's judgments. Said the psychologist who evaluated both marines, "They were the impetus that led to this completely unintelligent heist."

In another murder case, a man in Riverhead, L.I. was convicted of shooting his parents. During the case, the defense's lawyer decided to take the stand

that Daniel Kasten, 20 years old, had been under the control of his character, a mind flayer, in Dungeons and Dragons. The jury disbelieved him, and found him guilty of murder. The defense's lawyer, William Nash, stated "This case is about psychoses, delusions and schizophrenia. Dungeons and Dragons is the game Mr. Kasten decided to make his own reality."

In an interview with Dr. Jack Stark, a well renowned psychologist, many reasons for suicides among teenagers were given, but Dungeons and Dragons was not one of them. The major reasons for suicide among teenagers that need immediate attention are: that most teens experience sex at an earlier age, about twenty percent of teens are substance abusers, over ten percent of preschoolers have been involved with some sort of child abuse, and that over half of all kids born in the 1980's will live with only one parent. Dungeons and Dragons has no place being involved with suicides. It is an excuse, not a cause of the suicides.

According to Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and its Consequences, twenty eight teenagers (at the time this article was written) who often played Dungeons and Dragons had committed suicide. While this may seem like a large number to die from a single cause, two more facts should be taken into account. First is the fact that more than three million teenagers play the game. The second fact is that the rate for teenage suicide is approximately twelve teens per hundred thousand. These facts, when put together, suggest that the rate for teenage suicide from Dungeons and Dragons should be over three hundred sixty (Paulos 168-169).

Critics claiming that Dungeons and Dragons causes teenager suicide should first research the facts. There has been no documented evidence that suicide is caused by Dungeons and Dragons or any other role playing game. There has been no killing of any kind directly linked to the game, except for the killing being done by TSR and the bookstores that sell the game and all the accessories for eighteen dollars a book. Concerned parents should not ban their children from participating in the game but should watch or join a game with an open mind before making any final decisions.

Mrs. Pulling obviously feels otherwise.

You do not casually play this game, just like you do not casually take heroin... This game captures youths totally. It stimulates their imagination, all right, but it's an imagination of killing and horror (Witt 1;3).

I can agree only with part of what Mrs. Pulling said. Dungeons and Dragons does get very intense and is not for the casual player. The game also does stimulate the imagination, but not to the extent that players would go out on a murder spree to kill off friends and foe. I agree with Gary Gyax.

The majority of fantasy games are cooperative. Players work together to win. They are not trying to kill each other... Accusing the D&D games as the reason for teen-age suicide is a cross between McCarthyism and the Salem witch hunts. I have not seen one iota of clinical evidence linking role playing gaming with a teen-age suicide. This is only a coincidence because, unfortunately, teen-age suicide is an epidemic in our country.

Unfortunately, what we have is religious fanatics who object to the mentioning of mythological gods, demons and devils in the game. From a game aspect, who else do the good guys fight? (Games C13).

Due to the fact that there has been no hard evidence cited against the role playing game of Dungeons and Dragons or any other game, there should be no question as to whether role playing games cause suicide. The players of the game play in an intense atmosphere, but understand the limitations of the game as well as the difference between characters and players. As with any subject that may arise, there will always be a person who will be an exception to the rule. As far as suicide and gaming are concerned, there should be far more suicides and murders if the normal conventions are used. Those people who consider Dungeons and Dragons to be a threat to society should sit in on a game with an open mind so that they could find out the truth about what actually happens during the course of a gaming session. As there is no evidence that Dungeons and Dragons causes suicide amongst teenagers, there should be no argument about the game.

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"I do not feel obliged to believe that same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect, had intended for us to forgo their use."

— Galileo

Truth & Heresy

A Clarification of Historical Artifacts

For the Inquiring Role-Player

While rumor and superstition float in the muck, Truth & Heresy dredges the sludge at the bottom.

D&D history

Dave Arneson used to come down to Lake Geneva from the Twin Cities in the early 70's to play games. The Fantasy Supplement for Chainmail caught on and while Gary was making his campaign, Greyhawk, Dave was making his own, called Blackmoor. Both "castles" exist in the same world, Blackmoor being more to the north. The rules back then were MUCH more fluid than now, as they existed only in Dave and Gary's notes and heads, principally the latter. Eventually (I think 75) Gary formed a partnership with a gaming buddy and neighbor, Tom Kaye, (cf. Koeghtom's Ointment), and they published the original set of D&D, with Dave getting second billing.

The first supplement was called Greyhawk, penned by Gary and Rob Kuntz, a protegee of Gary's who'd been one of the original players with Ernie Gygax and Rob's brother Terry, and was now co-judging the campaign. This contained material principally derived from the Greyhawk campaign. About this time Tom Kaye died of some malady I forget, and Tactical Studies Rules threatened to fold, until Gary managed to get some capital from Brian Blume (Boot Hill), a peculiar sort from the North Side of Chicago, whose father was the very wealthy owner of a tool and die company. They incorporated and changed the name to TSR, which no longer means anything. The second supplement was called Blackmoor and contained material principally from Dave's campaign.

Around 77 Dave move down to Lake Geneva with a bunch of other Twin Cities gamers like Dave Sutherland (artist and Tekumel scholar), Mike Carr (Figh in the Skies), Dave Magary (Dungeon), and things got really cooking as they published all kinds of things, including MAR (Phil) Barker's wonderful (at the time) Empire of the Petal Thrown, much due to Sutherland's affiliation with Barker. This was when I started working for the company, although I'd long gamed with them. (I lived around two blocks

from Gary.) You see, only at this time was I legally old enough to do so. It was an idyllic time when only friends worked there and we gamed incessantly. Eventually Jeff Perren joined the company, and Jim Ward (Metamorphosis Alpha, Gamma World) quit his job teaching high school history in Prairie du Chien (the most beautiful area in Wisconsin — read Clifford Simak's SF) to come to Geneva. Gary's wife did PR and his son Ernie ran the hobby shop (which is where I worked). Tom Wham (Snit games, Awful Green things) had an office that looked and smelled more like some aging hippy's headquarters than a business office, and he and Brian Blume rented part of TSR's main building as their living quarters.

Well, much of the remainder is easily foreseen. As a family company became a big company and a stream of Blume's (Kevin, Doug, another brother, and associated spouses and spouses' siblings) came up from Chicago to run the business aspect, things started going downhill. James Egbert III disappeared from a Michigan campus, and the press hyped it up to be some sort of D&D-cult bizarreness; actually, it was but a poor, alienated, young genius from wealthy and insensitive family who just couldn't understand him, who had run off to get away from it all (he was 16, and in CompSci at the University already.) The national press helped TSR even more due to the exposure. We grew too big, too fast, and we forgot to be nice to the customer. As competitors sprang up, TSR spent a whole lot of time in the courts trying to get them on "Look and Feel" suits. We began to get a bad name in the business as a bunch of greedy, imperious assholes. The development types (Gary et al.) came head-to-head with the finance types (the Blumes) and there began to be fallings out amongst friends.

Eventually something happened between Arneson and Gary, and Gary fired Dave. Soon thereafter they invented AD&D and got Dave's name off of it (he really hadn't contributed much anyway after the initial development of FRP's). Dave took Gary to court on this, and to my astonishment, actually lost. I guess Gary had better lawyers. He somehow talked the courts, who understood as much about D&D as

they do about software, into believing that D&D and AD&D *were not the same game*, and the product lines began to diverge in order to make reality conform to law. After four years of part time work (full time during the summers) doing various things including shipping and mailing, hobby shop work, convention organization, proofreading, and playtesting,

I went off to college just as things were getting hot. Some of my friends had already left or been fired, like Arneson and Magary. Since then nearly everyone I ever knew there has gone elsewhere. The Blumes consolidated their power and kicked out even Gary, who was having mild culture shock as he went from the the village cobbler and despised as a do-nothing failed violinist to being the town celebrity and millionaire. Gary had moved to California to do the D&D cartoon and ended up divorcing his wife. Now he's writing bad novels and trying to do another company (New Infinities), I believe.

When I go home now I still get together with a lot of these folks, but they don't work for TSR now. We've got a bitter taste in our mouths about the whole thing, and try not to talk about "the good old days". It's all really depressing. This has been a much more draining posting that I'd expected.

Well, now you know the rest of the story.

— Tom Christiansen
CONVEX Technical Support Center,
Richardson, TX
circa: October 1988

"That's not a bug – it's a feature!"

TSR Trademark Policy

Here's a little story.

As part of the current Ragnarok advertising campaign I recently submitted an ad to Dragon for Abyss Magazine. I then got a call from a woman in the ad department who said that TSR's Legal Department had objected to the wording of the ad. Apparently I had mentioned the fact that Abyss publishes the occasional AD&D related article in the ad, and that was a no-no, which is fine, because Dragon is their magazine, so I sent them a new version with AD&D not mentioned and it was approved and was in a recent issue.

Then she told me that the legal department would like to LOOK at a copy of Abyss. I was willing to play along so I sent them a couple of recent issues, issues which featured the usual mix of not particularly AD&D specific material.

This is the letter which I got back:
By certified mail, no less...

Dear Mr. Nalle:

...Thank you for your letter dated December 19, 1990, regarding your publication titled "Abyss."

...As I'm sure you are aware, your revised ad will run in the next issue of Dragon Magazine.

...While TSR does not have any objection to others writing reviews of our products, we do object to our trademarks and/or copyrighted materials being used in any other context, i.e. articles or adventures.

...We therefore request that you refrain from any further use of TSR trademarks and/or copyrighted materials for anything other than a review of a TSR product. In order to fully preserve the great value inherent in its many important trademarks and materials, TSR must take all steps necessary to defend and protect its rights in its trademarks and copyrighted materials.

...Thank you for your cooperation in this very important matter.

Very truly yours,

Debbie Poutsch,
Legal Assistant

Short and sweet. Frightening and yet strangely amusing. The only way in which TSR products are mentioned in Abyss aside from reviews is in variant articles and editorial articles. When I first read this letter it struck me as unlikely that the trademark law would make it illegal to discuss products and their use in print. That would put Consumer Reports out of business, as well as dozens of other successful magazines and books.

TSR seemed outrageously over-protective of their rights. And on consideration it occurred to me that every time a game variant or a module which is AD&D compatible gets published, it is in effect a service to their loyal players and an endorsement and promotion of their game. So, in effect, their policy is to their own disadvantage.

But to check up on just what TSR was getting at, I sought out a copy of the trademark law. I quote from section 1114, which restricts the use of a

trademark by persons other than the registrant, prohibiting:

“use in commerce any reproduction, counterfeit, copy or colorable imitation of a registered mark in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution, or advertising of any goods or services on or in connection with which such use is likely to cause confusion, or to cause mistake or to deceive; or reproduce, counterfeit, copy or colorably imitate a registered mark and apply such reproduction, counterfeit, copy or colorable imitation to labels, signs, prints, packages, wrappers, receptacles or advertisements intended to be used in commerce or in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution or advertising of goods or services or in connection with which such use is likely to cause confusion, or to cause mistake, or to deceive...”

What this does make abundantly clear is that advertising a product and using TSR's trademark in your advertisement is definitely a violation. What it does not say is that referring to AD&D in an article or in a discussion of a product, or even in the text of an adventure or module is a violation of trademark. As long as the reference to AD&D or TSR is not part of the advertising, packaging or promotion of the product, there is no violation of trademark. That's very clear.

Later on in the trademark law, in section 1127 it defines what is meant by using a trademark in commerce, indicating that such use only occurs if the mark is placed “on goods or their containers or the displays associated therewith: or on the tags or labels affixed thereto.” Which clearly indicates that to violate trademark the reference to the trademark would have to be on the outside packaging of the product, something which has never been done in Abyss or any other of our products, and a point which should be clear to TSR's legal department.

I think the real key here is the part of the trademark law where it says “to cause confusion”, because nothing published in Abyss is going to confuse people into thinking that Abyss is some sort of AD&D product or supplement. Most of the mentions of TSR's products are fairly negative, usually editorial commentary on the damage that TSR is doing to the hobby as a whole and stuff like that.

I'm really not sure what else to say about TSR's rather aggressive policy. I can't see how they could find anything in Abyss to be a violation of their

trademark, assuming they've actually read the law they are trying to enforce, and the fact that they are so concerned makes me wonder a bit about their sanity. It seems to me that there are so many better things they could be doing, like making their products something actually worth protecting...but then I guess that isn't what TSR is all about.

— David Nalle

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circa: March 1991

Necronomicon

I must say that I have found the Necronomicon discussion amusing, to say the least. However, it is getting a little tiresome, so I went through some of my books and did a little research on the Necronomicon. By the way, I am a fan of the Lovecraft circle of writers (H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, August Derleth, Clark Ashton Smith, et al.), so I have read most of their stories and poetry, and I have read many essays, treatises, and biographies on these writers.

Here is what my research came up with:

Lovecraft: A Biography by L. Sprague de Camp 1975 Doubleday & Company, Inc.
ISBN 0-385-00578-4

According to this book (and others), Lovecraft made up the Necronomicon. Lovecraft *himself* stated that he made the book up. The title “Necronomicon” was derived from a Roman astrological poem written by Manilius (circa 100 AD) called “Astronomica.” This poem was a favorite of H.P.L. and he often quoted it in newspaper articles. Lovecraft did make use of real books in his stories [like “The Story of Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria” by Scott-Elliott (1896, 1930) and “Sadducismus Triumphatus” by Joseph Glanvil (1681)], but the Necronomicon was entirely fictitious.

Over the years, many different factors have caused people to believe in the existence of a real Necronomicon. One of the more popular theories is that due to repetition (the references to the Necronomicon in many, seemingly-unrelated stories) people came to think that a real book was being referred to. In other words, if a person hears something often enough, and from enough sources, that person will start to believe it even though it is false. In

addition, Lovecraft wrote a pseudo-intellectual history of the Necronomicon. This essay was the beginning of the whole mess. People began asking book dealers for copies and book dealers (now convinced of the book's existence; after all, if so many were looking for it, it *must* be real) began offering large sums of money for the book. Furthermore, a practical joker managed to place an index card for the Necronomicon in Yale's library files. And to top it all off, in Lovecraft: A Biography, de Camp writes: "A waggish bookseller, Philip C. Duschness of New York, listed a copy of the Latin edition in his Catalogue No.78 at \$375."

As for the hoax versions of the Necronomicon, I know of three versions. The first is the version that was produced by de Camp. It was artificially aged and every effort was put into making it look as authentic as possible. I actually saw a copy of this version in a book store in Los Angeles back in 1989. The owner told me what he knew about it. By the way, it was just on display, it was not for sale (I couldn't have afforded it anyway - it must be worth a small fortune). The second version that I know of (whether it was ever published, I don't know) was advertised in the Oct. 1982 issue of "Epic Illustrated" magazine (#14). It was a leather bound hard back that listed for \$50 (no publisher listed). The third version is a paperback (I happen to own a copy) was published by Avon Books in 1980 (ISBN 0-380-75192-5). All in all, not a convincing book. The author is listed as being "Abdul Alhazred," which, as others have pointed out, is not a proper Arabic name.

In case anyone is wondering about who L. Sprague de Camp is, he has been writing professionally since the 1930's and has written textbooks, fantasy, science fiction, biographies, and historical novels, as well as articles for newspapers, magazines, and encyclopedias. He has written something on the order of 100+ books.

— Andrew G. Hummell
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University of Pittsburgh
circa: April 1991

"To light a candle is to cast a shadow."

— A Wizard of Earthsea

A Response to Jim Vassilakos' Method for the Derivation of Constrained Number Probabilities

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Jeffrey Contompasis BSChE, MSChE is a chemical engineer who is currently part of the evergrowing "Massachusetts Miserable". His article addresses Jim's Rectangle as presented in Guildsman #3.

1 The Problem

Given n ideal s -sided dice (abbreviated nds), what is the probability of rolling a total, t , and what is overall probability distribution?

1.1 Answering Jim's Questions

Four questions were posed after Jim's Rectangle was created.

The first two were "Does it work?" and "Why?"

My response it "yes" because it is based upon summing the probabilities of rolling one die and the total, t , minus the value rolled on that first die. By continuing this process until there is but one die left will yield the probability of rolling t on nds . This will be explained in detail later.

The second two were "Is there an easier method?" and "Has it been shown elsewhere?"

The response is "yes" to the third question for a computer, but probably "no" for a human. Jim Vassilakos' method can be scratched out on a piece of paper easily. A simpler method actually requires more mindless, tedious, iterative calculations. But, this makes it extremely quick to code on a computer.

As for other implementations, a library search yielded no book in which a method like Jim's Rectangle is mentioned in any form. One might think that this would be a classic probability exercise.

1.2 A Recursive Approach

Recursion: what is it? Recursion is essentially answering a question in such a way that it leads to another question. This continues until a "bottoming out" occurs.

The classic example is the definition of the factorial (symbolized by an exclamation mark, "!"). What is $(2!)$? It is $2 \times (1!)$. But, there is a factorial in the answer. So, what is $(1!)$? It is $1 \times (0!)$. What is $(0!)$? It is defined as 1. That is where the recursion "bottoms out". Thus, $(2!) = 2 \times 1 = 2$. $(3!)$ is $3 \times (2!) = 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 6$.

Understanding this recursive approach is necessary in finding the total number of chances in s^n possibilities of obtaining the total, t , efficiently.

1.3 Deriving the Solution

What are the number of possible rolls, x , on n dice with s sides which will yield a total, t ?

If n is zero, then the solution is trivial. All chances are zero. If $n = 1$, then the probability for all x is 1 chance in s . This is important in establishing the "bottoming out" level in the recursive approach. The function $x(1, s, t) = 1$ where 1 is the number of dice, s the sides, and t the total.

If $n > 1$, then the calculation gets increasingly complex with higher n 's. Examine 2 six-sided dice.

The probability of rolling any total, t , is equal to the sum of all values from 1 to $(t - 1)$. It is $(t - 1)$ because one cannot roll a zero on a six sided die. For those unfamiliar with summations, there is a shorthand notation for expressing this.

$$x(2, s, t) = \sum_{a=1}^{(t-1)} 1$$

In this case, $s = 6$ and t ranges from 2 to 12 (which is n to $n \times s$).

$$x(2, 6, 4) = \sum_{a=1}^3 1 = 1 + 1 + 1 = 3$$

Therefore, the odds of rolling a 4 on 2 six sided dice is 3 in 36.

To obtain a table of all totals and their respective odds, it is only necessary to calculate the chances for 2 through 7. This is due to the symmetry of the event distribution. If the total is higher than the "halfway point", k , then it has an equivalent total on the other side of the "halfway point". Thus, if $t > k$, then the equivalent total is $((n(s+1)) - t)$ where $k = \frac{n(s+1)}{2}$ rounded down to the closest integer.

Notice, however, that the "1" in the summation expression is, in fact, $x(1, s, a) = 1$. The example can be rewritten.

$$x(2, 6, t) = \sum_{a=1}^{(t-1)} x(1, 6, a)$$

This leads to an important extension of the method to higher numbers of dice.

If n , s , and t are arbitrary, then...

$$x(n, s, t) = \sum_{a=(n-1)}^{(t-1)} x((n-1), s, a)$$

...provided that the total, t , is less than or equal to the "halfway point", k . If $t > k$, then t is made to equal $((n(s+1)) - t)$.

There is one further complication to consider. What if the total, t , is greater than the number of dice plus the number of sides on each die minus 1? Mathematically, what if $(t - s) > (n - 1)$?

Why is this important? As an example, try to calculate $x(3, 6, 10)$. One may only roll the values 1 through 6 on any single die. Examine the following table:

$t = 10$		
Die #1	Die #2 + Die #3	# of possible rolls
Min = 1	9	4
2	8	5
3	7	6
4	6	7
5	5	8
Max = 6	4	9
		<hr/> total = 27

If one rolls a 2 or a 3 on die #2 and die #3, there is no roll on die #1 that can make a 10. Thus

[1,1], [1,2], and [2,1] are not allowed. Only the 6 (number of sides) values below $(t - 1)$ and above $(t - s)$ can be used. Therefore, the lower bound of the summation must be changed to $(t - s)$ if $(t - s) > (n - 1)$.

At last, one has a complete, rule-based, recursive approach to calculate $x(n, s, t)$ for any n , s , and t . The rules are as follows:

1. Given n , s , and t , find $k = \frac{n(s+1)}{2}$ (round down).
2. If $t > k$, then the adjusted $t = ((n(s+1)) - t)$.
3. If $(t - s) \leq (n - 1)$ then

$$x(n, s, t) = \sum_{a=(n-1)}^{(t-1)} x((n-1), s, a)$$

4. If $(t - s) > (n - 1)$ then

$$x(n, s, t) = \sum_{a=(t-s)}^{(t-1)} x((n-1), s, a)$$

The rules of this recursive method form the basis of the source code of the computer program DICEROLL.

2 The Prediction Program

DICEROLL is written in C because "for" loops in C can have variable in the start, stop, and step values. This is unlike FORTRAN "do" loops where they have fixed values. C also has built in facilities for making recursive functions relatively easy to implement. The program will keep on reducing the value of n internally on each successive call until it "bottoms out" at $n = 1$. Then, it starts adding up all the possibilities. This does, however, slow the program down with large values of n . For instance, 50d3 has over $7.17E+23$ (that is 717 followed by 21 zeroes) possibilities. Even a fast computer slows to a crawl.

/*****
Revision History for Program DICEROLL.C

\$ #1 BY: CONTOMPASIS DATE: 01-APR-1991 Original version

MODULE TITLE: DICEROLL

DESCRIPTION: PROBABILITY CALCULATOR

WRITTEN BY: JEFFREY CONTOMPASIS DATE WRITTEN: 01-APR-1991

READ BY: JEFFREY CONTOMPASIS DATE READ: 01-APR-1991

SUBROUTINES CALLED:

 NAME - print_error(errcode,errtext)

 USAGE - prints out error messages to standard output

 NAME - x(n_dice,s_sides,t_total)

 USAGE - recursively calculate chances of rolling
 t_total on n_dice of s_sides

 NAME - raise(s_sides,n_dice)

 USAGE - raises the value of s_sides to the (n_dice)th power

FILES:

 NAME - DICEROLL.C

 USAGE - Source code file (self-sufficient)

DETAILED

DESCRIPTION:

 This program takes user input of number of dice, number
 of sides on the dice, and calculates the number of chances
 of rolling a particular total or all totals along with the
 total number of combinations on n s-sided dice.

The syntax for calling the program is:

diceroll <return>

The user will be prompted for all necessary input

/

#include <stdio.h>

/*****

print_error(errcode,errtext)

 This procedure prints an error message to standard output

```

*****/

void print_error(int errcode, char *errtext)
{
switch (errcode)
{
case 0: printf("\n%s\n", errtext); /* generic error message */
        break;                      /* prints error text passed to it. */

case 1: printf("\nSomething \"%s\" not found\n\n", errtext);
        break;

case 2: printf("\n%s\n", errtext);
        printf("Syntax is: diceroll <return>\n\n");
        break;

default:break;

} /* end case statement */
}

/*****

raise(s,n)

Directly calculate the total number of possible combinations
on n s-sided dice

*****/
int raise(int s, int n)
{
int i, p;
p = 1;
for (i = 1; i <= n; ++i)
    p = p * s;
return(p);
}

/*****

int x(n,s,t)

Recursively calculate the number of chances of rolling t
on n s-sided dice.

*****/
int x(int n, int s, int t)
{
int sigma, lower_bound, upper_bound, k, leftside, rightside, a;

k = ((n*(s+1))/2);

```

```

    /* adjust t in case it is in the second half of the
    event distribution. If it is in the second
    half, it is switched to the equivalent value in
    the first half. In essence, a mirror image is
    formed by repeating values. */

    if (t > k){
        t = ((n*(s+1))-t);
    }

    leftside = (t-s);
    rightside = (n-1);

    /* Because t has been forced to be in the first half
    of the event distribution, the upper bound is always
    one less than the total desired */

    upper_bound = (t-1);

    /* x(1,s,t) is defined as being 1 since it is a linear
    distribution. It is the "bottoming out" level in
    the recursion. The lower bound is one less than
    the number of dice rolled provided that none of
    the remaining rolls are greater than the maximum
    possible die roll on any one die. Otherwise, it
    is the difference between the total desired and
    the maximum die roll. */

    if (n == 1)
        return(1);
    else if ((leftside <= rightside)){
        lower_bound = (n-1);
    }
    else if ((leftside > rightside)){
        lower_bound = (t-s);
    }
    else
        print_error(0,"Error in variables");

    /* reset summation value */
    sigma = 0;

    for ( a = lower_bound; a <= upper_bound; a++)
        sigma = sigma + x((n-1),s,a);

    /* send back the total number of chances */
    return (sigma);

} /* end x(n,s,t) */

/*****
main

```



```

*****/

main()

{
int option, chances, possibilities, n_dice, s_sides, t_total, all;

    /* get user information */
printf("\n1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? ");
scanf("%d",&option);
printf("\nHow many dice? ");
scanf("%d", &n_dice);
printf("\nHow many sides on each die? ");
scanf("%d", &s_sides);

    /* find the total number of possibilities directly */
possibilities = raise(s_sides,n_dice);

    /* break into the two options */

    if (option == 1){
printf("\nWhat is the desired total? ");
scanf("%d", &t_total);
/* find the total number of chances recursively */
chances = x(n_dice,s_sides,t_total);
/* output is the probability outlook */
printf("\nThe chance of rolling %d on %d, %d-sided dice is ",
        t_total, n_dice, s_sides);
if (chances == 1)
    printf("%d chance in %d\n", chances, possibilities);
else
    printf("%d chances in %d\n", chances, possibilities);
}
else {
    /* Print an output header */
printf("\nTotal on %d, %d-sided dice | Chance of rolling\n",
        n_dice, s_sides);
    /* Reset the value for all possibilities */
all = 0;
    /* go into a loop from n to n*s */
for (t_total = n_dice; t_total <= (n_dice*s_sides); t_total++)
{
    /* find the total number of chances recursively */
chances = x(n_dice,s_sides,t_total);
/* output is the probability outlook */
printf("%20d %20d\n", t_total, chances);
all = all + chances;
}
printf("\nThe sum of all possibilities is %d out of %d\n",
        all,possibilities);
}
}

```

2.1 Sample runs

The following output is from actual runs made on a VAX mainframe running the DICEROLL program.

The first test is to make sure that a single die produces a linear distribution of possibilities.

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 1

How many sides on each die? 6

Total on 1, 6-sided dice | Chance of rolling

1	1
2	1
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	1

The sum of all possibilities is 6 out of 6

Note that the sum of all possibilities is equal to 6 to the first power. This is to be expected. Next, one tries a non-linear or bell distribution.

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 2

How many sides on each die? 6

Total on 2, 6-sided dice | Chance of rolling

2	1
3	2
4	3
5	4
6	5
7	6
8	5
9	4
10	3
11	2
12	1

The sum of all possibilities is 36 out of 36

The majority of rolls is in the center portion of the range. This is to be expected. This time the total possibilities is 6 squared. Higher values of n produce similar distributions.

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 3

How many sides on each die? 6

Total on 3, 6-sided dice | Chance of rolling

3	1
4	3
5	6
6	10
7	15
8	21
9	25

10	27
11	27
12	25
13	21
14	15
15	10
16	6
17	3
18	1

The sum of all possibilities is 216 out of 216

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 4

How many sides on each die? 6

Total on 4, 6-sided dice | Chance of rolling

4	1
5	4
6	10
7	20
8	35
9	56
10	80
11	104
12	125
13	140
14	146
15	140
16	125
17	104
18	80
19	56
20	35
21	20
22	10
23	4
24	1

The sum of all possibilities is 1296 out of 1296

Hand calculations confirm that the method is still working. The hand calculations, however, took a considerable amount of time. *Jim's Rectangle* is apparently faster in these cases. The program can even roll strange dice like a two sided die. A coin is an example of such a die.

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 10

How many sides on each die? 2

Total on 10, 2-sided dice | Chance of rolling

10	1
11	10
12	45
13	120
14	210
15	252
16	210

17	120
18	46
19	10
20	1

The sum of all possibilities is 1024 out of 1024

The reason for programming in C becomes apparent when one notes the ability to use almost any number of s -sided dice. One does not need to know the maximum number and size in advance. However, very large numbers of dice require recasting the program with "long int" rather than "int" for most variables. Otherwise, the values will overflow the space allocated them and produce bizarre results. The next example took the mainframe about 5 times as long to complete than the others. Examine the total number of possibilities, and the reason becomes clear.

1) Single calculation or 2) Table ? 2

How many dice? 6

How many sides on each die? 12

Total on 6, 12-sided dice | Chance of rolling

6	1
7	6
8	21
9	56
10	126
11	252
12	462
13	792
14	1287
15	2002
16	3003
17	4368
18	6182
19	8532
20	11502
21	15168
22	19593
23	24822
24	30877
25	37752
26	45408
27	53768
28	62712
29	72072
30	81642
31	91188
32	100458
33	109192
34	117132
35	124032
36	129668
37	133848
38	136422
39	137292
40	136422

41	133848
42	129668
43	124032
44	117132
45	109192
46	100458
47	91188
48	81642
49	72072
50	62712
51	53768
52	45408
53	37752
54	30877
55	24822
56	19593
57	15168
58	11502
59	8532
60	6182
61	4368
62	3003
63	2002
64	1287
65	792
66	462
67	252
68	126
69	56
70	21
71	6
72	1

The sum of all possibilities is 2985984 out of 2985984

Nearly three million possible combinations, and DICEROLL was able to account for all of them.

3 Future Work

Summing up n ideal s -sided dice is relatively easy once the recursive definition is made. What about the following problems?

- Summing up n ideal s -sided dice and m r -sided dice. For example, what is the probability of rolling a 6 on 1d4 and 1d6? One would have to determine the "excluded possibilities" more carefully. As another example, if the total desired is 10, there is only one possibility. Rolling a 5 or less on the d6 prevents the rolling of a total of 10.
- Summing up $n+1$ ideal s -sided dice and removing the lowest value. The classic example is 4d6, take the highest 3. What is the probability now? This

is particularly difficult since the assumption of a symmetrical event distribution is invalidated. Rolling a 3 on 4d6 (less the low d6) is a 1 in 1296 chance since any roll higher than 1 on any of the 4 dice would knock out a 1. But, rolling an 18 is a 1 in 216 chance since rolling 3 sixes would immediately knock out any roll on the last die (even another 6).

- Summing up $n+m$ ideal s -sided dice and removing the m lowest. The skewing is even more acute. This may be considered a generalized case of #2. This method is actually used sometimes in which rolls of primary importance get the highest value of $n+m$. For instance, roll 6d6 and throw out the 3 lowest for a primary attribute. Roll 5d6 and throw out the 2 lowest for a secondarily important attribute and so on.
- Summing up $n+2$ ideal s -sided dice and removing the top and bottom rolls. This is somewhat like "Olympic averaging" in sporting events. Take the judges' 7 scores and average the middle 5. This supposedly eliminates bias for and against a participant.
- Summing up $n+m$ ideal s -sided dice and removing the top i and bottom j rolls where $i+j = m$. This is an extension of #4.
- Loaded dice. Determine the skewing from the ideal. What if all the dice are loaded in the same way? What if some ideal dice are mixed in with some loaded dice? What if the dice are all loaded in a different way?

That is only a sample of the other probability puzzles that can arise while rolling dice. It might be interesting to see what programs readers of this article write to solve them.

"...one of those most bizarre of mathematical concepts, a recipriversexcluson, a number whose existence can only be defined as being anything other than itself."

— Hitchhiker's

Naverro, of the Correct and Unalterable Way

Chapters One Score to Two Dozen

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The gamester's favorite alterboy returns for another five chapters of action and adventure as the Naverro Saga continues.

— XX —

Naverro, male human cleric, 3rd level
Dania, female 1/2-elf MU, 3rd level
Rourk Ravensbane, male drow cavalier, 3rd level
Kortul, male human fighter, 2nd level
Razuli, male human fighter, 2nd level
Arlor, male dwarf thief, 2nd level

And so, our heroes entered the great city of Propyla for the first time. It was much what you would expect of a relatively new city — still mostly clean, tolerable citizenry, and the good yet inexpensive accommodations. There were several inns and taverns, a sizable marketplace, an upper class district, government buildings, and a Street of Learning — a small street in the rich part of town, with sages and magicians selling their services; also, one magic shop. The city had several squares, as opposed to one, with message posts and public fountains — an altogether hospitable place.

The party split fairly early on, each of us going about our own business. Rourk found an armorer capable of repairing plate, and a limner to repaint his shield device. Naverro wandered to the religious areas, where he found a church of the Correct and Unalterable Way and spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening. Arlor just wandered away. Dania, Kortul, and Razuli all congregated to the magic shop, to see what sort of goodies they could find.

Dania: "Wow! Look at all this stuff!"

Kortul: *grunt* *Inspects swords on one wall.*

Shop Keeper: *sneers in a whiny sort of way* "May I help you?"

Razuli: "Hey there! Got anything we could use?"

Keeper: "I wouldn't know, *sir*. Were you looking for anything *specific*?"

Dania: "What do these wands do?"

Razuli: "You wanna see a wand of fireballs, wizzard? I got one I know you'll like."

Keeper: "*That* is a Wand of *Mineral* Detection, *ma'am*. 5000gp."

Dania: "Oh." *Drops wand, looks at other things.*

Kortul: "Not many weapons here."

Keeper: "No; there's *little* demand for them here; *most* that make their way here *are*, shall we say, somewhat *used*. Weapons are in the back, as are *armors*, and certain of the commoner potions."

Dania: "Hey, look at that mace. You think Naverro would like that?"

Keeper: "That is a Mace of *disruption*, a very fine item and a rarity indeed. It was *only* through great fortune that I was able to get it at all. It's function is to destroy those of the living dead whom it hits, *completely* and *utterly*, down to the last vestiges of their souls. I am *sure* your friend would love to have it."

Razuli: "Great! Then he can take out all the undead. I can just see them, shivering in terror, as The Great Naverro appears! How much?"

Keeper: "60,000gp."

Dania: "Gaak!"

Kortul: "Bit expensive."

Keeper: "Sorry *sir*, but I cannot accept *any* less. And please do not *lean* on those carpets, you *may* stain them."

Dania: "What's this little statue?"

Keeper: "*sigh* A Figurine of Wondrous Power. 30,000gp. I *perceive* that you are on a budget. Perhaps you would *like* to look at something *else*, more in your range?"

Dania: "Uh... can we see what kinds of potions you have?"

Keeper: "Certainly. *sigh* Anything to please a customer. *George?*"

George: *From back room* "Yes?"

Keeper: "Could you tell these *wonderful* people what kinds of *potions* we currently stock?"

George: "We stock: MegaHeals of all varieties, potions of diminution, potions of growth, one of love a *hot item!*, potions of..."

Dania: "What's a MegaHeal?"

Keeper: "*sigh!* I wonder *how* long you have been *out* of town. A MegaHeal is a variety of *healing* potion, which I *suppose* would make it an attractive item to those of *your* profession. Normally, a healing potion may cure *less*, or *more*, but a MegaHeal will consistently restore the *same* amount of damage. It is unaffected by the *purity* of the drinker's body, or *any* of those other factors which make the ordinary, garden variety of healing potion so very unpredictable and undesirable." *This means: They cure 8 hit points, not 1-8. Megaheals come as 8, 10, 16, and 32 pointers.*

Kortul: "More expensive?"

Keeper: "That *used* to be the case, but the *never* techniques have reduced the cost to a much more *reasonable* level, which may make them more *attractive* for you."

Razuli: "How about crossbow bolts?"

Keeper: "George? Do we have any *crossbow bolts* in stock?"

George: "Light, or Heavy?"

Keeper: "*Light* or heavy, *sir?*"

Razuli: "Light, with barbed heads."

Keeper: "George? *light*, with barbed *heads.*"

George: "Sorry, we do not have any quarrels or arrows in stock."

Kortul: "Any two-handed swords?"

Keeper: "*George?* Do we stock any *Two-Handed Swords?*"

George: "We have one two-handed claymore, which is...+1, +4 vs. reptiles."

Keeper: "One two..."

Kortul: "Heard. Price on Lizard sword?"

Keeper: "*Hmph!* George? What is the list price on the *lizard* sword?"

George: "The list price is...5000gp."

Kortul: "Trade-in?"

Keeper: "*sigh!* Yes, we *accept* trade-ins. Are you speaking of *that?* Well, let me *see*. Hmm... Fairly standard enchantments, nothing *special.* *with* this, I *believe* we could settle for...3000gp."

Kortul: "1500."

Keeper: "*George?* Bring the *lizard sword* out here that the customer may inspect it before purchase. I *assume* you wish to do so, *sir.*"

Sword floats out of the back room, sets down on counter.

Keeper: "Thank you, George. I *believe* you can see that this fine item..."

Much haggling. Settle on 2300gp, Kortul is pretty much cleaned out.

Dania: "I think I'll just get a MegaHeal or so. That way, we don't have to depend so much on Nav."

Keeper: "*Sound* thinking, *ma'am.* Would you be wanting the *economy* size, or one of the more *effective* ones?"

Dania: "Uh, economy."

Keeper: "Fine. The 8hp type is...500gp each."

More haggling. Dania gets 2, Razuli gets 1.

Razuli: "Well, I guess that's it. You got nothing much worth buyin'. How do you keep people from stealing all this junk?"

A beautifully made suit of full plate on display animates, grabs Razuli, and tosses him out the door.

Dania: "Neat. Bye, George!"

George: "Bye, come again!"

We met again in the square closest to the gate, and went out looking for an inn to stay in. We found a very nice one; there was a common room below, with a small stage for entertainers, and the tables were all in good shape. Rooms were all upstairs, with thick walls to keep the noises of nighttime revelry out; we were mostly all tired, and did want to sleep that night. The party was mostly complete; only Rourk and Navero were missing.

Dania: "Where's...uh, whatisname, the stupid?"

Razuli: "Which one? There are a lot of them."

Dania: "I meant helmet-head. Wasn't he gonna be here?"

Arlor: "Um, I saw him, yup. He went into a house where there was this woman."

Razuli: "*Our cavalier, chasing human tail? Or was she human?*"

Arlor: "Yup. Not real nice-lookin', though. He seemed to like her."

Razuli: "No accounting for taste. Wonder what she tastes like? I'll guess I'll just have to ask him, won't I?"

Dania: "Oh, please. I don't wanna hear about it."

An elf enters, comes to our table. He is in fine red leathers, has silver hair and golden eyes, and has a lute.

Obnoxious Bard: "Hi there! New in town?"

Kortul: "What are you?"

O Bard: "Sir! Do you not recognize me by my profession? I see you do not; well then: how many barbarians does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Kortul: *glares.*

O Bard: "One, of course."

Razuli: "That's not very funny, ya know."

O Bard: "What's funny is how many light bulbs it takes."

Razuli: "Here's one for ya: how many obnoxious bards does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

O Bard: "That depends on how big the light bulb is. Speaking of which: magic user! Are you free tonight?"

Dania: "Do you have a name, o great minstrel?"

O Bard: "Indeed I do, o palpitator of men's hearts! I am Kory Silvertongue, soon to be The Incredibly Famous Kory Silvertongue, known throughout the land for his incredible musical talents."

Razuli: "Dania's already known throughout the land for her incredible talents."

Kory: "Oh, really?! Well! We should get together and make beu-u-u-atiful music together sometime! How about tonight?"

Dania: "I don't know who you are, but I already know that I don't like you. Piss off."

Kory: "Say that with a smile, sweetheart! Ah, Dania! Can't you see what I'm trying to tell you?"

Dania: "Yes! You're a fucking pervert with his brains in his pants!"

Kory: "Oh, dear! My face would cave in every time I went to the bathroom!"

Arlor: "Why are those guards coming over to our table?"

Kory quickly disappears.

Guard 1: "Who was that?"

Dania: "I don't know. I don't want to know."

Guard 2: "Well, you are all under arrest."

Razuli: "Aw, c'mon officer! We didn't know he was the governor!"

Guard 1: "What's this about the governor? We wanted to arrest you for traveling with a Dark Elf."

Kortul: "Joking."

Arlor: "But we wouldn't, nope. They're not nice people!"

Guard 1: "Were you in the company of a short knight when you came into our city, at gate #2 this afternoon?"

Dania: "Did we come in gate #2? I don't think so. That wasn't us."

Guard 3: "The color of your chits indicates otherwise. How long did you know this person?"

Razuli: "Oh, not long. Was he a darkie? He never took that helmet off."

Guard 4: "Details, please."

Kortul: "Met a few days ago. Traveled with us, kept apart. Left us after the gate."

Guard 1: "So you know nothing of him?"

Dania: "Nope. How'd you catch him?"

Guard 2: "We didn't. We found his body in a drainage ditch a few hours ago. He was naked and drained of blood, through two holes in his neck. Probably also used in some other nefarious rites as well; the body had been mutilated. Not being worthy of a funeral, and not wishing to have it polluting our city, we took the body out and burned it. And now, we wish you to explain his presence here."

Arlor: "We didn't know, no no no. News to us."

Guard 1: *sigh*. "You will swear to that?"

Dania: "Sure. Right here, if you want."

Guard 2: "Not strictly necessary. Ah, well. Good evening to you."

They leave.

Dania: "Rourk's dead? Oh, well."

Razuli: "They probably got all his money too."

Kortul: "Hmph. Remember: cities more dangerous than dungeons. Watch it."

Kory: *Reappears* "Ah, ha! So you did know this person!"

Dania: "Oh, shit. I thought they scared you off."

Kory: "Magic-user: how could one of our race knowingly run around with one of those filthy bastards? I find it difficult to believe, but I'll forgive you if you sleep with me tonight."

Dania: "What if I told you I got kicked out of home for sleeping with one of those bastards?"

Kory: "Yeesh! Then yours is a road I shall never travel! Good God, woman! You have absolutely no morals! And I'm starting to like you!"

Kortul: "Hmph."

Kory: "You have some opinion, o great and hairy one?"

Kortul: "Light, Dark, all the same. Are all uppity, and all bleed."

"You speak of elves as though they were meat."

"Often are."

— Dan Parsons

— XXI —

After training, as appropriate...

Navero, male human cleric, 4th level
Dania, female 1/2-elf MU, 4th level
Kortul, male human fighter, 3rd level
Razuli, male human fighter, 3rd level
Arlor, male dwarf thief, 3rd level
Kory Silvertongue, male elf bard, 2nd level

Kory is a new-type bard, not the old type; the Dragon Magazine type, as they were called back then, now the 2nd Edition type.

Training this time around was no problem at all. There was a semi-public library for magic-users, temples for Navero, a very small arena, etc. It all went very leisurely, with plenty of time to relax and unwind; we were beginning to like this place. A pity that it didn't last... we still had plenty of money to spend.

At our tavern, just after dusk.

Arlor: "Nice, quiet place, yup."

Kortul: "No dragons. No paladins."

Kory: "O hirste one; would you be speaking of Those Who Are More Than Two And Less Than Four? You have my condolences. You won't be meeting them again, I pray?"

Dania: "Not if we can help it."

Kory: "Ah, good! That gives me yet another reason to hang out with you guys. The first being your beacon of spiteful loveliness, who fascinates me endlessly. The second is that you guys seem to have somehow produced an irresistible force which draw me ever closer to you."

I'm still not sure how he got his S's to sound like dollar signs.

Razuli: "The bonds of camaraderie and friendship are strong indeed. *sigh*. Hey kids, wanna find Navero and take him to see the sights?"

Kory: "That little priest person we met earlier, no? Well! I know of a house run by a lovely older woman that I'm sure he'd just *love*..."

Kortul: "Some guards coming."

Kory quickly disappears.

Dania: "I don't see any guards."

Kortul: "Don't either. How long'll he be gone?"

Razuli: "Long enough to try laying one of the barmaids. He'll be back soon."

Kory: "That was not very nice."

Razuli: "And the 8-second wonder returns! How was she?"

Kory: "Oh, not too bad. Soon as she saw me, she just melted..."

Dania: "Down through the floorboards, hoping to escape, no doubt."

Kory: "You watch your tongue, young lady! If you keep this up, I may have to spank you! Then, you can spank me!"

Dania: "Ooh, sounds kinky. Can I use your sword? Trust me."

Razuli: "Hey, c'mon, I get a turn, don't I? What's one bitchy little magic user between friends?" *shit-eating grin*

Kory: "More than you could ever dream of. Dania, my dear! Picture this:"

Dania: "Some elf's balls frying in butter? Mmmm, sounds tasty."

Kory: "Uhhh... Friend Kortul! Is she always like this?"

Kortul: *Hostile stare*

Razuli: "It's just PMS."

Dania: "Oh...fuck you all. I'm going to bed."

Razuli: "You're going to bed to fuck us all?"

Kory: "My most perverted dreams come true!! Only we need some women for the rest of you. Wait a minute, there's some over there! Wow! On second thought, Razuli can HAVE the magic user!" *Leaves.*

Dania: "What an asshole."

Many many Guards approach table.

Razuli: "Oh, shit, not again. Kids, get ready to run."

Arlor: "Hello, officers!"

Guard 1: "ello, me loverlies. 'member me? Yur ol' friend come ta see ya."

Dania: "Oh, FuckingJesusChristGoddamIt... What is it?"

Guard 1: "Wasn' nice, you attackin' us guards, runnin' out'a town, leavin' behind such a 'orrible mess. Been weeks cleanin' up afta yu. And runnin' ta this city, o' all places, seein' tha' the Lord o' Swamp Keep happens to be the Guv'nors brother-in-law! Took a bit o' time ta peg yu. But maybe we all should talk some, right?"

Arlor: "But, sir, we didn't make any of that mess."

Guard 1: "Why didn' ya stay and help clean up!? Right un-neighborly. In fact, so un-neighborly yu all could be arrested rite here. But we all would much rathe' have your willin' co-operashun."

Kortul: *grunt*

Guard 2: *This guard bears himself like some sort of lieutenant, or something.* "According to certain officials at Swamp Keep, you are responsible for cleaning out an Orc nest in the area and so are more or less responsible for events transpiring thereafter. *Glares* I hope you all understand that if *you* can clean out an Orc lair, the militia would certainly be perfectly capable of handling the same problem. If said militia does not, it is because of possible repercussions, which you apparently did not stop to consider. One cannot simply go waltzing into a cavern and start slaughtering. *You* may move on, but *we* have to live with the *consequences* of your actions!"

Razuli: "Look, we're sorry, okay? Now what's the deal here?"

Guard 2: "You be quiet. You and your kind have done quite enough."

Guard 1: "Tell 'em wha' ta do, already."

Guard 2: "I was about to, so *be quiet*, dolt!"

Guard 1: *mutters* "Oo' pu' a burr up yur ass, then?"

Guard 2: "During your activities, you disturbed a young Black Dragon, I believe."

Razuli: "That was Rourk! We didn't do it!"

Guard 3: "Oh? So you admit to knowing him, then?"

Razuli: "Knowing who? Oh, you mean the darkie! We're talking about a different guy, here."

Dania: "Yea, different person. What about the dragon?"

Guard 2: *a-hem!* "Some citizens of the empire have been complaining that such a dragon has been sighted near their fields where it steals cattle. Why it should come up here, when it was safe and happy further south, I of course haven't the slightest idea. *Glares* You, I understand, have developed a slight reputation for the slaying of Dragons..."

Kortul: *groan...*

Razuli: "Here it comes..."

Guard 2: "Surely, for such *competent* and *capable* adventurers as yourselves, slaying one young rogue black would be as child's play. *And* in addition, you would have the thanks of the citizenry of the state, who may forget about the small matter of your debt."

Razuli: "We keep all it's treasure!"

Guard 2: "Amusing. Anything it has stolen from the citizenry belongs to the citizenry, and not to any brigandish ruffians who come along and sneak off with it. You will be expected to surrender whatever valuables you should find in the black's hoard, and accept the reward decreed by the Governor for the Dragon's death. Any more is not in your due. Am I understood?"

Party: Yup, yes, gotcha, absolutely your priggishness Sir!

Guard 2: "Should you try to simply cut and run, before *or* after killing the black, you will find that the chits you have been given, and which you now wear and cannot remove, will lead us unerringly to you...and you will *all* then suffer *punishment* to the *fullest extent of the law!* Am I understood now!?"

Party: Uh...yes. Absolutely. Can we go now, we have lots to do.

Guard 2: "Yes. I think you do have quite a bit to make up for. The black hasn't killed anyone yet; if it had, I'd have you all locked up for murder. But as it is, you get a chance to redeem yourselves; and I don't know whether I want you to succeed, or fail."

Guard 1: "Bye, now. Hope yu have lotsa fun. He he he!" *Guards exit*

Dania: "Let's go find Nav."

Kory: "Excuse me! Was it you who was getting screamed at?"

Razuli: "Yep. Some stuck-up cock sucker wants us to go kill another dragon."

Kory: "Oh, cool! Been nice knowing you all. I shall sing songs of your bravery for minutes to come. Wait a moment, did my pointed ears deceive me, or did you say *another* dragon, dear fellow sentient?"

Razuli: "Yea, another dragon. Shouldn't be too much trouble, we've seen it before, and killed worse."

Kory: "Then I must accompany you! I've never been to a Dragon slaying! Oh my, what wonderful opportunities this creates for my autobiography."

We found Navero and explained the situation to him, and then spent the rest of the night separately. The wise ones prepared their equipment and slept; others spent the time less wisely. In the morning, we set out, but not on horseback, as before. The northern parts of the marsh were considerably more boggy and inhospitable than the southern areas, and going on horse would be difficult. But there were several runs lacing the swamp, draining it's waters into other streams and rivers; a large skiff riding high in the water would be much better than walking through quicksand. At least, that was the idea. We very quickly discovered that no one had ever steered a skiff before, and there were far more subtleties to it than you might guess. Fortunately, we didn't capsize before we got something figured out, and were soon on our way into the swamps.

"How the hell do we get into these things?"

— Dan Parsons

— XXII —

When last we saw them, our heroes were poling up the swamp runs in a skiff. We were sadly inexperienced, as was apparent to anyone who saw us. But soon, we left the jeering spectators behind, and as morning wore on into afternoon, an uncomfortable silence settled over the swamps. Fortunately it was the beginning of winter; it was damp enough, but not hot, and the insect density was tolerable.

Dania: "Quit splashing."

Razuli: "Jezuz H. fuckin' *Christ*, magic-user, *you* steer, then!"

Kortul: "Shut up, both of you."

Kory: "And who elected you, bright eyes? I fail to see your qualifications for the position of courageous leader."

Arlor: "I feel sick."

Dania: "So dive in and cool off. There aren't any crocodiles nearby."

Kortul: "Some over there, elf. Leave Dwarf alone."

Navero: "Dania, why do you not like Arlor? I haven't seen him do anything to make you mad at him."

Dania: "I don't hate him, Nav. Lighten up. It's just this useless little hairy geek gets on my nerves. Didn't anyone ever tell you about Dwarves? They chop down forests to make charcoal for their damn forges and mines. Whole forests."

Arlor: "Um... You only use dead wood for that."

Dania: "Well, it's sure as hell dead when you get through with it!"

Navero: "They make some very useful and nice things, I know, Dania."

Dania: "Oh, sure, yeah, dead things, that decay, or just gather dust! Oh, what do you know? You'll never live to see it, anyway."

Arlor: "Forests don't last either."

Dania: "Not with you around, that's for sure."

Navero: "Please, why are you angry? Maybe the Dwarves clear away deadwood, and use it to make other things, that wouldn't exist otherwise. Making things must have it's place in the world."

Dania: "Tell *him*! *They're* the ones who went wild and went chopping down trees and killing people just so they could get more *gold*, and go around killing everything beautiful in the world and..."

Kortul: "*Wizard!*"

Dania: "*Whaf?!*"

Kortul: "Pointless, stupid. Wizard, steer. Razuli, take priest's pole. Priest, sit there." *Indicates between Dania and Arlor.*

Kory: "No, no, let them go on. This is highly amusing."

Dania: "Why the *fuck* should I listen to you?!"

Razuli: *Leaves steering oar.* "Come on, take the steering. Navero, why don't you have a talk with these two?"

Dania: *Glares, grumbles, takes steering oar.*

Razuli: *Aside to Kortul* "What's with you? You spoke several sentence fragments in a row. For such a long speech, she must be finally getting to ya, huh?"

Kortul: *Glares* "Women down here uppity, don't know to shut up. 'Specially elves. Talk too much. Everyone talks too much."

Razuli: "It's those pert little buns, isn't it? The heaving breasts, the fiery eyes; a woman you can't tame..."

Kortul: *Glares*

Razuli: "Ok, OK! Sheesh, you're no fun at all, ya know?"

Kory: *Laughs.*

Along the way, we met a most extraordinary person. During a lull in the conversation, we saw a small man in woodland colors, waving to us from the side of the river. We went over to investigate.

Small Man: "Hello. I could not help but hear you as you came up the river. I was wondering at your purpose, as I can see that this is not your usual mode of travel."

Razuli: "We're going to kill a dragon. Wanna come with us?"

Small Man: "How kind of you to offer. I had entered this area with an intent of scouting out such a beast, which threatens the order of this lovely green. However, with the company of such obviously capable and industrious people as yourselves, I may be able to do more to correct the unbalancing of natural forces."

Razuli: "Huh?"

Small Man: "Yes, very capable and industrious. I am Topash Raycin; I am a member of the Green Brotherhood of the Wood."

Naverro: "Don't you worship trees?"

Topash: "Hah. No; we work with the forces of nature to preserve the balance of the world. We do not worship anyone; we coexist."

Dania: "Great. Glad to have another elf on board. Come on in."

Topash: "Elves, humans, dwarves; all have their place in the balance. But before we move on, I think perhaps some advice on how to handle a skiff is in order..."

And so we went on into the swamp. The afternoon passed uneventfully.

Game Master: Damn. I expected you to walk in. You're floating past all the encounters I set up.

Party: Sorry 'bout that. What a shame.

GM: I guess I'll just have to wing it.

**SPLASH!* Skiff tilts, entire party goes into the drink.*

Kory: *Glub!* "Oh no! I'll get my instrument wet!"

Razuli: "Worry about your manhood some other time. There's nothing around here that would want it anyway."

Arlor: "I can't sw..."

A huge, greenish, yucky-looking humanoid had come up under our skiff and toppled us into the river. Fortunately, it was shallow in the swamps, and only Arlor went under. More humanoids appeared from the bracken along the shore, and they rushed clumsily to the attack.

Kortul: *Draws sword, moves to Troll 1 by the skiff.*

Dania: "I think it's Trolls!" *Magic Missiles Troll 2*

Topash: *Entangles two Trolls in bracken*

Razuli: "Get a fire going! Naverro, do it!"

Naverro: "But my tinder and flints are all wet!"

Arlor: *Blub*

Kory: "I can't play a wet lute. Take that, putrescence! *stabs Troll 3* Mess with me, eh? I'll teach you to " **WHAM!** "...on de udder hand, I could always use a bit o' education myself..."

Troll 1: "Harruugat! Kill! Fuud!" *Much swinging of claws, etc.*

Kortul: "Ha!" *Criticals, removes Troll 1's head. It falls in river, body begins looking for it blindly.*

Naverro: "Hang on, hang on..." *Staggeres to shore, gets out flint and steel, starts looking for dry tinder.*

Razuli: "Quit playing with your instrument, bard." *Hits Troll 2.*

Kory: "Oh, ha ha. At least I have one, human!" *Misses Troll 3 "Fuck it."*

Dania: "Are you that desperate, Kory?" *Magic Missiles Troll 3.*

Arlor: *BLUB!*

Topash: "Is this how you usually do battle, brave adventurers?" *Hits Troll 4*

Trolls: *Three Trolls still fighting. Razuli clawed twice, Kory bitten, one moves in on Naverro.*

Naverro: "eep!" *Runs from Troll 4, Troll 4 chases.*

Topash: "It's good to see a group of people who can cast aside their personal differences and cooperate so well." *Hits Troll 3.*

Arlor: **BLUB!**

Razuli: "What the fuck was that?"

Kory: "I believe it is our Dwarven companion, attempting to alert us to one of the hazards associated with shortness. Go see to him, my good fellow; and do be quick about it."

Kortul: *Takes large chunk out of Troll 3.*

Dania: "Oh, let him walk ashore." *Magic Missiles Troll 3, finishes it*

Trolls: *Two left. One bites and claws Razuli, other still chasing Naverro.*

Razuli: "Oww...My cue for a strategic retreat." *Breaks away, goes to look for Arlor.*

Kortul: *Comes ashore "Priest! Quit playing; get over here!"*

Naverro: "Ahhh!!" *Hits patch of very moist ground, falls. Troll 3, strangely, does not follow.*

Kory: "Does anyone have a fire started yet? Children, children, do I have to take care of everything?" *Stabs Troll 2.*

Dania: "Oh, shut up." *MM's Troll 2.* "Kortul! We need you on this one!"

Topash: *Hits Troll 2.*

Arlor: *GASP!* *Pulled up to air by Razuli.*

Trolls: *Headless Troll has found it's head. Troll 3 starts to come back up out of river. Troll 4 leaves Navero. Troll 2 claws Dania, Kory, misses with bite.*

Navero: "I'm sinking!" *Indeed, he is sinking into the damp ground.*

Dania: *MM's Troll 2, it falls.*

Razuli: "Nav, it's quicksand! Lie still!"

Arlor: "I'm not never goin' in a boat again, yup, that's for sure."

Dania: "Yes, you are. Now do something!"

Razuli: *Notices Troll 1 putting it's head back on. Promptly knocks it off again. It tries to bite and falls into the river.*

Kortul: *Criticals, cuts Troll 4 in half.*

Topash: "Hmph." *Comes ashore, starts to work on fire. "Everything's wet."*

Kortul: "Common enough in swamp."

Trolls: *Troll one resumes search. Troll 3 moves to Dania. Troll 4 squirms. Troll 2 stays on river bottom. Trolls 5 & 6 starting to break out of the Entanglement.*

Kortul: *Drags Navero out of quicksand by his vestments. "Not going well."*

Topash: "Patience... Got it!" *Fire started.*

Dania: "Great! Now do something with it!" *Smacks Troll 3 with her staff, it falls.*

Razuli: *Puts Arlor in shallow water, goes looking for Troll 1's head.*

Kory: "Ah, good! Someone besides me displays signs of competence! I am greatly encouraged; now, if only my lute weren't ruined..."

Navero: "Ugh! The two halves are growing!"

Arlor: "They do that, yup. Disgustin'"

Trolls: *Troll 1 still looking. Troll 3 goes down, Troll 2 hasn't come up. Troll 4 still squirming, Trolls 5 & 6 break Entanglement.*

Navero: "That fire's awful small."

Topash: "The wood is quite damp."

Kortul: *Moves to Trolls 5 & 6. "Get over here!"*

Dania: *Webbs Trolls 5 & 6; it just misses Kortul. "Ha! Got 'em!"*

Arlor: *Wades ashore. "I hate water."*

Razuli: "Any luck with the fire?" *Finds Troll 1's head, sticks it on his sword.*

Topash: "Some. There; if anyone has any dry torches, we can begin. But be careful not to let the fire spread."

The skiff had fortunately not been capsized, merely tipped, so our supplies are still dry. With the help of some lantern oil, Trolls 5 and 6 were soon roasting. As other Trolls come back up, they are sectioned and burned; some party members take damage during the fight. After healing, everyone is moderately OK, although muddy and very wet. Of course, with this many Trolls, there is probably a lair nearby; a few hours search reveals the only likely candidate, a large cave near the water, under an overhang. We took torches, and went in, Kortul at the point.

The cave went in for about 25 feet; the floor was earth packed down by huge feet; tree roots poked through the roof. At 25 feet, the tunnel took an abrupt dog-leg turn, and around the corner, waited 2 more Trolls.

Troll 1: *SMACK!* *Hits Kortul with a Longsword, bites.*

Kortul: *!? Shoves torch in it's mouth.*

Navero: *Starts Chanting*

Troll 2: *Tosses flask of oil onto Kortul.*

Kortul: *!?!*

Troll 1: "Gon' burn now?! HahahAhaAhA!"

Razuli: "Oh, fuck."

Kory: "Duy, duy, this one's got a brain somewhere! We should remove and donate it to science!"

Dania: "Kortul, back off and let me web 'em!"

Troll 1: *Claws, bites Kortul.*

Kortul: "RRRAAAHH!!!" *Swings twice and criticals once. Troll 1 goes down.*

Topash: "Very impressive. Now get out and let us burn the other."

Troll 2: *Grabs Kortul, hugs him close, sticks tongue out at party.*

Dania: *MM's Troll 2*

Arlor: *Has snuck behind Troll 2, stabs it in the knee, distracting it.*

Kortul: *Squirms away from Troll 2 "Hit it!"*

Topash: *Lights the oil that rubbed off of Kortul onto Troll 2.*

After much sound and fury, the two Trolls were dead and burned. The air within the cave is quite fouled, but we explored on nonetheless. Within, we found a lot of bones, a lot of rocks, and very little else. It being nearly nightfall by this point, we set up camp a short way up the river; any bits of Troll we had missed did not come to bother us, and the night passed uneventfully.

"Oh, goody! My instrument seems to be in working order!"

"Kory, quit playing with yourself and go to sleep. You can lay Dania in the morning."

— Dan Parsons

— XXIII —

Navero, male human cleric, 4th level

Dania, female 1/2-elf MU, 4th level

Kortul, male human fighter, 3rd level

Razuli, male human fighter, 3rd level

Arlor, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

Kory Silvertongue, male elf bard, 2nd level

Topash, male elf druid, 3rd level

Morning came, foggy and dim, to the marshes. Nothing had come to the camp to eat us in the night. The nocturnal sounds of the swamp were uninterrupted. The mists were very thick; feeling somewhat vulnerable, we loaded the skiff and set out, pausing now and then to bash an adventurous crocodile on the nose. In the fog, everything seemed subdued and quiet, as if listening, and waiting for something. Thick, gnarled trees rose up from the hidden ground, vines and mosses and strangeweeds hanging from their branches.

Kory: "Oh, I just *love* what they've done with this place! So totally retro-primeval. I must say, this dampness suits you quite admirably, dear magic-user. The way your robe clings to you is *so* evocative of the dreamy summer days of my distant youth."

Dania: "Leave me out of your wet dreams."

Arlor: "I wanna go home."

Kory: "You be quiet. I'm quite happy here."

Navero: "I wish it weren't so wet. This would be a nice place; those trees over there are kind of nice."

Kortul: *Starts "quiet!"*

Kory: "What? Be *quiet*? Don't you understand me? Of course you don't. To remain quiet is against the rules of my chosen profession. Why, I come from a veritable royalty of splendidly harmonic issuance, perhaps the finest..."

Razuli: *Clamps a hand over Kory's mouth.* "Bard, ya got three choices: shut up, dive in, or start losing appendages. Your tongue won't be last."

Kory: "Music haters."

Topash: "No; there is a disturbance near here."

Razuli: "You feel a tremor in the force, Obi-wan?"

Topash: *sigh.* "No; something is watching us."

Dania: "I don't see anything."

Kortul: "course not."

Arlor: "I really wanna go home."

Dania: "So start swimming."

Navero: "Maybe it would be a good idea if we all tried to be quiet?"

Party: *Yea, sure, right kiddies, etc. Party stays quiet maybe 2 minutes.*

Kory: "Damn. I gotta go to the bathroom."

Topash: "Why didn't you go before we started?"

Kory: "Oh, your buffness? You too, Raz. Could I trouble you two kind gentlemen to pole us over to the side, by those reeds? Thank you kindly."

Razuli: "Shit, Bard. But not here."

Kory: "That's what I'm trying to do."

With faint but audible grumbling, the skiff was poled over to the side of the river. Kory jumped out and went into the bushes. Then, suddenly we all heard a great crackling, like trees being torn up and pushed aside; a blast of chill air swept over us. A big black shape rose up out of the mists on the

opposite shore, opened it's jaws, and spit. The glob of digestive acid hit the skiff amidsthips, spattering everyone; we all dove into the water to wash the vile liquid off. Everyone but Navero, that is. He was hit full in the face with the glob, and, without even a chance to scream, dissolved into the bottom of the skiff. The acid ate out the bottom, and the whole thing went down.

Party: AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

Twang! Light! Hurl!
Spellcast! "Kill the *%&\$@%*&!!"
"Bolt!"
Twang! **KABLAM!**
Throw! Ka-Thunk! Twang!
Whunk!
Twang! Twang!

Plus many other sounds commonly made by a badly frightened party unloading into some poor defenseless little dragonling...

The baby Black wobbled in mid-air a bit, then silently crashed into the middle of the river. Being a small shallow river, it was only partially submerged, so we spent another couple of rounds filling it with arrows and bolts and magic until we had assured ourselves that it was dead.

Dania: "Is it dead?"

Kory: "It damn well better be!"

Razuli: "Where's the priest?"

Kortul: "In the boat."

Dania: "Where's the boat?"

Kortul: "On the bottom."

Dania: "Oh fuck it, not again."

Dania splashed into the remains of the skiff; most of our equipment was acid-seared and water-logged, but some was salvageable. Of Navero, she was able to find a shoe, a few teeth, and not much else. Kortul and Razuli waded out to the Dragon; they were careful to stay upstream, as the water was already becoming laden with it's noisome blood. By this point, the thing was quite dead; sadly, the hide was too badly damaged to be of much use, and we knew of nothing else that had value.

Kortul: *Prying out a canine* "Treasure?"

Razuli: "I got no idea where it is. Better find some to satisfy snot-face. Are we going back there?"

Dania: "Remember the chits? Forget running."

Topash: "A monetary prize would be of some use. This 'snot-face' you mention seems unnecessarily obsessed with money, however; perhaps if he did not receive any, he would realize the utter futility of concern over material wealth."

Razuli: "Yea, yea, what he said. Let's get rid of these things and get outa here."

Kory: "My feelings exactly! I wish to skip merrily through the woods, free of the dismal chains of bureaucracy! Besides, this dumb little thing clashes with my tunic. Let us be done with them!"

Dania: "Right. I'll look into it. But first we find this thing's treasure."

Topash: "I shall look into that." *Shapechanges into a sparrow, flies off.*

Dania: "Don't go alone, you...oh, you idiot."

The sparrow flew off in the direction the dragon had come from. The land in this direction was higher than usual, almost dry; following the dragons trail was not difficult. It had been moving along beside them for some time; no doubt awoken from a gorged sleep by all the noise the others had been making. It seemed to have come out of an overgrown spot on a small, gentle hill. That seemed the most likely spot for the lair.

Sailing on his borrowed wings, Topash flew into the trees, gliding between their high and noble trunks. They were tall and straight, unusual for the area, and further apart than usual. Faint depressions in the earth indicated that other trees had once stood there, but had been thinned away, allowing these others to grow higher. They effectively screened a large area from the air, preventing the occupant from being seen from that angle. It was amazing that a dragon which seemed so young could have done all this.

Fluttering deeper in, the ground vegetation thinned, revealing the occasional track. Most of these were ordinary; rabbit or such. Some were dragon's tracks; however, a couple of these were quite a bit larger than a small dragon could be expected to make. A very uncomfortable thought began to rise; Topash nervously flew on, to make a startling and disconcerting discovery at the center of the wood. He elected to quietly leave and inform his new companions of this unexpected turn of events.

Sparrow shrieks into the middle of the group like a bat out of hell, changes into an elf in mid-air and crashes to the ground. Topash stands up.

Topash: "Can the boat be repaired? *Quickly?!?*"

Razuli: "I doubt it. You didn't find the treasure, did ya?"

Topash: "No, I'm afraid not. Instead, I found your baby's parents. Do you know anything about dragons? Like, they rarely have children? And that those children are valued more than the earth itself? And they get a trifle annoyed with people who kill their children?"

Arlor: "I'm going home."

Kory: "Oh, Christ! How did you people ever talk me into going on this ill-fated expedition? You told me, Dragon! Singular! I'm terribly sorry, but multiple dragons is not in my contract."

Dania: "Goddamn it all... We better get the fuck *out* of here!"

Kortul: "Useless. On foot. They're flying. Will defoliate whole swamp to find us."

Topash: "I must agree. They are going to be *quite* upset when they find out."

Razuli: "Waitamminute, waitamminute. 'When they find out'? They don't know yet?"

Dania: "Yea, didn't they hear us?"

Topash: "Ah, no. They're asleep. Older dragons sleep more heavily."

Kory: "Oh... Asleep, you say, dear woodsy-type-person?"

Kortul: "Have to kill them."

Razuli: "That just might be possible, kids. Where are they?"

Topash: *Hmm...* "There seems no other option, so... this way, please."

"There sure are an awful lot of dragons around here."

— Dan Parsons

We had some more Dragons to deal with...

The dragons would probably not wake up anytime soon; so, there was no great hurry to go and see them. We spent some time around the body of the baby, securing teeth or scales or whatever else we thought might be worth something, and waded to the other side and walked to the Dragons' grove. We were quieter than usual — this was serious business — but Dragons do sleep heavily, and until we were actually entered the grove we had no doubt they would not hear us.

Razuli: "Hey Wizzerd, I saw you pulling some bits of things out of the boat. You thinking of getting Navero resurrected again?"

Dania: "It'd be a good idea. He's reliable."

Kory: *Stifles laughter* "Yes, indeed, you could sure rely on ol' Nav for some things."

Dania: "Well, we are at least going to try."

Razuli: "Whafor? Do you remember how much it *cost* last time? And they were being nice to us! Forget it. Not this time. If he gets himself killed this much, he just ain't worth having around. Besides, we got us another healing-type person right here, and one who can do something else, too. Besides blow it, I mean."

Topash: "It is only reasonable, Dania. May I call you Dania? All things are born, and die, each in their own time. It is the natural way of the world, which most priestly orders disrupt with these 'resurrections' they perform. Surely you appreciate that all things are only part of the endless cycles of birth and..."

Dania: "Look, we are going to try. Maybe it isn't time."

Razuli: "How are you gonna resurrect a bicuspid?"

Arlor: "I dunno. It'd cost a lotta money. We're strapped, yup."

Dania: "If I wanted your..."

Kortul: "Close enough for them to hear?"

Topash: "Why, I believe so, yes."

Kortul: "Good. Quiet."

We entered the grove, noting the tracks of the Baby Black, and the occasional larger track. This was more than enough to encourage silence and a light tread. After several minutes of careful travel,

— XXIV —

we came within sight of the pair. They were almost invisible, lying in a depression under some hanging boughs; they were both about the same size, each a bit smaller than the Red Dragon had been. We had no idea how old this made them. They were both fast asleep, their necks curled together, sleeping claw in claw.

Kory: "Awww, how sweet. I see a nice place for a fireball."

Topash: "I can call up a lightning bolt to strike the spot you point out quite nicely, and it would not be nearly so messy and destructive as the random blast of misguided magic you speak of. Besides, that way, the warriors can stand near it to strike them as they awaken."

Razuli: "Wait, wait, wait, what this about warriors being anywhere near those things? Don't scare me like that; that was in very poor taste!"

Kory: "You get the one on the left. Meanwhile, li'l ol' me will be in those trees over there, singing a battle song to encourage your efforts."

Kortul: "Need sword, not cheerleader. You go with him."

Kory: "WHAT?!"

Dania: *Smacks Kory with her staff* "Keep your voice down, you idiot!"

Kory: "I have been insulted! And assaulted! You think you're so tough, eh? Well, I challenge you! Kazoos at 20 paces!"

Topash: "Unless you have something constructive to say, I suggest a minimum of noise. How about this: Dania and myself in the bushes..."

Razuli: "Hey, why can't I get that part?"

Topash: "Because you are inappropriately armed."

Razuli: "How would you know?"

Dania: "Shut up. Topash over there, and call your lightning. Then, I'll be over here to magic missile them, and you all beat on them. Kory, sing your battle song, but only after they're awake."

Kortul: "Arlor, Razuli, get one on left. Looks weaker."

Razuli: "Ok, I can live with that."

Kory: "You hope."

We moved into our positions; Topash silently moved to the left into some bushes and began to prepare a Call Lightning spell. Kortul went slowly and carefully over to the Dragon on the right, mindful not to make noise. Arlor and Razuli, less heavily armed and armored, moved more quickly into their positions by the leftmost one. Dania stayed put, and Kory went to the right and hid behind a tree. The bough-covered depression made hitting them while they were within an obviously ineffective approach; hopefully, the lightning would encourage them to quickly leave the hole. Clouds gathered slowly above; flashes of electricity began to spark; an odd smell rose and the air seemed to acquire a certain charge...

The lightning struck, flashing through the heads of the two sleeping dragons, making their great bodies stiffen in a paroxysm of pain. With a great snarling scream, two heads sprang up, followed by wings and claws. Kortul took one great swing at his dragon, his huge blade biting into its forelimb. Razuli stabbed the other in the belly; Arlor stabbed nearer the base of the tail. Two magic missiles flew out, one to each beast. Kory's song burst out, rousing and enboldening and slightly off key.

Topash called on the boughs that had spread over the pit to hold the Dragon's down; he didn't expect much, but maybe it would buy crucial seconds. Dania cast a web over the neck and head of Razuli's dragon. Kortul swung twice; his first strike glanced off the Dragon's neck, but the second caught it full on the nose, making it bellow with pain. Razuli and Arlor stabbed again, Razuli drawing blood from its flank. The Dragons exploded out of the pit together, snapping the restraining branches like toothpicks. One lashed out with its claw at Razuli, ripping into his arm, while tearing away the webbing with its other claw. The other turned to Kortul and spit; Kortul avoided the glob, but the stuff splashed and spattered him.

The two spread their great wings, and seemed about to take to the air; Topash called the humble creeping shrubbery of the swamp floor to hold them, which it did, for a time. More magic missiles streaked out of the bushes. Razuli got a lucky hit on his dragon and snapped one hollow wing bone; Arlor stabbed at its underbelly, but the short sword did not enter. Kortul missed completely. Kortul's dragon tore its feet loose and leaped to the skies, all the while keeping its beady eyes fixed on Kortul. The other bellowed its pain and frustration, and, howling, leaped full onto Razuli, clawing and biting and tearing at its tiny tormenter. Razuli was barely able to preserve his own precious hide.

The airborne dragon looked to its mate. It

knocked Arlor away with it's tail, stunning him, and then tried to snatch Kortul up in it's claw; it missed. The other dragon lunged for Razuli, driving him to the ground and biting at him. A Web appeared on the airborne dragon's wings, so that it fell, nearly on top of Kortul. Kortul smashed it twice over the head, until it lay still.

Razuli ran away from the Dragon; it did not pursue, but instead turned toward the tree where Kory was still loudly playing. It never got the chance to do anything, however; Kortul stabbed it in the gut from behind, and with a final hiss, it expired.

Kory: "All right! We be bad!"

Razuli: "Medic!"

Kortul: *Sneers*

Arlor: "Money!"

Dania: "Is there any loot in that hole?"

Topash: "Yes, look. I shall see to our stricken companion's revivification."

Kortul: "Good pile. Coin, other stuff."

Dania: "Great. Sort through it, and see if there's enough to buy Navero a resurrection."

Topash: "I thought that issue had been settled."

Kory: "By no means! Let us all sit and argue about it for a longish while. I personally favor bringing back dear ol' darling Navero. What is money if you don't have someone to make fun of? I mean, let's be reasonable here."

Razuli: "C'mon, he was practically useless. But if you really want, I guess we can try. I hope they take teeth."

Dania: "You really shouldn't talk about getting rid of all the people who are useless, dear."

Topash: "I really must oppose this. This defiance of the cycle of nature runs rampant, but denying the natural course of birth and death is morally indefensible. I do not favor any sort of resurrection of the body; it should return to nature, the mother of all."

Razuli: "Look, kids, I'm not gonna end my life as fertilizer."

Dania: "You already are."

Kory: "Ah...I just love lively, well-reasoned debate."

Topash: "Perhaps we can compromise on this. It can be arranged to have him reincarnated, if you really want him back."

Dania: "Yeah, right. Have him come back as a beaver."

Kory: "Well, he likes water. Look how many times he fell out of the boat!"

Dania: "Oh, shut up. What's in the pile?"

The pile contained quite a bit of coin, broken pottery, shards of broken glass, colorful pebbles, and other bright shiny refuse; a mixture of the valuable and valueless, thrown together haphazardly. We set to work separating it; piles of gold stuff, silver, possibly-magical items, and old junk. We were in the midst of this when, right out of nowhere, a bolt of lightning struck the earth nearby, with a great flash and cloud of smoke. The earth trembled as if a God had flicked it with his smallest finger, and we were all knocked off our feet and sprawled on the ground.

Awesome Reptilian Voice:
"HHUMMANSSS!!!"

Party: All weapons mysteriously find their way into our hands.

Smoke clears, reveals Awesome Reptilian Bipedal Figure.

Awesome Reptilian Voice: "I am Thor, favored of the Snake Lords Who Must Not Be Named!! You have been busily dissipating the Reptilian Lifeforce in this part of the world!! This will come to an End!!" *Raises Truly Awesome-looking War Hammer.*

Dania: "Oh shit, we're dead."

"Jeff, isn't your pet iguana named Thor?"

"Why, yes, he is. Why do you ask?"

— Dan Parsons

The Harrison Chapters 7 & 8

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Despite several threatening gestures on the part of the protagonist towards the author, the Harrison chapters doth continue.

— Seven —

A dim, filtered luminescence clung to the cold air as Christina Quatalis re-checked her flight instructions for the fourth and final time, shaking her head with a now comfortable disbelief. The recycler hummed in a shaded corner of the bridge as the computer silently reconfigured her upper boards to account for the installation of turbo-fan chemical jets into the IFM Vista's tertiary ports. Hazel eyes scanned its progress, reading the textures of data with a mixture of apathy and distrust. Over the bridge IC she heard Rrkal's husky voice shouting obscenities amidst the dull background chatter of ground techs.

She opened her line, "Some sorta prob engineering?"

"Captain?" It was Victor. His York accent was easily discernable over any transmitter. "Com-beta on the third tube is right out. If we had another day we could make repairs, but not in space."

"Typical ISS surplus. Don't sweat it. We can still route navcom through manual."

"Only if we tear open your panel. And then we'll probably have to reconfigure the whole system from scratch. Is it really worth it?"

"We haven't any choice. We're taking-off in five hours."

There was a growl from the other end.

"What's that?"

"Nevermind. It's not repeatable."

Chris smiled, "Tell Rrkal to watch his lip. I want you back up here to chart our course."

"I thought our course was already registered."

"Just get up here; there's been a slight change in plans."

"On my way."

The bridge lights flickered as local batteries kicked in. It was one of Rrkal's ways of letting everyone know when he was annoyed. Chris punched up another channel.

"Gunnery, are you ready for the Jane's files on Wasps."

"Ready Freddy," Rita's voice crackled over the IC.

"Sending now..."

Mike cautiously stepped onto the maintenance grav-plate. The congested workspace of Hanger 183 made him feel conspicuously overdressed. Robin dangled her legs over the edge of the plate as it slowly lifted to the spacecraft above. Large spotlights attached to the wall illuminated the aft of the vessel as water vapor condensed and frosted along the fuel hoses and quickly sublimated back into the air a few meters down the line. A large Vargr, his coveralls stained with lubrication fluid, barked directions to the star-port maintenance personnel from a small engine port. An expression of distaste seemed to cross his black, furry snout as he sniffed the pair's scented formals.

"Y'da pass'ngerz?"

Mike stepped onto the cold, steel hull extending his hand, "That's right. My name's Mike."

"Rrkal," the Vargr shot Mike a toothy grin and turned toward the airlock. "Da stat'rroomz don'da lif'tund beinty stups sdhar'burd. Blu dhoorz."

"Thanks," Mike winced as the engineer's breath steamed into his face. "We can find our way around."

The airlock's iris valves rotated open as Mike and Robin approached the outer hatchway. A youngish woman with short, sandy-blonde hair stood in the short passage. Her khaki uniform showed command rank.

"Ms. Clay, Mr. Harrison, it's a pleasure to welcome you aboard the Imperial Free Merchant Vista. I'm Captain Quatalis. If you'll follow me, I'll be happy to show you to your cabin. Our other two passengers have not yet arrived. Will you be staying together?"

Mike and Robin followed the Captain through the airlock's double iris valves and into a hexagonal passage with railings and iron grating floors.

"No. What are the accommodations?"

The Captain glanced toward Mike, twisting a red lever which opened a set of sliding doors to a small cargo lift.

"Two staterooms, double occupancy."

The lift descended one level and the doors slid open. Three passages ran to the bow, port, and starboard respectively. The floors and walls were all finished in an artificial, white substance made to look like polished marble, but the metal handrails remained. One was conspicuously bent outward several centimeters.

"Bumpy rides?"

"We often get comments on that."

They followed the captain through the starboard passage and into an oval common area. A wide table occupied the central floorspace, its translucent body suspended from the ceiling by a reflective, holographic projection rod. Gravitic recliner housings lay scattered on the floor around the table like an assemblage of anthills. Nested into the far wall were cupboards, a hydration oven, a squat cooling unit, and two air filters. Sliding, blue doors to either side marked the stateroom entrances.

"You'll find the galley down the port passage in case you get hungry. Rrkal, I believe you've met our engineer, he cooks the supper chow at eighteen hours ship time. Otherwise, its fend for yourself. If you need to use medical, that's next to the galley. Rita doubles as our ship's medic; you'll meet her if you get spacesick. If you need anything else use channel zero on the IC. We'll be leaving Tizar in four standard hours, or a little over fifteen cents local time. After we jump into hyperspace we will review your drop-off instructions," Captain Quatalis paused with this last thought searching for the right words. "I hope you enjoy your stay. Good-day."

She quickly headed down the passage and made a swift right turn away from the lift.

"Apparently in a hurry," Robin poked her nose into the cupboard.

Mike leaned against the passage railing, "What drop-off instructions?"

"I think she means we aren't landing at the spaceport. Wanna split a can of mash?"

At T-0:02 Bill and Niki showed up, packed as tightly as two rats could pack. For Niki, that meant a pair of pris glasses, a string of worry beads and the standard med-kit with bandages and casting-foam. Bill carried his own sort of med-kit, three vials of purified ethanol, ten grams of hexobarbital, a laser blade, and one fiberglass body pistol of last resort. Mike never understood how two people so different could

get along so well. Getting Bill and Niki together was a recipe for destruction. At formal banquets they could behave, but in a starship galley...

"Foodfight!"

"Hey Mike, what's the matter. I thought you liked yogurt."

"Wanna smoke an enchilada?"

"What the hell is going on here?!"

"Uh..oh.. Ah, hi el cap-i-tan. How beautiful you look this evening."

"This passenger is drunk!"

"Who?"

"I want to know who the hell brought drugs onboard this vessel!"

"Hic..."

Mike began to question the wisdom of bringing along an entourage. Niki was essential, just because without her finding Fork would be next to impossible. Robin was part of the deal, which could have been broken back on Tizar. And Bill, with his aptitude and inclination for brawling, was just cannonfodder. Mike smiled, wondering if he would get that far.

"Are you aware of the term 'depressurization', Mr. Walker?"

"She's gonna space me..."

"Only if you're lucky. And as for you miss Sen..."

"Tee hee hee..."

Captain Quatalis had an interesting method for dealing with drunks. First, they were injected with a nausea inducing compound causing them to sacrifice to the porcelain god the entire contents of their stomachs in addition to several dry heaves just for good measure. Then she had them hooked up to plasma vaccs where they had their blood filtered by the Empire's most sadistic gunner/medic. Finally, she had them stuffed into low berths for one hour of uninterrupted hibernation, just so they wouldn't miss the hangover. Then, after they were thoroughly sobered, she offered them her sincerest apology for having put them through such stringent disciplinary measures and broke out a bottle of Antares' finest spirit, just to show them how much she meant it. If they accepted, they got to go through the whole process over again.

Mike sat in the corner of medbay taking notes and plenty of pictures for future blackmail. Half way through the proceedings he felt an unmistakable disorientation.

Bill leaned on the plasma filter, pukestance. "Was that the drug or just me?"

"We just jumped into hyperspace," Rita Ghomes examined the readings along the med displays. "Oh...that's interesting."

"Sweet mama, Mike, get me the hell outta here."

"Sorry Bill, captain's orders."

"Billy..." Niki curled herself into a little ball around the base of her filter, probably to keep the room from turning so fast.

"What is it Niki?"

"I feel woozy."

"Yeah, that's one way of putting... Mike?"

Mike looked over at his sobering companion. Bill had plainly noticed something new in his now undrunken state.

"Take off the hat, Harrison."

Mike obliged him, relishing the surprise of a half-suspended grin. Niki's was less controlled, and evolved from giggles to more puke which nobody thought she possessed.

"What the..."

"It's a long story."

"Them's head-tricks, Mike. Highly illegal for Tizarians."

Mike nodded, "Courtesy of Mr. Clay."

"In other words, you didn't have any choice."

Mike smiled, "I guess he wants to keep me in line."

"Or out of line."

Niki looked up from her barf, "I think it's gross."

"Look who's talking."

"Hey, at least I hit the bucket, okay?"

Mike turned about and left, donning his hat only as an afterthought. The dark passage with its white finish and bent railing seemed to flow over with misplaced memories. He leaned against the metal as if testing its strength. Something about the cold steel put him at ease, as if the time-space bubble which now surrounded the ship would take them somewhere else beside Calanna. Even Telmar was preferable. Or perhaps Tyber. Mike remembered the dense, choking atmosphere, mildly acidic carbons and sulfates eating his lungs as he scrambled for a filter mask, tall smokestacks cutting through the lethal fog a mile and more. Even that would be preferable to Calanna.

The oval antechamber to the passenger state-rooms was dark and cold. Mike searched the table's surface for environmental controls without success, finally fumbling across the IC.

"Hello?" The voice was strange. A York accent?

"Hi. How d'ya turn the lights on?"

Suddenly the room lighted up.

The person at the other end seemed to laugh, "I think you found the magic words."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Glad to be of assistance."

Mike switched the line closed and stumbled into a gravitic recliner beside the table. He wondered who he had just talked to, and how many more "strangers" were aboard the Vista.

"Computer on." Nothing happened.

"Quaint..." Mike leaned over the table and found the switch at the base of the connector. The air above the table began to glow with a luminescent texture as the holo-rod generated a spinning three-dimensional representation of the Vista. Mike paused, waiting for some sort of prompt. The image of the Vista continued rotating.

"Hi."

"Unrecognized command."

"Help."

"No help available."

Mike went to the cooling unit and returned to his seat empty handed.

"Show passengers."

"Respecify at unrecognized parameter... passengers."

"Cargo manifest."

"Records unavailable."

"Bullshit..."

"Unrecognized command."

"Show flight instructions."

"Records unavailable."

Mike returned to the cooling unit and grabbed a sluice-stick. He bit off the end and sucked out a quarter of its frozen, syrupy contents.

"Who the fuck programmed you?"

"Respecify at unrecognized parameter... the."

Mike sat back in the gravitic recliner and let the head tilt back until he rested on a forward incline, his feet sticking upward and out like a gull's tail feathers.

"Who... are you?"

"Specify data format."

"Verbose."

"Vista, Imperial Free Merchant, SG-64923. Laid down 124-618, Dimstar, Imperial Dimstar Corporation. Tonnage two-hundred standard, twenty-eight hundred cubic meters displacement. Engineering, one Doppel PF-18 fusion-linked power plant driving two Ditar AG-217e hyperfield generators and one Monoquad MQ-3 fixed impulse maneuver drive with dual Zalpha-X turbopan installation. Gravitics, Napaliastics I-14 Field Generators with standard inertial compensation and zero to two gee sustained gravity adjusters. Range, sixteen point three light-years with unlimited maneuver..."

Mike straightened his posture as the holographic display zoomed-in on specific systems aboard

the craft. He tried to keep pace with the output as the computer jumped from one topic to the next. The Vista was a 38-year-old retired scout ship built by Dimstar based on a standard design two-hundred ton hull. It had been purchased at discount by the Bank of Ares and leased through the Galactic Press Corporation as a refitted free merchant. Its entire class had a history of excellent atmospheric maneuverability, but the Vista, in particular, had been placed in drydock six years previously with orders that it be scrapped due to a series of critical drive failures. Somehow a deal had been cut, and the defective drives had been repaired.

The vessel was crewed by two Galactican personnel, two independent contractors, and three robots. The captain, Christine Quatalis, was born on Tyber. She served as a pilot in the Imperial Scouts before being hired on by the Galactican. Her first mate, Victor Darian, was from Ares. He served Sector Navy as a tac-ship lieutenant before being discharged in naval cutbacks three years earlier. Rita Ghomes, a native of Telmar, was discharged around the same time from her planetary guard while the civil unrest was beginning to brew into open revolt. Rrkal, the vargr engineer, was from the outworld coalition. He worked his passage from the frontier aboard a merchant craft until he was laid off near Dimstar. The three robots worked in cargo, maintenance, and engineering respectively, places which passengers were unlikely to ever see.

The passenger roster was classified as were flight instructions. Mike guessed that he could have broken the security if he had Cindy on hand or access to the ship's computer directly. An idea itched away somewhere deep inside his mind, but he put it away shaking his head and smiling. If he hadn't seen the way Captain Quatalis dealt with drunks, he might have been more willing to see how she dealt with snoops.

Mike decided he was tired. He peeked down the passage and saw no sign of movement. Niki and Bill were going to spend a few more hours in sick bay for sure. Mike pulled himself to his feet and started toward the closest of the staterooms.

"Lights off." The door slid open as the room darkened behind him. He shuffled out of his shirt and climbed into where he thought the null-tube should be.

"Mike?" It was Robin.

"Uh..oh.. I think I stumbled into the wrong room."

"It's okay. You don't have to go."

"What makes you think I was going to?"

She didn't bother to come up with a reply but scooted over to make more room. Mike tried to make

out her features in the pitch darkness. He wondered what she was wearing.

It! It's an android. Mike tried to refocus his thoughts, but they kept twisting around on him.

She moved again, "What are you thinking?"

"Wrong question."

"You're trying to see me, aren't you."

Not your typical android question, Mike thought. "Can you see in the dark?"

No answer.

"Like, infrared?" His throat felt dry.

She moved again, her head very close to his, but without breath. "With a dash of the ultraviolet." He could almost see her smile.

Mike closed his eyes and tried to sleep wondering why she would do the same. She seemed to mimic humans in almost all aspects of their behavior. Was it simply a part of her programming or something deeper? After several minutes he felt the suppressant currents slowly rock as she seemed to breath, quietly, peacefully. He finally let himself sink slowly beneath the cover of sleep, the depth of space closing inward like a far away dream realized in a sudden instant. And in his mind's eye he saw the fine red outline of a short fence post, its needle-thin barbs pressing outward, seeking blindly in the static wind as a trio of squat, white figures lay aside, their fluffy forms resting on a bed of green haze.

"If I wanted your opinion, I would have asked for it."

Captain Quatalis looked mildly irritated. She chewed on the end of a buttersprout and glanced around the galley looking for her lightpen. Victor sat in the far corner of the room still sizing up her intended audience of four passengers as Rrkal and Rita stirred a can of condensed terriak hearts into their joint concoction.

Niki studied the map on the near wall, trying to decipher the gist of the implications. "What if we get caught?"

Quatalis turned to the Siri, "If we land at the spaceport we'll all be picked up by starlaw, or worse, by ISIS. This is the only alternative."

"That's only true if the Calannan guard lets the Imps push them around, which is something I find highly unlikely."

"It's more likely than you might think Mr. Harrison, particularly since Calanna has never been a friend of Tizar or the Galactic Press Corporation."

Mike nodded, and reconsidered. The drop-off instructions, drawn by an ex-army commander working directly under Jaden and heading the Tizar office's internal security division, were simple and di-

rect; a clean military troop insertion if Mike had ever seen one. Under the plan, the Vista would jump in at the far side of Calanna's smaller moon, dive into the planet's atmosphere, deal with any resistance as necessary, make the drop via gravchutes, and get out. The only problems were the gravitational effects on the hyperspatial drives, and the resistance, most likely in the form of Wasp fighter craft. After the four were safely dirtside, they should easily ditch the chutes and hide in the local terrain. After that, hiking twenty kilometers into Aelflan, a large agricultural community, would be a snap.

The incident would be logged as yet another smuggling operation which made it through. Since many government and security officials took part in such activities themselves on a regular basis, no eyebrows would be raised. The Wasps would probably follow the Vista out at a safe distance and let the few ground personnel available handle the drop. Probability of success: 90% plus, or so it was written. And better still, the Imps would be thinking Harrison and company still on Tizar counting the ashes of poor Mr. Fork.

"Fine, but how do we get out." It was Niki again.

Quatalis had wondered when somebody would ask the obvious question. The fact that it had been asked meant that they had already accepted the plan for getting in.

"The Vista's cargo shuttle, the Ariya, will land at the spaceport eight days after the drop. We'll unload our cargo and begin speculating. No doubt we'll attract some Imperial attention, so when you try to get back in contact, be subtle. We'll stick around for ten days after that, or until we are no longer needed. The Vista, herself, will be hiding under scanner range of the system's largest gas giant. In case of complications, I suggest you arrange for a backup spacecraft. Are there any questions?"

Seeing none, Rrkal announced open season on the supper, and the crew plus one android dug in. Bill poked at the food with the end of his laser blade, watching the mixture fizzle and flame with tempered distaste, and Niki gathered half-a-bowl in a half-hearted attempt to put something down. Mike just sat around watching the others, his appetite all but evaporated by the discussion.

Rrkal grinned at the trio, "Da Pass'engurz don' eet hartz."

Bill looked up from his bowl, an enigmatic smile slowly creeping across his face.

"Z'hartz goood foood. Ven Z'Droyd noez."

Mike looked across at Robin. She was still shoveling it down with an eager hunger bordering on

ravenous.

"Zhe eetz like und no tomarwoo."

Robin looked up from the table, gulping down her mouthful without chewing.

"Why iz zat, droyd?"

"Because there might not be..." She looked across at Mike with a matter-of-fact smile. Taken together with the fake sleeping, yawning, detachable ears, and punch in the chest, he decided he didn't like smiling androids, not that he had ever known any others to justify the generalization. Mike reflected on his attitude as she resumed eating.

"Doz zhe zhit too?"

Her eyebrow cocked at the query, and for the first time Mike felt an inkling of interest in the conversation, such as it was. Bill perked up too, as did the captain after a moment's pause.

"Not exactly your usual supper manners, Rrkal."

"I'm...tirzty." He seemed to search for the last word as if unsure of the translation.

Quatalis regarded him with a passing curiosity. "You're thirsty? For knowledge?"

"Da." The Vargr grinned, two canines dropping from either side of his snout. He seemed rather pleased that he'd gotten his point across, and had all but forgotten about Robin.

Mike looked across the table, "I don't know; Robin, do you?"

"Do I what?"

Mike smiled at the slated reply, "Y'know, 'zhit."

Niki spilled her bowl as Mike felt a raw reminder of the pain coarse up his spine, snapping each vertebra as it ascended until it loomed at the threshold of his mind. He awaited the burning, but it just stood there like a flickering candle flame, pausing for some sort of twisted invitation.

Mike opened his eyes to see everyone staring at Niki, her face averted in shame as she tried to dry the table. Rrkal slid across and began helping her clean-up as the Captain shuffled out of her recliner to grab a hand-vacc.

"Maybe we should have discussed the drop after supper."

Bill kept frozen in his place, his eyes sweeping from Niki to Robin, and then over to Mike. As their eyes locked in an understanding that didn't need explanation, Bill reached down to the base of his recliner and switched off, his body slowly rotating into a standing position before the gravitic currents gave way to the surrounding fields. Mike followed suit, and soon found his feet placed firmly on solid decking.

"Thanks for the food, but we're not hungry."

"Daz okay...mor foood fur uz."

Mike followed Bill to the hold, the younger man entering an access code at the lift and again at storage. A security camera watched from the corner of the room as Bill hauled one of the gravchutes off the near wall.

"Mama says it's best to strike while the enemy is out to lunch."

Mike nodded, "Looks like you've been keeping busy."

"I figured it was high time I paid my keep." Bill took his last vial of ethanol from his back pocket.

"She let you keep that?"

"I told her it was for barter...on planet."

Mike snatched the vial from Bill's open hand, twisting off its cap as the younger gatherer broke out a two and a half gram capsule.

"I wouldn't drink that if I were you, Mike."

"Not straight."

"Straight or mixed, you'd die." He began opening the chute's gravitics, snipping a thin wire with the end of his knife and fishing it out.

"Ethanol?"

"Guess again, Mike." His grey eyes seemed to flicker with amusement he tied the thread around the capsule.

"I dunno."

"Well, for starters, it's radioactive. The vial's the shield."

Mike handed it back without the cap, "Fine...you drink it."

"Not very likely." Bill plunged the capsule into the liquid and extended his hand as if for a shake.

"This isn't gonna work, Bill."

"The cap."

Mike handed it over, sweat droplets beginning to form on his forehead. "They're gonna check these things out."

"Really?" Bill's eyes widened with pretended surprise.

"Really."

"Don't be a puss, Mike. It'll take at least fifty claps for the current to dissolve the casing." Bill produced a foam napkin, wrapping the vial and tying it securely at both ends, the thin wire string falling from its interior. "And in another twenty...give or take..." He gritted his teeth as the laser blade burnt the wire back into place.

"Then what?"

Bill closed the unit and replaced the chute back on its rack, nicking its polymer housing almost as an afterthought.

"Boom?"

"Neutrinos, Mike. Lots of neutrinos."

The Vista hung cloaked beneath the shadow of Baal, Calanna's lesser moon, as its port sensors began scanning the cloudy world below. On the distant horizon, the rutilant giant descended into night, saffron rays slipping carelessly away to space.

"Passive EMS reports local clear."

"Focus IR, 3rd Octh, Coord 34.21, 84.13."

Captain Quatalis cautiously edged the Vista between the jutting walls the dark lunar canyon. An eerie silence crept outside the craft as the joints along her spine began to tingle in anticipation and fear.

"How long 'til the batteries..."

"That depends," Victor's hand fidgeted over the sensor boon controls while his adjunct talked to the ship's computer and played with the data.

"Nothing unusual."

"Try Neutrino."

"Already done. Minute's clean."

"Maybe."

Mike sucked in cold air outside the dropshaft, glancing toward the digital altimeter on the far wall. Niki and Bill sat opposite, knees bent upright, boots braced together. Bill wore a worried expression. Niki looked elsewhere, she was ignoring the tension. Mike focused his eyes forward, a cool sweat breaking out along his hairline. Robin gently fingered the straps of her gravchute.

"Overweight?"

"Paranoid."

Mike smiled at the reply as the vessel jolted sharply against a deafening noise.

"Minute's clean! Get me DR and ID!"

Christina struggled with the helm controls as the Vista rocked and tumbled with the impact.

"They're ground to air. Quiet snipers."

"They?"

"Two mark ten."

"Ghomes, are you reading this!?"

The Vista's hull armor crackled and glowed against the atmospheric friction as the heat seekers scrambled in pursuit. A swarm of plasma cells jettisoned from the aft and exploded in a fiery blaze over fifteen miles high.

"Sending pinpoint on source."

"Fire at will!"

The robot eye scanned skyward, over the grey and dusty clouds, a cumbersome program slowly analyzing the data. Chemical explosion. Plasma release. A small mechanical motor raised the antenna to an

upright position as the launcher's communit broadcast the coordinates of the hit. Within moments only a burning crater remained.

"Okay, give me decoys."

"Is that neces..."

"Yes!"

Six gravballs dropped in pairs from the Vista's ventral aft, dispersing about the vessel as it darted toward the cloudcover below.

"DR Victor."

"Hull breach in tank seven, jump's out also."

"Oh, and by the way."

Victor smiled at the criticism, then stopped smiling.

"Two wasps, cold fuel. No make that four, in close form pairs. They're mark six. Missile range in twelve."

"Eyes open Ghomes."

"Get me fix."

"Sending... Eight goblins folks."

A single Hellraiser flushed into the inky black as Victor pronounced the "E" in "Eight." Within scarce moments a billion cubic yards of sky burst into an intense white flame.

"One and two nixed. Three and four are breaking up. Four dupes out."

"We got lucky."

"Four more goblins. Mark five and six."

Christina reflexively pulled hard and to starboard as Rita fired an antimissile and loosed a swarm of plasma cells despite the tumbling and turning of the spacecraft. Suddenly the Vista lurched from impact, its steel frame splintering open and erupting from all sides in a fiery inferno of fusion and plasma.

— Eight —

Downward through the thick blankets of clouds a dark figure fell, twisting and twirling, helpless in the howling tempest. Darkness loomed above, seeming to descend and collapse closer to earth with each passing moment. Then the sky became as bright as a thousand suns and the darkness was vanquished. Hair caught fire; skin parched, baked, and blackened in the blink of a boiling eye. Then only a single fireball remained, high above, like a sun but lifeless and slowly disintegrating. The sky seemed to crack as the shell of an egg, and a blast ripped through the clouds, shredding the air and deafening all senses as it passed.

Michael awoke to the pain of burning flesh, the deafening blast seeming like a distant and forgotten dream. The wind tossed him between clouds, scrambling his senses with his emotions. He tasted fear as he saw the ground below and the fireball above. Suddenly, a sharp pain swept through his spine like an ocean wave, sparking memories and stinging his consciousness.

He thought he heard Niki giggling somewhere and realized he'd lost his helmet.

He looked down again; it was time. He unhooked the release and pressed the activator. The gravchute seemed to yank him upward toward the filthy night sky, now littered with burning debris as the fireball spread outward, dividing into glowing bits of metal and thunder.

Feet together, knees slightly bent, muscle braced against bone, the old routine flickered in the back of his mind as he hit and rolled, falling uncontrollably into a warm, wet, compost ditch. Botflies circled his head as it emerged from the steaming muck.

Nimble fingers worked free the straps of the shoulder harness and waistbelt, making splish-squish sounds in the lacteal water. The chute slowly sank and disappeared altogether beneath the surface as Mike crawled up the side of the ditch, peeking over the rough earthen edge. The air began to hiss and spit while small chunks of metal ripped into the ground like shrapnel from a grenade. In the distance some hundred meters, a tall wire fence lighted by iridescent lamps stood proudly, its barbed icing leaning inward, sparking against the hot debris. Mike dug himself into the soft earth as far as he could until his lungs breathed dirt. An explosion rocked the ground, and then another. Several clumps of stone and clay fell into the sludge as Mike felt his fingers grip the roots of some alien weed. The air grew thick and smelled of death and fumes and fire, all mixed together like some unholy beast.

For several minutes the sky seemed to fall, and then all was quiet. Mike crawled cautiously from the ditch. Blood trickled down his neck and dripped slowly onto the ground as he stood, haphazardly, holding onto what was left of his face. The skin crackled and fell away without feeling.

A clean military troop insertion. He tried to smile while there was nobody to see him, but the right side of his mouth was too mangled. He remembered the Vista jolting, the general panic, Bill diving for the drop shaft, himself scrambling with his helmet and pack.

There was no sign of his pack anywhere. No infrared goggles, no niko camera, not even a stupid

pair of wire cutters. He stared back toward the fence. The distant sound of hooves against dirt met his ears. Mike staggered toward the light of the fence, drawn by the noise of the spooked animals. As he peered into the murky darkness on the other side, he saw several quagga galloping parallel to the posts, their white stripes shining dimly against the cold light.

In the distance, he heard the faint whine of chemical combustion engines, probably two-wheelers, motorcycles. This was a ranch. He stared dumbly at the fence. A high-security ranch. Mike walked parallel to the gate, crouching behind the cover of the scrub brush and beyond the range of the light. It was too dark to properly perambulate the area. Patches of snow and ice covered the ground, and the dirt was sturdy but largely barren. The air became steadily colder, and he began to shiver.

As he walked a small spark of light caught his eye. It was on his side, far away from the fence. Bright, yet so small it was hard to distinguish. A flare. Mike crossed through the shallow thicket, dizzy by his loss of blood. He stumbled over a large stone and remembered Robin screaming in mid-air, her gravchute shredded, her body burning, the earth miles below. He heard a dripping noise and tried to concentrate. His hands felt warm and sticky as he regained his footing, but the flare was closer. It stood upright, wedged between two tall rocks on a steep hillside, their sharp edges outlined in the sizzling white light. Mike climbed up the slope, falling to his knees every few meters, his temples pounding with each step, his body shivering from the intense cold.

He contemplated falling asleep. He could reach the flare tomorrow or the next day or sometime after that. He tried to imagine waking up later, seeing the flare, its white flame still burning, grasping it in his hand, touching the hot fire. It would tingle his senses, like the waves of the ocean on Tizar, the cool swells lapping effortlessly at the long shore. He would hold the flare in his hand as he slept beneath the starry night sky. He'd sleep forever, and the sun would never rise. Kitara would stay beside him, soothing his dreams as she used to, entering them, sharing her own. Something she had whispered; he could hear her calling his name.

"Michael..."

Dim evening light slipped lazily through the small glass window, coloring the dark, quiet, chamber in shades of purples and greys. In the corner, a rough wooden stool leaned against the wall by the mantle, small burning embers tickling its legs. A black kettle hung suspended above the crackling fire, steam wisping from its nozzle, mixing with the smoke in the

chimney. Above the mantle, a dull wooden-handled axe rested against the wall on a set of long iron nails drilled parallel with the floor.

Niki sat at his bedside, sopping the sweat from his forehead with a cloth napkin. Through one eye, she looked comfortably tired. Mike tried to think of something to say.

"Shhh..."

He closed his mouth and let a smile escape. Sharp waves of pain sprinted through his mind.

"You'll have to learn to stop that too."

"What happened?" The words came out slurred.

"You've lost some blood. A mild case of shock. You're lucky I'm a qualified nurse."

"It was a prerequisite. Where are we?"

"I don't know... but we're safe."

"What about the others?"

Mike felt a brush of sorrow after he asked the question. Niki's sorrow.

"Are you sure?"

"I don't know anymore than you. I've been searching for Billy, but... I just don't know." Mike felt the cool, damp cloth caress his forehead as she spoke. Something in her voice said the task was hopeless.

"Don't lose faith."

"I haven't. I'm going to keep searching. But you have to go back to sleep."

Mike was too tired to argue. He settled back into the bed and closed his one good eye. It wasn't the first time psionics had saved his life or provided shelter, but the chances of Niki finding Bill were slim. Mike tried to guess likelihood; he couldn't. He wondered who owned the cabin. How long could they stay before the owner's return?

Mike felt the right half of his face. Niki had kept the swelling down, and his mouth was almost completely mended, but she couldn't reconstruct the bones or the teeth. Something had definitely hit him. He couldn't remember what. It ached for him to think about it.

The sky was dark when he awoke again, a bowl of huckleberries on the stool beside him. Her gravchute sat lonesome against the wall. A small pocket in the cabin floor was open. Inside lay a brown leather sack, full of a hodgepodge of useful items. A two-pronged fork, a plate, a rusty distiller, leaky chemical batteries, a wishbone, a long tin vial, a pot and serving spoon, a box of matches, a ceramic mug. Mike regarded them curiously.

Outside the cabin Niki sat crosslegged facing the forest, deep in meditation, her slight body framed by the predawn light. The forest surrounded the

cabin on all sides without leaving so much room for a clearing. A thick green tarp covered the entire roof, a small hole cut out for the chimney, and above that the long, weeping branches of a dwarfmurgrove tree hung limp in the cold air. The chimney ended in a dun colored box, black cords falling from underneath its corners and into the tarp's heavy fabric.

Mike guessed the whole mechanism was some sort of makeshift insulation to detract from the IR image. Somebody had gone to a good deal of trouble to build the hideaway. He wondered how Niki had found it and how she had managed to drag him through the dense brush without leaving a conspicuous trail. The memory of a lonely gravchute formed in his mind, it's dull grey exterior blending into the darkness as it sat, propped, against a cabin wall.

Niki opened her eyes, "Lots of juice in those puppies."

Mike looked up, startled.

"Sorry."

He churned up a staid expression. "You're getting good. Were you just reading me or searching for Bill at all?"

"I said I was sorry." She seemed to fold inward on herself, trying to become small and unnoticed, clutching to her string of beads like a security blanket. Mike knelt down, testing his flexibility after a day in bed.

"Speaking of juice, I'm thirsty. Where's the stream?"

She reached into her cloth knapsack and retrieved a shiny aluminum canteen. Mike drank.

"There's a stream about a kilometer north. Over the hill beyond that is where we came down."

"What have you got in here? Gyrocompass, good. Medscanner, castfoam, pris glasses, synthetic gloves; aha, mullah. You've been holding out on me, Niki."

"Mike?"

"Cold, hard imperial cash. Highly illegal at the moment, but considering the state of the drin, it ought to be good for barter. How much is this...y'know you're practically destitute, Niki?"

"Sorry, my boss doesn't pay me what I'm worth."

Mike looked into her eyes and smiled as much as his new facial structure would allow.

"Oh he doesn't, does he?"

"Billy's alive, boss."

"Where?"

"I'm not sure yet, but we gotta start looking."

Mike stretched his arms and yawned, "Hold that thought." He stepped into the treeline, backing within a clump of foliage.

"What's my Mike doing?"

"Mike-turating, lemme lone."

"Huh?"

"Answering the call of Mother Nature."

"Humph...well lemme tell you about Father Time," Niki picked out a flat stone and sent it ricocheting off a nearby branch.

"Hey!"

"Now stop rubbing your frowzy face and get back here!"

The two angry men dunked his head into the murky water, thrusting it deeper than before, holding it longer until he reflexively opened his mouth to breathe. He felt himself being yanked back to the surface, coughing, wheezing, sputtering for air, his guts surging upward to his mouth, the stank of the urine and feces weakening his cuffed limbs from nausea. A brown offal bobbed on the surface, seeming to laugh with every motion.

The white-shirted man stood opposite him, a thin smile playing across his lips. "You approve of our sewage containment system? I give you my assurance that you will have plenty of time to inspect it closely unless you begin talking now."

"No speak."

"You are a stinking liar."

Bill caught a lung full of air as his head submerged beneath the filthy muck. The two men lifted his legs above his upper torso and pushed them down into the refuse until his head hit bottom, dung and piss spilling along the barrel's rusty sides. After a minute, his body began to twist violently, convulsing for lack of air. The guards looked up with doleful eyes.

"Not just yet. Our friend is thirsty; we must let him drink his fill."

Soon, his feet slowed down, stopped kicking, and finally hung limp. The guards pulled his dripping, corpselike body from the slimy excrement, holding him upright off the ground. The white-shirted man walked over and patted Bill on the cheek.

"Yes. I think you will like it here."

Bill opened his bloodshot eyes and sprayed the man's face with a mouthful of sludge, spitting the last of the staining refuse onto the man's white shirt. Seizing the moment, his cuffed legs kicked upward as if by their own volition, striking their target at full force as the man's jaw dropped in horror and pain. Bill watched in satisfaction as the man fell to the littered floor gripping his groin tightly with both hands.

After several deep breaths, the man looked up into Walker's steely grey eyes. "You're dead."

"Now, now Sheffy," a ringing voice from the far end of the room cheerfully chirped, "the boy can't help it. He obviously doesn't speak our language."

Bill saw an elderly woman step into the dim light from the darkness of a corner. She wore a black, levantine dress with long leather gloves and boots, and her silvery hair was clipped with a furl.

"He's lying mother."

"Really dear, I think it's time you were off to bed."

"Stop patronizing me!"

She stopped in her tracks and cast her son a sharp glance, her sharp blue eyes seeming to sting him from a distance. The man tried to stand, but stumbled over his own legs in agony. She regarded him callously, like a vulture might regard a dying carcass. His eyes glazed over in trepidation as he noted her gaze.

"I mean," the quiver in his voice was laced with fear, "yes...mother. I'm going to bed now." He seemed to force the last words out one at a time. One of the guards helped him to his feet and out of the room. Bill gauged his chances against the other as the woman approached him, carefully sidestepping the scattered droppings and puddles of urine.

"Whew...you smell terrible."

"No speak."

"Though not as bad as Sheff smelled after he cornered that zorille last year. You remember that, don't you Medwin?"

"Yes Madre."

"Ambrose thought our boy was ready for some hunting."

"No speak."

"No, no that's quite all right. I don't prize my young men for their vocabularies. What I'll do with you is report you to the authorities. In fact, I'll have to report this whole mess. Then we'll have to scour the countryside for your friends. You didn't come alone, did you."

Bill shut his eyes and tried not to listen.

"Then the Imps will come in if my appraisal is worth beans. That's bad news. The Imps don't much cotton to sticky messes, which is what you're in right now. I think you'd rather work in a labor camp or as a slave in some rotting hole in the ground rather than have your brain erased. They do that nowadays, you know...with interstellar criminals."

"No speak."

"No you won't speak, and it's too bad. If you only spoke you could save your life, your friends lives. It's a crying shame, I think. But pipe beatings and

dung drownings obviously won't cure your affliction."

Bill found himself pondering her words.

"The authorities will have drugs which will make you talk, and the Imps will have methods which are better left undiscussed in polite company."

She shifted her feet around another puddle and stepped in front of Bill, casually waving off a tiny gnat.

"There will be people here in the morning. Will they be looking for you? What should I tell them? What reason do I have to save your ass if you won't talk?"

Bill could feel his breath quicken. Her sharp blue eyes scintillated in the dim light, driving imaginary needles into his own as the gnat spun wildly in the air, plunging recklessly into the rusty rimmed barrel and the thick gooeey soup within.

Gall midges buzzed under the trees around the shallow stream as the early sunlight spiked down between the branches like razored knives. Mike decided that Niki must have made a bee-line for the cabin after she found him; psionics didn't account for ease of travel. He chopped brush out of the way, and made a neater trail than the one she had sniffed out. The long handled axe was somewhat dull, but it did the job all the same.

It was the axe, she said, that led her to the cabin. Psionically, it was like a beacon, a conspicuous aberration in an otherwise unlikely background, full of strong emotions and pain. She thought of calling for help at the ranch instead, but there was pain there as well, and enough angry people to blow their mission. And there would probably be government people asking questions, trying to find out what happened, maybe even Imperials.

Mike tried to collate the data. The explosion still throbbed inside his memory blocking out the usual clutter. The drop never took into consideration a strong defense. Calanna wasn't known for tight planetary defenses. If anything, the opposite was true. It was almost as if they had been expected.

The hilltop was studded with dandelions sprouting forth from the hard terrain. Niki spied the landscape through the pris glasses. To the north another kilometer almost, Mike saw the tall wire fence gleaming in the morning sunlight. A kilometer further was a ranch house and a tall guardtower jutting upward from the grassy fields.

"To count the sheep?"

"Gimmie dat."

Niki handed over the glasses. Mike adjusted the power and zoomed in, chainlocking until he could

see the sun sparkling off their shades.

"Thems is autorifles. Lucy issue. Serial number..."

Niki snatched the glasses back, "No poop; lemme see."

"Yes poop. Can that thing take pictures?"

"Nope." She winced though the lenses, the internal flywheel gyroscopically stabilizing the image. "You can't see the serial numbers."

"But it was fun pretending; gimmie back."

Mike counted about twenty guards in all. The prisoners numbered at least a hundred, most working the fields with hoes and picks. One tractor sat idle underneath a canopy tent beside a row of stables, its mechanical guts strewn over the ground like so many spare organs. Two kilometers east of the house was a crater a good fifty meters in diameter. Big enough to cause a scare, he figured. Some prisoners and guards were there, sifting through the wreckage.

"What's the matter. Wha'd'ya see?"

Mike handed the glasses back to her, "Take a peek at this."

A smile crossed her lips, a momentary rupture of glee. "He is alive."

"And well, though incarcerated. Typical."

He felt the expected rabbit punch to his kidney as the clapping of copter blades echoed on the wind.

"Now the question is..."

She lowered the glasses to complete his thought, "How do we get him out?"

The black copter circled around the ranch house slowly, spying the guardtower and the stables and the tractor under the canopy tent. The morning sunlight glimmered off its dark surface, its guns gleaming like polished spears.

The old woman glanced out her office window, "What the hell are they doing back so early?"

The men in the fields stopped their work, and those in the distant crater climbed out and watched the vessel settle down beside Madre's garden. Bill picked his teeth with a splinter of hull metal.

"Those the Imps?"

"Come to pay us visits," Sheff's blue eyes gleamed in the sunlight as he smiled and shoved Bill backward. "Back to work neghral."

Bill had learned that the last word translated roughly as "alien" in the planetary lingo, stressing the negative connotations. The Calannans didn't like offworlders; most dirtsiders didn't.

Two figures emerged from the copter's cockpit, one dressed in a white, loose fitting, wrapper, the other wearing a khaki uniform sporting a kepi atop

his shiny bald head. The old woman strolled out to greet them, an air of confidence and composure close about her.

"Colonel Arman, what a pleasant surprise. And I see you've brought our guest. Sule, wasn't it?"

"That is correct." The bald headed colonel bowed slightly, his thick Calannan accent drooling over the Galanglic as he chuckled nervously. The offworlder stepped in front of him wearing a determined smile, her long white hair flowing free with the warm breeze like a quagga's mane.

"I am still looking." She seemed to spit the words, harshly.

"Congratulations," the old woman beamed back.

"Madre, please." The colonel mopped beads of perspiration from his crinkled forehead with a brown cloth. He seemed to her more embarrassed than annoyed as a sharp gust swiped at the visor of his hat. She ached to pity him.

"Why don't you both come inside. I'll make us some tea. Do you drink tea Sule?"

Gusts of wind swept up loose dirt, stinging the prisoners in the field. Bill hustled into the crater for protection, scowling at the suddenly harsh wind.

The living room was plush by local standards, tiled in white marble with dark red streaks, elegantly furnished with the forest's finest. A large table occupied the floor's center, before the hearth. Its stout wooden legs smoldered black at their base were shaped as the paws of a lion. Sparks danced carelessly along the floor, seeming to conduct the crackling fire as the old woman poured the hot tea from a white china kettle, her long thin fingers stiffened with age.

"Me and my boys often break fast here, around this table. Greenleaf tea for everyone, that's what we have."

The colonel sipped the home brew, his pudgy fingers wrapped around his small bowl for security. She remembered him as a little boy, always curious and kind. His curiosity had been long chased away.

"The hospitable reputation of Madre is well deserved," he explained, his deep voice cutting through the air. "Not only she care for her boys, but she also take strangers. Is not that right Madre?"

"That all depends on how strange they are. More tea?"

Sule stroked her chin in thought, "Tell her about the tracks." Madre pondered the richness of her voice, not dark and crusty like the colonel's, but somehow different.

"Ah yes, the tracks," the colonel tried to search for the words. The interstellar verse was not

easy for him. "We find the tracks of a person near the farthest gate. Much blood. It end on a small hillock south of here."

So he has a friend. The old woman nodded gently, anticipating his train of thought, "And you think I opened my house to this individual?"

The colonel smiled, a flush of pink entering his dark brown cheeks. She glanced toward Sule; the young woman stared solidly back, her bright blue eyes matching the sky at highsun.

"What did this individual do?"

The colonel's smile broke into a deep resonant laugh, "Then you admit."

Madre shook her head, "Admit? No. I never said that. I'm simply curious."

Sule stood up from her chair and walked toward the old woman, "You do understand that harboring a criminal is a felony under Imperial statute?" Her voice was too raspy for a girl, and something about her walk suggested aggression.

"I understand that you are looking for someone. Has this person committed some offense?"

Sule's voice hissed and slithered like something diabolical, "You are not in a position to question me."

"While you are in my house I'll question you whenever I damn well please." The old woman waited for a retort, for a scowl, a blush, some sign of weakness or strength. Sule's reply was silent composure. Suddenly she realized what she'd been thinking all along.

"What are you? You're not a woman..."

Sule smiled at the remark.

"...and you aren't a man either. Are you an android?" Her question touched a spark.

"Do androids interest you, madre?"

"No, I think they're quite disgusting actually, machines parading around as people. I say the lot should be rounded up and roasted on the spit Lucy style, along with their makers."

Sule perched herself on the table edge, "Isn't it a revolting notion? Microcircuits for brains, complex algorithms to mimic sentience, to pretend emotions. An absolutely horrific science."

"You seem at odds with yourself, child."

"I'm not an android any more than you are."

"Then what are you?"

Sule chewed on the query, her eyes darting to the stone hearth and the dying embers within. She slipped gracefully beside the fire reaching inside to pick out a glowing red coal.

"I am biological," her words now sarcastically melodious as she returned to the table, "yet I do not roast so easily. Do you?" Her hand wavered in front of the old woman's face, her sky blue eyes seeming

maliciously playful against the dimming red of the coal.

"Is that supposed to be some sort of frail threat?"

"Just call it a forecast of your imminent future if you continue to refuse to cooperate."

"I'm qui..."

"Mother!" Sule's hand closed into a fist around the coal as Sheff crossed the tiled threshold into the dining room, puffing wearily for breath. Cupped in his hands he held a blackened, metallic object, about the size of a grapefruit. Bill was close behind, his frail body seeming less fatigued by the sprint. His grey eyes glinted with a strange mixture of curiosity and apprehension.

"Mother, look what I've found!"

"You found?" Bill started, but Sheff hurriedly bowed before the two guests, ignoring the remark. He proudly displayed his trophy in one hand. The object was a dodecahedron, somewhat scathed from its fall yet still intact. Engraved on one triangular face was the distinct picture of a small songbird with its wings outstretched as if in flight.

"I don't care who found it. Just what is it?"

"It's an alien artifact," he retorted, his free hand sweeping backward into Bill's face.

"Ah, so it is. My boys never cease to amaze me with their brilliant powers of deduction. Oh, by the way, this is Sheffy; he likes to be called Sheff. And this one here is Vilo, but you can call him anything you like, or hate for that matter, not that it matters, because it doesn't unless you make it."

"Mother?"

"Sheffy, I will not put up with your rude interruptions."

"But the artif..."

"Now that you're here you can make yourself useful. Wash these dishes. Vilo, show our guests out, they were just leaving."

Colonel Arman stood abruptly from his chair and began to leave, waiving his apology to the Madre. Bill found himself grabbing Sule's arm without effect. When he tugged it was like trying to pull a mountain. She snatched the dodecahedron from Sheff's hands as he collected the tea bowls, running her long fingers across the shiny engraving.

"You really have these jerks by their nuggets. Especially grey-eyes. Don't you know how to treat a lady?"

Bill instinctively pulled his hand away as he heard her voice, its raspy edge hissing along the hollow between his shoulder blades. It was somehow a dichotomy between cultured refinement and animal barbarism. The old woman smiled at his response.

"Don't mind her boy, she's biological."

"That doesn't mean I won't sting." Sule flicked the coal into his face, leaving a red, burned spot where it nicked his cheek. Bill wanted to shove her head into the hearth, but thought better of it when he noticed the daring smile playing across her lips.

"She's tempting you boy, trying to deny the facts of life." Madre walked toward her, gently guiding Bill aside with her free hand. "Sule, the facts are that you are being forcibly evicted from the premises; your only choice is with respect to the method of transport. You can either walk out or be carried out in pieces. I don't care which."

"I'll go, but I'm taking this." She held the dodecahedron firmly in her palm, testing its weight.

"The hell you are."

"It's from space, unclaimed. That makes it Imperial property."

"It was found on my land and it's mine."

"And what would you do with it?"

"It doesn't matter if I'd make ducks and drakes of it; I still say it's mine. Now put it down or I'll have you shot."

Sule smiled, perching the object on three fingers. "So it is yours for now. Let us see how long you can keep it." She tossed the dodecahedron into the fire, crushing the burning sticks under its weight. Flames enveloped it as Sheff ran to the kitchen for water.

"Good day, Madre." Her tall boots clicked on the tile floor as she left, leaving the stain of their echo on the pungent morning air.

"Vilo, see that they make it to their vehicle."

Sheff scurried back into the dining room with a pail of water which he threw on the fire. The flames sputtered and drowned instantly. He reached into the steaming embers and withdrew the dark object.

"Mother, that girl is a bitch with an attitude."

"She's no girl."

He dropped his prize into the bucket with a sound metallic plunk.

"Why'd you let her go?"

"Colonel Arman."

"Arman's no friend of neghrali."

The old woman finished sipping her tea as the sound of chopper blades clicked off the windows.

"He's a friend of mine."

Sheff sighed, "Mother getting sentimental in her senility?"

"Watch that."

Sheff took the bowl, "I could have softened her up."

"Like you softened up Vilo or whatever his real name is? I don't think so. I gave him to you for fifty

cents. Your methods produced nothing. I talk to him for fifty claps and he's blabbering so much I need an extra set of ears just to keep up."

Bill strolled into the room wearing a quizzical smile, "I hope I wasn't that easy."

"My poor boy, being easy is a blessing on Calanna. Nobody admires people who are difficult. Now come give your mother a kiss."

Bill leaned over and pecked her on the cheek, "You're a sweet mama."

"I know I am. Now get back to work before I see fit to have you slaughtered."

"Yes Madre."

Bill headed outside into the crisp breeze. As he walked toward the crater he watched the black chopper shrinking slowly over the distant horizon, its shiny surface reflecting the growing star's light. Within the house, another pair of eyes followed its descent into the skyline.

"He's trouble, mother."

She frowned at the comment.

"He'll bring the Imps upon us. And for what? His lies?"

"I only hope they are lies..."

Sheff considered her reply with a questioning glance, "What did he tell you?"

"Enough to keep me entertained."

"He's a neghral, mother."

"Not anymore, Sheff. He's one of my boys now, and I'll not give him away to the likes of Sule."

Sheff laughed at the statement, anticipating her icy stare without fear.

"And just what's so funny?"

"He's not yours until he's ours."

"Sheffy..."

"I've got to insist, mother. It is tradition after all."

She weighed his demand against the harm it could inflict, and decided the latter a lighter sum. It was, after all, tradition.

"Tonight, mother."

"So be it."

Madre turned the time-glass over with as much indifference as she could feign, the steely grains tumbling through its neck like the falling sleet as Bill watched the eight advance around him with an almost orchestrated precision. Sheff closed the distance first, grinning wickedly as he leapt forward into an outstretched leg. Bill slammed the foreman's head into his rising knee, the squeaky crack of a splintered jaw dividing the cheers into opposing camps.

The feeling of triumph lasted about two seconds as his legs swept suddenly from the earth, the wet earth rising in a hateful alliance with his enemies. Bill braced the fall with a forearm and rolled with the momentum, rising to his feet and second later and ducking a roundhouse as the circle fragmented and the crowd pressed forward. Instinct tried to take form in his legs, but there was nowhere to run. On every side guards held fully automatic rifles, five facing inward as the rest held the crowd at bay. Bill broke into the rim as several barrels homed in on his body. The closest guard thrust a stock into his back, pushing him into the ring as two others forced him to his knees.

He twisted his head sideways, avoiding the brunt of an oncoming boot, and felt his elbow spike into a sloppily defended neck as his fist punched upward into another's crotch. The crowd cheered again but was muffled by the noise of gunfire. Bill spat mud as he rolled back to the rim, desperately trying to regain some footing in the slippery dirt before the ground came crashing back upward, spinning as it impacted and smothered.

Bill felt a rib crack from his tackler's blow, breath fleeing his lungs on its own volition as the man's arms yanked his body upward, the now familiar earth receding from his legs as he kicked wildly into another. The change in momentum forced his companion into a backward fall with a satisfying crunch, the arms which had lifted him falling to either side as he rolled from the circle's center and regained his footing at the opposing side.

"You son of a..."

The haymaker was too obvious to deserve a block. Bill sidestepped the fist, turning his motion into a backward elbow cut followed by a second. The farm boy slumped to the ground as two others approached. The crowd roared, and someone threw a burning flask of petro into the circle, the glass shards erupting into an expanding ball of flame. Bill crouched into the sticky dirt as gunshot filled the air, the crowd falling back as his attackers rolled in the mud, desperately extinguishing their burning clothes. He didn't realize the mistake until he was tackled from the side, his already broke rib giving to another as his face hit a stone.

Bill's nose flattened as Sheff pounded the young gatherer's head a second time, blood sluicing out the nostrils like a waterfall. Time slowed to a halt as the crackle of fire and automatic rifles became one; Sheff trying to say something out of the corner of his mouth, his upper lip split through the middle like a pair of outstretched wings, and a carpet of flame spreading overhead. Sheff seemed to laugh

as his skull connected with the ground, wheels of time resuming their motion as Bill found his arm limply tangled around the foreman's neck.

The gunfire ceased as the guards fell back into the circle's center, flames evaporating beneath the foamy spray of chemical extinguishers. Bill felt himself lifted off the ground and carried to the front of the house, the top of the timeglass now empty except for the refraction of the dying firelight. Madre was gone, and her bodyguards with her. Bill scanned the windows and noticed motion from the balcony as three guards in riot gear, weapons blasting, forced their passage into the clearing.

"Confukingratulations Vilo!"

The largest of their number slammed him to the ground with a sturdy nightstick, belting him over the shoulders until he agreed to remain still. The second revealed a branding syringe from its cylindrical casing, stabbing the needle end deep into the small of his left knee. The ensuing howl of recognition did little to relieve the pain. The guards lifted him to his feet and turned him back toward the crowd, icy hands hoisting him skyward like some enfeebled lark as the Madre watched from the safety of her balcony.

"You're one of us, now, Vilo..."

"Hey Madre, he's done!"

She held the tracer in one hand, adjusting its dials with the other and finally glancing back downward with approval.

"She sees you, man."

They carried him into the stables, each singing with unfounded joy. His leg throbbed and buckled as they set him down, their bodies rocking with laughter as he tried to walk.

"Takes time, Vilo."

"Tu saadras... c'mon!"

Bill stumbled forward, forcing himself back to his feet. The knee threatened to explode as he tested more weight.

"That's it..."

He fell forward again, bracing his fall with outstretched arms.

"What you need... is a good kick in the face." Sheff's words came out slurred, and Bill heard more laughter as his skull snapped backward with the force of the blow. A warm, mushy feeling swept over him, holding him down as he tried to fight for air. The second kick was lower and far more painful. Voices blurred together in the background as the white ice filled his mind, numbing his senses as he passed out.

"Hey man, that's cold."

"Payback, Rone. Just payback."

Getting out of the Doldrums

Jo Jaquinta

Here's a story about a woman I'd like to meet.

Lora was bored. Everyone had gone off leaving Daegaer for company. She wandered about the ship, Daegaer following. "Your great company, you know, Daegaer," she told him. "A barrel of laughs." He stared blankly at her. "Go on, find something that doesn't work. I will fix it." He held out a snapped stylus. "Oh, very funny." She wandered back to engineering and pressed a few buttons at random, then reset them. "Go on, I'll close my eyes and you twiddle a few knobs," she shut her eyes. Daegaer turned off the light. "Gee, that's a difficult one," she said, turning it back on. She pulled out a reference manual. "Let's see if everything meets its tolerance levels." She leafed through a few pages, "Go get me a welding kit, a fire extinguisher, an impedance tester and a milkshake." He sighed and loped off. "Strawberry!" she yelled after him.

She turned the power plant on and began increasing the energy flow. "Just a shade below red." Daegaer returned and dropped the items. "Lighting system should be able to take 0.3 mega-watts," she said around the straw. She flicked a few switches and the lights glowed a very intense white. Daegaer gasped and covered his already shaded eyes. "Sorry!" She turned them off. "Let's see, circulatory fans on max." Daegaer held his head as she made the connection and flicked the switch. A gentle wind began blowing through the ship, gradually increasing. "Wheee!" cried Lora. She turned it off as the manual's pages began to blow about in her hands. Daegaer sat back up in his seat. "What next? Purification plant? Boring. Air conditioning? Never did like snow...Hull bonding? Hmmm...enhances molecular bonds in crystal structure of hull, three megawatts." Daegaer whimpered quietly. "Did you say something?" He shook his head rapidly. "I know you can talk. Why do you play mute?" She sighed. "Let's give it a go." She twisted a few wires together and threw the switch. An almost subsonic throb echoed and quickly died away. Lora raised an eyebrow and flicked the switch off and on again. The low noise reverberated throughout the ship. "I've got an idea!"

She unwired the console and set up a small circuit to the power flow controller. She set it to one

megawatt and activated it. The monitor filled with a square curve and around them the hull emitted a vibrant tone. She smiled. "Go to stores and get forty meters of six core cable", she instructed Daegaer. She dismantled the temporary circuit and began studying wiring diagrams.

She worked rapidly most of the afternoon, Daegaer catching a bit of her excitement. Dashing here and there, fetching and carrying tools. In late afternoon the sun was setting. They stood on the hot cement to one side of the ship. A thick cable drooped out a hatch and ran to a set of many switched boxes that Daegaer sat at. A thin wire led to the final apparatus which Lora carried.

"Stoke her up," she said. Daegaer gingerly turned a knob, watching the head shimmer radiate off the engines. "Connect the interface." He threw several large switches. "Engage filters." Her activated these and his hand hovered shaking over a large red button. "Activate," she whispered. He pushed it.

She savored the moment of silence, then leaped in the air bringing her hand down sharply on the strings of her guitar. The sound blasted from the hull's surface area and exploded over the whole shipyard as she sank to her knees, fingers madly plucking their way up the neck as the sound rose higher and higher. Daegaer clung to the console as the ship slid several inches on its madly vibrating landing gear. At her climax, he joined in with the ship's artillery thundering.

Terry and the others returned that evening to find their lot covered in people. Starport police surrounded the area, and a few administrators in business suits were arguing loudly with Lora. Around her several other spacers had turned up and were chatting at Daegaer. One had brought a howitzer; another held a suitably modified ultrasonic combat stunner, and a tight knot worked around a plasma cannon making unguessed modifications. Lora waved them over.

"What is going on here!" demanded Terry.

"We just thought we'd have a good old jam session!"

Ashorax and the Wizard

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Here's a tale of love, deceit, and death... not necessarily in that order, albeit. Too often they've crossed paths, burning those who cross with them, but rarely have they burnt so brightly.

Hunger awoke the dragon as the blackness of the cave was softening into the dark grey of morning. His slumber ended as if he had never slept at all, for that is the way with dragons. He was irritable because of his empty stomach, and he scanned the cave with his senses, looking for an excuse to attack something. Nothing moved in the shadows. The only sounds were his slow, heavy breathing, and the beat of his heart. The dragon noticed no scents, ignoring his own stench that would have choked other creatures. There was no one in the cave but himself. He hadn't expected anything different, but old habits persist. In his former cave, intruders had been a regular source of annoyance, from insects which tried to feed on him and forest animals who sought to share his cave to humans who wanted to rob him. All of them he had killed or driven off, except the insects, who were too stupid and too numerous to defeat. But his new lair was different. High up in a lesser peak of the great range that the humans called the Eastern Mountains there were no insects, and the few birds that took to the high altitudes quickly learned to keep their distance. No human would ever so much as find the cave, let alone scale the cliffs to reach it.

Ashorax uncoiled himself from around his hoard of treasure, some of which glinted in the dim light. This dragon did not sleep on his treasure, wallowing in it like some of his kind, nor was there enough of it for wallowing even if he was so inclined. But then, Ashorax collected only certain very special treasures. He picked through them with his foreclaws until he was satisfied that none were missing, and this improved his attitude somewhat. His mood brightened further when his empty stomach reminded him: on this morning, he would not have to hunt for his breakfast.

Lumbering to the mouth of the cave, the dragon spread his wings and dropped off the cliff. As he winged his way among the mountain tops, he

thought of the fat sheep or beef that waited ahead. Anticipation spurred him on, and he soared out of the mountains and over the sparsely wooded foothills that led down to the plains of southern Ei. Soon he spied the fields and pastures of humankind. As he neared his destination, his keen eyesight picked out the stake and the beast that was tethered to it. His anger returned with a rush. His tribute was a thin, aging bull, with no more meat on its bones than last week's goat or the sheep of the week before. Ashorax growled in annoyance. When he got close enough to smell the animal's disease, he roared. The humans were not keeping to their side of the bargain! Ashorax decided to keep it for them. He belched up fire, swooped low, and set the moribund beast on fire. Without touching ground he flapped aloft again and went looking for the herds. He found one immediately, a nice line of milk-cows being led by a small human, on their way from the town to a pasture. Ashorax dropped onto the fattest one of the lot and broke its neck, ignoring the rest as they scattered in panic. The human ran screaming back to the town, and the dragon began to feed.

By the time Ashorax finished eating his cow, a band of humans had gathered at the edge of the town. As he looked up, several of them began shooting arrows at him. Now arrows at that distance are no great threat to a dragon, unless one finds his eyes or belly, but Ashorax did not think highly of pain of any sort. These humans needed to be taught a lesson. Turning his armored back on his attackers, Ashorax heaved himself into the air. When he had gained enough height, he tucked all four legs against his vulnerable belly, closed his eyes to slits, folded his wings, and dove. The humans scattered, just like the cows had. He flamed at one and missed, but ripped another open with a quick slash of his claw before soaring back out of reach of their weapons. Before he could make another dive, the humans had fled into a building. That suited Ashorax, as he was about finished. This was, after all, just a reminder and a warning, not a war. He set fire to the roof of the wooden building, and flew back to his cave. * Mayor Branno sat with his elbows on the table, his

hands cradling his head. The meeting room of the Town's House was full of people, all of whom were talking, most of them loudly. A few were bellowing, their voices reverberating between Branno's aching temples.

"...burned to the ground, we were lucky to escape with our lives! Who's going to pay for..."

"...probably won't live till sunset. We couldn't move him for fear of spilling his insides out; Deyval had to sew him up right where he lay. We still can't move him, and the blood..."

"...blame me, I did my part; it was my turn and I staked out one of my best bulls, I did, but does the monster take it? No indeed, just roasts it where it stands and..."

"The hell ye did, I saw that bag o' bones ye staked out, 'twas the same one ye cut out o'the herd two days ago so's it wouldn't infect the rest..."

"...going to rebuild my inn? Nothing but charcoal..."

"...dies, who's going to feed his kin?"

"...the wizard, that's who's to blame!"

"Go fetch the wizard, and we'll hang..."

"Enough!" Branno roared, which raised his headache to new realms of pain. Silence appeared like sunlight through settling dust, and the mayor took a moment to savor it before speaking again. "Fetch the wizard here."

"Aye, on the end of a rope!" came an answer.

"I'll decide if there's any killing to be done! Now all of you go back home and I'll deal with our wizard!"

The crowd left.

Branno replaced his forehead into the relative comfort of his palms, and tried in vain to think about nothing at all. Though the shouting was gone, the complaints still echoed in his mind, refusing to be banished. After a while the wizard entered. For long moments they just stared at each other, the town's mayor and the town wizard. Branno was the first to speak.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Damn you! What are you going to do about your precious dragon? This time it's gone too far. Burned down Mark's inn, nearly killed Sandor, may be dead already for all I know. We had an agreement, and that monster isn't keeping its side of the bargain. I demand that you kill it!"

"The agreement was one fat herd beast every week," came the calm reply. "I've seen some of the animals you've left: old, starved, diseased. How long did you think Ashorax was going to put up with that?"

"I said I want that dragon dead!"

The wizard sighed. "We've been through this before. Holding it in thrall is one thing; I can manage that. Killing it is another matter entirely."

"If you won't do it, I'll get someone who will."

"Suit yourself. I wish you luck, you'll need it."

With that, the wizard left.

When Histan saw the town below, he heaved a sigh of relief. His horse, as if agreeing, whickered in reply. Since early that morning, after taking directions from a herdsman, the road had gradually meandered farther away from the Borr pass, beyond which lay his destination. By early afternoon it was leading toward the Eastern Mountains. *Now, he thought, I can get some real directions. I should have kept the gap in the mountains ahead of me and just headed cross-country.* But off the road his chances of finding lodging dwindled from poor to nonexistent, and Histan had had his fill of sleeping under the stars. The long days of travel, after the longer days of war, had left Histan with a yoke of weariness that sleep could not lift.

The town consisted of a few dozen buildings clustered about the intersection of two roads. A small village by Histan's experience, but here on the plains of Ei it rated as a medium-size town. At the very first house at the edge of town Histan met one of the townspeople. The house was a small one, little more than a stone hut. From what Histan could see of it, it was typical of the region, with a single door and no windows. The thatch roof was the only part of it that looked new; the rest could have been there for ten years or a hundred. In front of the hut was a well, and in front of the well was a woman. Her red hair, cropped short at her neck, flamed in the sunlight against the worn grey robe which hung to her ankles. She was struggling with a well hoist and cursing fluently at it. *Most unladylike language*, thought Histan, *but a lady in need is still a lady in need, even though she swears like a soldier.* He dismounted and approached, saying "Lady, may I assist you?"

She broke off her struggle with the tangled rope and made as if to strike it, but then stood glaring at it with her fists in the air before slowly lowering her shaking hands. "Please," she said through clenched teeth. Histan could see now that she was perhaps in her twenty-fifth year, and probably would be rather attractive if she weren't wearing a scowl. The rope was well and truly tangled. Histan wondered how she could have allowed it to work itself into such a mess, but said nothing as he bent to the task. He worked patiently for many minutes until the bucket moved

freely again, then raised a bucketful of water and set it on the edge of the well. Taking a battered copper dipper which hung by the well, Histan filled it and offered it to the woman, who took it and drained it with a single long draught. Retrieving the dipper, he asked, "May I?", waiting for a nod before taking a drink himself. "Your health, lady."

The woman sighed. "Forgive my manners. I've had a very bad day."

"Mine has not been the best of days, either. I was misdirected this morning; I fear I will have lost a whole day of traveling. Could I trouble you to tell me where I am, and how to reach the Borr Pass?"

"No trouble." For the first time the scowl on her face softened. "This is the town of Callin. In the center of town is a crossroads. The right-hand road will take you to the Borr Pass."

"My thanks, lady." Histan turned to his horse to remount.

"I am called Janit. And who shall I thank for fixing my well hoist?"

Histan bowed low. "Histan Mandoro at your service, lady."

She paused before continuing. "The sun will soon be gone; it sets early over these mountains. Did you plan to spend the night in town?"

"If I can find lodging. I look forward to spending the night under a roof for a change. There is an inn?"

"There was this morning." Her scowl returned. "Now there is only charcoal and cinders."

"Was this an attack by bandits, or the result of someone's carelessness?"

"You might say someone was careless. Would you permit me to repay you by spending the night under my roof?"

"Lady, I thank you, but do not consider yourself in my debt. Even if you were, it would not be seemly. Your father or your husband would surely not approve."

Now Janit actually laughed. "You presume too much. I offered only the shelter of my roof. Go into town then, and see if you can find lodging. But if you cannot, my offer remains."

"I thank you, lady." Histan bowed again, and mounted his horse. "Until we meet again," he said, and started into town.

Histan found the inn as Janit had described it: a smoking ruin of charred timbers, in which several blackened and broken chimneys stood. He found a tavern nearby, which promised to fulfill as least some of his desires for food, drink, lodging, and information. He left his steed outside near a trough, not bothering to tether it, knowing that the warhorse would

neither stray nor permit itself to be stolen.

The tavern was just beginning to fill with customers. When Histan entered, conversations ceased as the newcomer was examined. He paused for a moment while the locals took in his helmet, leather armor, bronze sword, and boots. He wondered if they would consider him an enemy. The Mohnaian Empire had not yet conquered the plains of Ei, but neither had they attacked or even threatened it, as yet. The talking resumed after a brief pause and Histan let himself relax. He resolved, not for the first time, to get some civilian clothes, and turned to the bar to order a drink.

"Yer come from the wars, are ye?" asked the barkeep, as Histan drank.

"Yes."

"Yer pardon fer askin', an' no offense, but we don't git much cust'mers like yerself passin' through, and we likes t'hear what news an' stories we can, when we can, if ye knows what I mean."

Histan sighed. He had no interest in telling tales of blood and glory; he was trying to put all of that behind him. But he was seeking information too, and there was nothing to be gained by being rude. "Killdee and Padya are now part of the Mohnaian Empire," he began. "Forentinia will soon follow." He paused. "I really don't have any other news."

"What about a tale of battle, then?" asked a customer, emboldened by beer and Histan's apparent willingness to talk.

"How came ye to be here?" the barkeep asked, "An' where are ye bound, if ye don't mind the askin' or the tellin'?"

Histan sighed again. He had told no one about his dismissal from the Mohnaian Army since it had happened so many days ago. He wanted to forget about it, turn his back on it and go home, but hunger for a sympathetic ear, not to mention ale in an empty stomach, loosened his tongue. "So you want a tale of the glories of war, of heroism in battle, of men of honor pitted against each other in a test of strength and will?" He felt the tavern grow quiet as faces leaned forward to listen. "Years ago, in Borr, I listened to such tales. I wanted to be a part of them, so I joined the Mohnaian Army to find honor, glory and adventure."

Histan found that there was little or no glory in the training camps of the Mohnaian Army, and adventures were better in the telling than in the doing. But he viewed the privations and the humiliations as necessary prerequisites, and there he learned the business of war, or at least of fighting and following orders. And so he went to war, to fight and to conquer, and Histan learned the difference between

honorable men and the other sort. "And I thought I lived honorably," he said, "as I fought shoulder to shoulder with men in whose trust I put my life, who trusted their lives to me. They commended me; they decorated me; they made me a sergeant." That was his dream: to be a trusted officer, respected by his men, awarding bravery, punishing cowardice, valuing honor in himself and his men above all else. Histan paused in his tale to drink. "Then something changed. I don't know whether the war changed, or my commanders changed, or I changed; it doesn't matter. I realized that we were fighting more battles against farmers and townspeople than against opposing armies. We burned —" Histan paused, pressing a hand to his forehead. *I don't want to remember*, he thought.

Histan's commander had ordered him to take his troop into a village and burn it; the village was suspected of harboring enemy soldiers. Histan remembered the faces of the villagers as his soldiers rode into the village. The people stared at the Mohnaian soldiers in fear, waiting in silence. No resistance was offered as Histan and his men searched, methodically and fruitlessly, for the enemy. Histan ordered his troop back to camp, where he reported to his commander.

"The village has been burned?" asked the commander.

"No sir. We searched every hovel and found no trace of the enemy."

"Sergeant Mandoro." The commander fixed Histan with his gaze.

"Sir."

"What were my orders?"

"To burn the town, sir."

"And why has the village not been burned?"

"Sir, we searched everywhere..."

The commander cut Histan off, his voice sharp. "Why has the village not been burned?"

"Because I disobeyed your orders, sir."

The commander turned to his aide. "Tell Sergeant Lyann that he is to take his troop and burn the village. Immediately." The aide saluted and left.

Histan was busted in rank, but he was still a valuable soldier with an otherwise clean record, and so they kept him. "A few weeks later," Histan continued, "We were fighting in a town, not much larger than this one. Our army and the Forentinians had converged on it, surrounded it. Townspeople were running everywhere, being trampled and slain, sometimes by accident, sometimes not. I was fighting a Forentinian soldier in the street. A child ran screaming, right between us, followed by its mother. I paused to let her pass. My opponent paused, too.

Next to me, another soldier — one of ours — raised his sword to strike her down. I yelled at him and parried his blow. He screamed at me in a rage, and knocked me down. When I regained my feet, the man I had been fighting had killed her. We just looked at each other, and then the fighting drove us apart.

"After the battle, my commander discharged me from the Mohnaian Army. He had seen the whole incident, it turned out. He should have had me hung, but he gave me my life in return for the service I had given in the past, which had included the saving of his life on more than one occasion.

"I'm going home now."

There was only silence after Histan finished speaking. He finished his drink, and turned once more to the barkeep. "Is there somewhere I can get lodging for the night? I noticed that the inn has burned."

"Nowhere but the stable."

"Say, if it's honor you're looking for," came a voice from the back of the tavern, "What could be more honorable than killing a dragon?"

"And where would I find a dragon?" asked Histan sourly, "In your stables?"

"What do you think burned down the inn?"

"Carelessness, more than likely." Histan's narrative had left him in a dour mood, and he had no interest in jesting with a drunk. He turned to leave.

"It's true, y' know," said another voice, "It was just this mornin', old Ashorax came a-flyin' down out o' th' mountains, a-roarin' and a-flamin'. Attacked th' town he did, killed half a herd o' cattle, injured a half a dozen men, an' tried t' burn th' whole town down."

"Injured *one* man," retorted the barkeep, "ate *one* cow, an' if Ashorax'd wanted the whole town burnt, we'd all be drinkin' ashes right now."

Histan paused at the door. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Never more," answered the barkeep. "It surely would be an hon'r'ble thing t'do, killin' that dragon fer us, an' they might make it worth yer while, too."

They took him to the Town's House to see the mayor.

Mayor Branno was eating his supper, alone, when a servant entered to announce visitors. "Send them away, idiot," he snapped, "Can't you see I'm eating?"

"Your eminence, it seems there is someone who would rid us of Ashorax," came the reply.

"Well, tell him to wait. No, that won't do, show him in — does he look serious? Capable?"

"Quite serious, sir. He appears to be a soldier or a mercenary."

"Well then, show him in. If he's clean, mind you."

"All of them, your eminence?"

"All of whom? Do we have one mercenary or an army?"

"Mark, Varly and Hammat have brought him here, sir."

"Well, well, are they all going hunting for Ashorax?"

The servant smiled. "I rather think not, sir."

Branno's fists pounded the table, which made all the dishes jump with a clatter, and spilled his wine. "Then bring in this soldier or mercenary or whatever he is," he yelled, "and get rid of the rest! And clean up this mess!"

The smile vanished. "At once, your eminence."

The servant returned with a tall, lean, olive-skinned man dressed in the garb of a soldier. "The honorable Navan Branno, Mayor of Callin, Guardian of the Borr Pass, and Protector of the Southern Eian Plains," intoned the servant, "May I present Histan Mandoro, late of the Mohnaian Army."

No, thought Branno, it isn't his height so much as the way he holds himself. This young man has been to war. He rose. "Come, sit down, join me at supper," he said magnanimously. "What brings you to our fine city?"

"Passing through on my way home to Borr, sir," Histan replied, taking a seat.

"I understand you are interested in a possible dragon-slaying? What are your qualifications?"

"In truth, sir, I have had no experience at all with dragons. I have had three years with the Mohnaian Army, most recently as sergeant. But I am eager to help rid you of this evil menace, if you would have me."

"Well, we do have a problem here, and no mistake. Is this your first time in Callin?" Histan nodded. "But you have, of course, heard of it?" Histan shook his head. *Good*, thought Branno, affecting a look of shocked surprise. "No? Well, what can one expect of Borrmen. Why, time was when Callin was the fairest, the richest, the most famous city in all of Ei! Our streets were paved and lined with merchants, and peasant and nobleman alike would go out of their way just to pass through Callin. But that was before Ashorax." The mayor made to spit, then thought better of it. "Ashorax and the wizard."

"The dragon appeared about five years ago, from whatever infernal regions spawn his misbegotten ilk. Nearly destroyed the town, wiped out crops,

devoured livestock. Soon no one would even come near Callin. Two or three years later, down came this wizard, offering to rid us of the dragon. A fine fee we paid too, and in advance. And what do we get for our money? The wretch couldn't kill the beast, but claims to hold it in thrall." Branno was now visibly upset. "Made a deal with it. A deal! Our wonderful wizard made a *deal* with that monster! It gets our precious livestock, what we have left of it, the wizard gets what's left of our food, and one of the few houses left unburnt, and what do we get? The dragon leaves us alone. Ha! If we don't leave the fattest cow, or maybe the beast just gets bored, off we go on another rampage."

"I understand his latest attack came only this morning," said Histan.

The mayor started at the interruption. "What? Oh, yes, damn right it did. A perfect example of what we are burdened with. Stake out a fine cow, right on schedule, and what does thrice-damned Ashorax do? Burns the cow without eating it, attacks the town, nearly kills Sandor, and burns down Mark's Inn. Damn the beast, that monster." A sequence of curses followed, then Branno lapsed into silence. When he had recovered his composure, he sat up in his chair, folded his hands, and gazed at Histan. "Taking for granted, of course, that you've not yet seen Ashorax, though you have seen an example of what he can do, was there a particular figure you had in mind?"

"Figure?" replied Histan.

"For ridding us of Ashorax."

"Oh, no sir. I consider it my honor-bound duty to assist you and your town in any way I can to rid you of this evil menace. Any recompense, for which I would be most grateful, would be strictly at your discretion."

"Strictly at my... Ah, I see. Very well, then. One hundred marks."

"Sir, you do me a disservice. I..."

"Two hundred."

Histan shook his head. "Listen to me," he said. "I don't think you understand."

"All right then, four hundred! But for that price, you take care of the wizard, too!"

"Mayor Branno. I give you my word of honor that I will rid the town of Callin of the foul dragon and the false wizard, or die in the attempt. If I succeed, you may pay me whatever you see fit."

As he was leaving, Histan turned and said, "Mayor Branno, about this wizard..."

"Oh, we'll take you to meet the wizard tomorrow," said the mayor, without looking up from his dinner. "Go now, and come back in the morning. A

pleasure to do business with you."

As soon as Histan had left, Branno summoned the servant. "I have promised the fool four hundred marks if he'll get rid of the dragon and the wizard."

The servant went white. "B-b-but sir, the treasury..."

"Imbecile! Don't you think I know to the last steel coin how much money I have? Go and fetch Srandin here. And take away this slop."

"At once, your eminence."

Histan left the Town's House and went back to the tavern for his horse. The sun was nearly gone, its last sliver making him squint as it threw his shadow away down the dusty street. Not a stone remained, Histan observed, of Callin's former street paving. And someone had been most efficient in cleaning up after Ashorax's rampages; except for Mark's Inn, Histan could see no remnants of destruction. *The mayor seems to have exaggerated*, he said to himself.

A woman's scream interrupted his thoughts. With a sharp word and a tug on the reins he brought his horse about and rode to the source of the sound, a house he had passed moments before. The scream had diminished into wailing as he burst in through the open door, sword in hand. There were two men in the house with the woman, but no violence was being offered. One man was supporting the weeping woman while the other just stood with his head bowed.

"I beg your pardon, sirs, my lady," Histan apologized, replacing his sword. "I heard the lady cry out, and feared that she might be in danger."

"Who are you?" said the man who was not comforting the woman.

"Histan Mandoro at your service. Please forgive my intrusion, sir. If you will excuse me, I will not disturb you further." The woman, who had been startled from her crying by Histan's abrupt entrance, had calmed somewhat.

"Thank you for your concern, stranger," the man continued. "We have just brought Siri news that Sandor, her husband, is dead."

"Sandor? Was he not the one maimed by the dragon?"

"The same. Ah, cursed be all dragons."

Histan addressed Siri. "My lady. While I cannot return your husband to you, I hope it may give you some small comfort to know that, as I am able, the monster will soon be dead."

"You (sniff) would kill Ashorax?"

"Tomorrow I go in search of him, and one of us will not survive the meeting."

"The gods go with you then, Histan Mandoro. Few in this town have hunted Ashorax, and fewer still have lived to tell of it."

Histan left the men to console the widow, and rode to Janit's hut at the edge of town. The sun was quite gone now, and darkness was settling onto the plains of Ei and the town of Callin.

Janit met him at the door of her hut. "You have returned, I see."

"I will accept your offer, lady, if you wish."

"Oh, I wish. Come in. I haven't much room, as you can see, but there's enough floor to spread your blanket on."

There wasn't much more than that. The width of the hut was perhaps twice Histan's height, and its length was not much greater. One end contained a rude hearth for cooking, crowded about with battered pots and kettles and containers of foodstuffs. At the other end, a clean pallet of straw lay in one corner and a chamber pot of chipped clay in the other, next to a straw basket apparently for clothes. A high wooden plank bench, propped up on stones, sat against the back wall, strewn about with scrolls, books and candles, some of which were lit. In front of it was a wicker stool which squashed noticeably when Janit sat down on it. Histan took all of this in at a glance, but refrained from staring at Janit's belongings.

"I hope you found the afternoon more enjoyable than the morning," said Histan.

"Somewhat. There is always tomorrow."

"Yes, tomorrow. Tomorrow promises to be a very fine day indeed, for tomorrow, with luck and the gods' blessings, I shall rid this town forever of the foul Ashorax."

"Oh, will you?"

Histan went on to describe all that had befallen him that afternoon. Janit listened in silence, offering little in the way of reaction. When he had finished, she spoke.

"Well, let me improve your day further. You won't have to wait till tomorrow to meet the wizard."

The tone of Janit's voice froze Histan. "What are you saying?" he said softly.

"Marlia Janit, Wizard of Callin, at your service," she replied, the candlelight flickering on her teeth as she smiled grimly at Histan.

For a long moment Histan stood motionless, not daring to take his eyes from Janit's, while his mind raced. He had wondered at the woman's willingness to board an armed man without fearing for herself. Reconstructing a picture of the hut in his mind, and adding to it what he could see with his peripheral vision, Histan considered his alternatives, and guessed at hers. He tried to remember every-

thing he had ever learned about wizards, which was not much. While the Mohnaian Army occasionally employed wizards, they nearly always stayed in their private tents, away from the soldiers. The soldiers were content to keep it that way. Histan had to conclude that he hadn't the slightest notion what she could do, if she chose, or even what things she might already have done without his noticing. *Is it really out of caution that I stand without moving? Could I move if I wanted to? If I had to? If I do move, what will she do? If I don't move, what will she do?* Finally Histan decided that doing something was better than doing nothing, and talking was probably safer than action, at least for the moment. Straightening his back ever so slightly, he said: "It appears, lady, that we are to be adversaries. Shall we begin this now, or shall I withdraw and let tomorrow bring what it may?"

The wizard laughed. "Will you draw your sword and cut me in two?"

"Lady, I have no wish to kill you, or even do you any harm, but I have pledged to see you gone from this town, and your dragon's life is forfeit."

Janit sighed. "I don't think you know what you're talking about. Have you ever *seen* a dragon?"

Histan opened his mouth, then closed it again, thinking how best to reply.

"I thought as much. Look, why don't you get a good night's rest and, in the morning, just be on your way and forget about it? Ashorax will take you to pieces, *burnt* pieces, if you even threaten him."

"Lady, I have given my word of honor, and nothing may stay my course."

Janit was suddenly on her feet with angry eyes fixed on Histan. "Your word of honor to that fat stinking liar Branno? Did it never occur to you to think about how much of what he told you is true? Did it never occur to you to hear *my* side of this?"

The former thought, of course, had occurred to him; the latter had not. "Lady, I offer my apology. What you ask is only reasonable."

"I didn't ask anything." Janit sat down again and lapsed into sully silence. There was an uncomfortable pause while Histan realized that it was up to him to continue.

"What exactly is your relationship to this dragon, lady?" he asked carefully.

Janit paused before answering. "A few years ago Ashorax, the dragon, began raiding the herds for food. He never bothered the people much, unless they bothered him. Which they did. They soon sent the word out that a reward was offered for his destruction or removal. When I heard about it I was living some days north and west of here, and decided to give it a

try."

"Why?"

Janit stared Histan full in the face. "Why did you?" She went on before he could reply. "There was a reward."

"With my arts I studied Ashorax, and eventually I faced him down. I set a spell on him such that I could kill him any time I chose, and if I died so would he. I offered him his life, and a weekly tribute sufficient to keep him alive, in return for not raiding the herds. In addition, he keeps the nearby plains free of the small prairie wolves and great plains cats that also steal livestock. If Ashorax dies, the wolves and cats will return and take more than the cow a week that Ashorax gets. The town's better off now than even before Ashorax came."

"That is not what Mayor Branno believes."

"And well I know it. They begrudge every beast they give, even the old and sick ones. And Branno begrudges me this hovel he was gracious enough to grant me. How is it that you have come to Callin?"

Histan was not about to repeat the story of his dismissal again, so he said simply, "I am on my way home from the wars."

"Where is home? With whom did you fight?"

"My home is in Borr. I fought with the Mohnaian Army." He made both of these statements with some diffidence, as if daring the wizard to comment on either his homeland or the ever-expanding empire.

"You are on leave, then?"

"I was discharged."

"Has the Mohnaian Army so many soldiers, then, that they didn't need you?"

Against his will, but drawn by Janit's incessant questioning, Histan found himself relating the story of his dismissal in even greater detail than he had in Mark's Inn. When he had finished he asked, "Why did you not enchant the well hoist to unknot itself?"

"Why don't you chop firewood with your sword?"

"My lady, my sword is a fine instrument, and an instrument of war! Not only would it be unseemly to sully it with so mundane a use, but I would dull its edge and likely even damage it."

"And so it is with magic. It is not an art to be trifled with, nor to be used at the merest whim. It is not to be used lightly, and even its simplest use is not without danger. I use magic when it is needful to do so, and only then."

"I fear that I know but little about magic."

"And I know even less." Histan stared at the wizard. "You see," she explained, "The more I learn, the more I learn that I have yet more to learn, and for each page I understand, I find that there is a whole volume that I do not. You, who know so little, have no idea how much there is to know."

Wizards, Histan had heard, talked in riddles. He mulled over in his mind all that Janit had said to him, and all that Major Branno had said as well, trying to discern the likely truth out of all the potential lies. "Why did you not simply kill the dragon?" he asked.

"I told you, the town is better off the way they are, with Ashorax under control and keeping the predators away." She rose. "The hour grows late and I rise early."

"Then I will bid you good night. I shall consider all that you have said."

"You will not stay the night?"

"Lady, we remain potential foes."

"Oh, would you please call me Janit! Look, when you decide that we are to be enemies, then I'll throw you out. I promise I won't enchant you as you sleep."

"What assurance do you have that I will not slay or bind you while *you* sleep?"

Janit looked at Histan for a moment. "You won't," she said.

Histan was awakened by a small noise of indeterminate origin. He sat up in the darkness of the hut, and knew by the soft light that crept under the door that it was near dawn. Janit was nowhere to be seen. His sword and mail shirt were where he had left them; he put them on and went outside. There was no trace of the wizard there, either. He drew a bucket of water from the well to drink and wash his face, and then drew another for his horse. While he tended the stallion he searched the plains for some sign of the missing wizard. He soon spotted a grey-clad figure heading away to the southeast, towards the mountains. *She goes to meet the dragon*, thought Histan. *Well, then so shall I.*

"Good morning," he called as he caught up with her.

"Good morning," she replied without breaking her stride.

"Where are you bound?"

"You have your business; I have mine."

"You seek the dragon." It was not a question, and Janit did not answer it. "Lady — Janit. Will you not aid me in ridding the town of this menace?"

Yesterday this monster killed a man, widowing his wife. How many more men must be killed?"

"The fool should not have interfered. Ashorax wouldn't have attacked unless he was attacked first, of that I'm certain. You have made a foolish promise to Branno; I have not. Now will you please go away before you get yourself killed?"

"Do not hinder me, lady, or we are enemies. I must slay this dragon or die in the attempt."

"Oh, you'll die all right. I'd just rather not watch it happen. I'd rather it didn't happen at all, but you can expect no help from me."

"So you will aid the dragon?"

Janit laughed at this. "Ashorax needs no help from me," she declared.

Neither Histan nor Janit spoke again until they reached the top of a hill under the shadow of the Eastern Mountains themselves. Here Janit stopped and said to Histan, "Don't stand so close, I need room to work." Histan obligingly stepped his horse back several paces, but kept his eyes on the wizard. From a pouch which hung on a strap from her shoulder, she took a fist-size cube of what looked like smooth grey stone. Supporting it with the fingertips of one hand, she touched its faces with the other hand in a ritual pattern. As she did this, the faces of the cube changed color, some of them to black and some of them to white. The white faces seemed to glow slightly and, strangely, so did the black ones. Janit then held the cube in front of her, lifted her head to the mountains, and called out in a strong, clear voice: "Ashorax!" She called the dragon's name several times, and then began manipulating the cube again. When the faces had all returned to their original lifeless grey, she replaced the cube in the pouch.

After several minutes Histan asked, "Where is the dragon?"

"He will come."

Several more minutes passed in uneventful silence, while Histan divided his attention between the wizard, the mountains and the sky. And then the dragon did come, from high in the mountains, soaring downward towards the two humans on motionless wings. For a moment Histan was entranced by the sight, having never seen a dragon before. Brown like rich earth it was, though somehow in places its scales managed to reflect sparkles of sun. Its belly and the underside of its wings were pale. It was fully three times Histan's height from its jaws to the tip of its long tail, which by itself was as long as Histan was tall. Its wings spanned nearly as much as its length. Its heavily muscled hind legs and tiny foreclaws were drawn tight against its body, and its narrow head swung back and forth on a long, flexible neck.

As the dragon grew closer, Histan stopped staring and dismounted, taking up his shield and drawing his sword. With a quick word he ordered his horse away to a safe distance, and prepared to meet the impending attack.

"Wait," said Janit, "Give me a moment to talk to him."

Histan was just as happy to have a few moments to study his adversary, being unsure of quite how to go about battling a dragon. Ashorax landed several paces from Janit, leaving the wizard directly between itself and the armed soldier. The dragon made a deep growling sound, and the wizard replied in a tongue which Histan had never heard before. They conversed in this manner for a short time, with Janit occasionally gesturing towards Histan, the town, or the mountains. She became annoyed, and Histan got the distinct impression that they were arguing about something. Finally, the dragon extended a foreclaw towards Janit, and she took from Ashorax a melon-size faceted ball of crystal. As the wizard and the dragon continued their unintelligible conversation, Histan suddenly understood why Janit would not kill Ashorax.

"Out of my way, wizard!" cried Histan, running around Janit to attack the dragon. Ashorax reared back before the slashing blade, narrowly missing being disemboweled. The dragon breathed fire at Histan, who brought his shield up just in time to deflect the flames, which nonetheless singed the hair on his head and arms. The smell of its breath nearly choked Histan; it brought to mind a burning cesspit. Before the man could recover for another attack, Ashorax was in the air, flapping hard to gain altitude for a dive. At this point Janit maneuvered herself between the two assailants, hollering "Stop! Ashorax, begone! Away!" The dragon broke off its dive and complied, but not without roaring in anger at the two humans.

"I see now what your word is worth, wizard!" Histan exclaimed.

"I have not broken my word to you, Mandoro. I aided neither Ashorax nor you!"

"You helped the creature escape!"

"I kept him from burning you to a cinder and then smashing you into an ash heap!"

"Further, you lied to me about your reasons for keeping him — it — alive! You allow it to live so that it can bring you its treasure!"

Janit voice grew shrill with rage. "I do not lie, Histan Mandoro, not to you, not to that pig of a Mayor who lies so much that he no longer knows what truth is, and not to any man! Or beast! If you call me a liar again, I swear I'll kill you — or

make you wish I had. What I told you was the truth, though not the whole truth. Yes, I keep Ashorax alive so that he brings me pieces of his hoard. But let me tell you something about Ashorax. He doesn't just collect treasure, oh no. He only collects *magical* treasure: amulets, talismans, enchanted weapons, protective jewelry. And he can't even use them! The things he brings me I could search a lifetime for, and never find, or study a lifetime, and still not be able to make! Ashorax will pay for killing Sandor; the widow will receive retribution."

"How many more men must die for your treasure? How many more widows? How many..."

"None, if they'll just leave him alone and not try to feed him diseased meat!"

"And still it is the townspeople who pay!" Now Histan was shouting, too.

"*They* pay for the safety of their livestock from indiscriminate predators!" Janit's voice rose to near shrieking. "I pay for the treasure! Do you think it costs me nothing to hold Ashorax in thrall? Do you think that my magic is as easy to wield as your sword? Even now the spell weakens, and must be renewed soon else Ashorax will be free! And when he is free (and make no mistake, he will *know*), then he'll wreak such a vengeance on me and on this town that none will live to tell of it!"

"And whose fault will that be, at the last?"

The wizard paused, and when she spoke her voice was calm again. "It will not happen. I will not allow it to happen. Eventually, I will kill Ashorax."

"When?"

"When it pleases me! A few more pieces of his treasure, and I will be content."

"Listen to me, Wizard of Callin," said Histan, "The dragon must die. Aid me in hunting it down and killing it, or else stand aside and let me do it alone. But if you hinder me again in any way, I will cut you down!"

When Janit did not reply, Histan mounted his horse.

"If you kill Ashorax without my leave," she said, "I will kill you." Histan looked at her for a moment without speaking, then spurred his horse and rode back towards the town.

Histan reported to Mayor Branno, telling him most of what had transpired that morning. Branno was most annoyed that Histan had not already killed Ashorax.

"I was unprepared," explained Histan. "The wizard told me that she must soon renew her spell over the dragon. I will kill him then."

"Ahhh!" exclaimed Branno, rubbing his hands together. "Excellent! I can tell you exactly where

they will meet, and you can ambush them and kill them both!"

"I will kill the wizard only if it is necessary."

Branno's face clouded. "But I want her dead as well! I thought we had an agreement?"

"I agreed to rid your town of her, not kill her."

"No matter. The wizard will certainly try to stop you from killing the dragon, and then you will have to kill her."

"If necessary."

Branno told Histan how to get to the ravine where Ashorax and the wizard would meet. Histan left the Town's House and went to the market to buy some provisions, and when he was done he stopped at the tavern for a drink.

Marlia Janit, Wizard of Callin, sat in her hovel brooding. *It's time to kill Ashorax, she thought. This time I must do it. Yes, this time I will do it. I've got enough of his treasure. This one amulet alone is worth everything I have paid. I'll kill Ashorax and get out of this town.*

This sounds familiar, said another part of her brain. This is just what you said last time. Then it was "just one more treasure, just one more." You didn't kill him last time, and you're not going to do it this time.

Yes I am! Besides, if I don't, Mandoro will do it, or get himself killed trying.

And what do you care about him?

Nothing! I just don't want to see him get killed.

But you'd kill him yourself.

Janit pressed the heels of her hands to her forehead and tried to stop arguing with herself. *I've got to get rid of him somehow, she thought. But how? Branno will probably have him killed after he kills Ashorax, but by then it'll be too late.*

See what I told you?

Oh, shut up. Wait, that's it! I'll tell Mandoro that Branno is planning to murder him.

You don't know that.

It's probably true! It's just the kind of thing Branno would do.

You don't know that. You'd be lying. You don't lie.

No, not really, not... Oh, I don't know.

If you're really going to kill Ashorax, then just tell Mandoro so. He'll help you.

No! I'm not ready...

I thought so.

Damn it, Ashorax is mine to kill or not to kill! Getting Mandoro out of the way has nothing to do with whether or not I kill Ashorax!

Janit burst out of her hovel and into town, located Histan's horse outside the tavern, and waited for the man to emerge. She did not have to wait long.

"Mandoro, I need to talk to you."

"What do you want?"

"Branno — can we walk while we talk? Which way are you going? Branno intends to have you killed after you kill Ashorax. He never intended to pay you in the first place."

"How do you know this?"

"How? I — I was passing by the Town's House, and I overheard him talking to someone, the one who will kill you."

"When?"

"Today, he — they were eating together, at noon."

"So, it will only be one?"

"Oh no, no, several. I heard them talking. Several men, heavily armed with — with bows."

"When? Where?"

"I — I don't know, they didn't say. I was afraid they'd see me, so I left."

Histan said nothing as he considered this new development.

"If Branno means to murder you, then your agreement is forfeit. You don't have to get yourself killed trying to kill Ashorax. You can leave!"

"No." Histan shook his head. "The dragon is a plague on this town, and its people deserve better, even if their mayor does not. I cannot honorably give up this venture, regardless of Mayor Branno's intentions."

"You fool!" Janit cried, "If Ashorax doesn't kill you, Branno's men will! Do you want to die?"

"I am warned, and Branno's cut-throats will be expecting to surprise me. I believe I can handle them. Your kindly warning may well have saved my life, lady, and I thank you."

Janit stood with her mouth open, staring at Histan, and then whirled and strode away down the street. She was almost in tears with rage and disappointment. *I lied! And for what? The stupid fool is going to get himself killed. Damn him! Damn him! I've got to kill Ashorax. Tomorrow.*

Then why don't you tell him so?

Shut up!

And then, as if in a dream or a vision, Janit's old mentor seemed to be walking behind her, repeating some of the last words he had spoken to her: *In the end, there are no grey sorcerers, only black and white. You are unwilling to commit your life to serving the good, and you think you can serve yourself without doing evil to others. You may call yourself a grey wizard, Janit, but the time will come when you*

must accept the destiny that the light demands, or be swallowed up by the darkness.

"How can this darkness take me, if I am not willing to go?" she whispered, as she had asked once before, but this time she already knew the answer.

Most likely, you will begin to lie. One day you will lie, to another or to yourself, and each lie will spawn others, until all you have left is lies.

Histan rode towards the mountains, thinking about his last conversation with the wizard. Something had not rung true in Janit's words, and the more he thought about it the less he liked it. He thought about Branno and the unnamed assassin discussing his demise while they ate. Histan had been in Branno's dining room; it was on the second story of the Town's House. How had Janit overheard a conversation on the second story, unless she was inside the building? But she said she was passing by, outside. Unless Branno had been eating on the ground floor. Histan did not want to believe that she was lying. While he could not condone her actions, everything she had said had seemed to indicate a personal integrity. Everything she had said. But what had she actually done? Prevented him from killing Ashorax, tried to convince him to abandon his quest — *of course!* Histan thought, *this is just another attempt to turn me aside.* Now he knew that he would almost certainly have to kill her as well as Ashorax.

He found the ravine without any trouble. It was hard by the side of a steep mountain slope, with a small stream running out of it. It was just wide enough to turn a horse in, with many twists and turns that made it impossible to see what lay more than a score of paces ahead. Near its end, about a hundred paces in, it widened into a cul-de-sac which looked just large enough for a dragon to land in. Its floor was full of crevices and boulders that provided numerous hiding places, while its walls were high and sheer — climbable, perhaps, by an expert in such things, but certainly not by Histan. The stream cascaded down from some unseen height. Tufts of grass grew between cracks in the stone, and there were scorch marks everywhere. Histan found a particularly deep crevice in which he could conceal his horse, and another one from which, unseen, he could watch anyone approach.

Janit rose at first light at the end of a mostly sleepless night. She set out on her walk to the ravine, still uncertain as to whether she would renew her spell on the dragon, or kill him. Using her arts as well as her senses, the wizard kept a close watch for pursuit

by Histan. It did not occur to her that he might already be waiting for her at her destination.

Janit heaved a sigh of relief upon reaching the ravine, and hurried inside, withdrawing her amulet and activating it as she went. As soon as she reached the cul-de-sac, she called for Ashorax. The amulet trembled in her hands as she darkened its facets, and she thrust it away into its pouch and clenched her hands into fists to quiet them. It only made the shaking worse.

What's the matter with me? she thought. I haven't felt this way since I first enspelled Ashorax. I've done it time after time, and I can do it again.

So, you're not going to kill him after all.

Of course I'm going to kill him! I'll get one last treasure, and then be rid of him forever.

Is that what you're afraid of? That you won't be able to kill him?

Of course I can kill him! It won't be any harder than renewing the spell.

You hope.

The dragon came, startling Janit out of her mental conversation. "It is time," she said in the ancient tongue, "To renew our agreement."

"Free me," replied Ashorax, "And I will give you half my hoard."

Janit ignored the offer, as she always had. Ashorax's freedom would mean her immediate death. Drawing her amulet from its pouch, she touched its facets and spoke the words to bring it to life. The facets glowed, black and white, in a different configuration than the one she had used to summon the dragon. When she felt the power flowing strong and smooth, she gathered it about her and cast it at Ashorax, binding his wings and stifling his flame with bonds which, though strong, would not last long. As always, she must work swiftly. Ashorax roared with rage and strained against the unseen cords which held him, but in vain. The malevolence burning in his eyes was enough to make Janit wince. Quickly but carefully, she removed the remnants of the old spell which linked the dragon's life to her own. Now she was in the most danger, for should her binding spell fail before the new linking spell was in place...

A sudden movement from the wall of the ravine caught Janit's eye, and she saw Histan Mandoro striding towards Ashorax. "Stand aside, wizard," he commanded, "Ashorax is mine."

"Don't interrupt me, you fool! I have stolen his powers of flight and flame, and hold him immobilized by my will, but his powers will return swiftly. I must renew the spell that links us or he will kill you and I both!" *And I can't spare any attention to get you out of the way,* she added silently.

"Good," replied Histan grimly, "Then I will have no trouble killing him."

"If you kill Ashorax," the wizard cried, "Then you will die before you can lift your sword a second time!"

Then the dragon spoke in the language of the humans, a dry, grating sound that chilled Histan far more than his growling had. "The wizard cannot spare even a touch of her power for you, as long as she holds me. Kill her now, human, and I will make you rich beyond imagining!"

Kill her now, thought Histan, and then kill the dragon while it still cannot fly away or burn me. He stepped forward and raised his sword. As he did, a flash of light from the entrance to the ravine caught his eye, and he glanced towards it in time to recognize what it was before it disappeared behind the cover of a boulder.

It was a crossbow.

She wasn't lying! he thought, and moved with a speed borne of conviction. Ashorax reared and slashed with his foreclaws, but the dragon's fighting reflexes couldn't adjust for the temporary loss of wings and fire. Histan drove his sword deep into the dragon's belly, then withdrew before it could retaliate with claws or teeth. The blow was true, and Ashorax fell. Its death scream echoed off the cliff walls and rang in the ears of the humans. It was all over in a handful of heartbeats.

Histan turned to face Janit, or tried to turn, and found that he could no longer move from the neck down. The wizard walked around his immobilized sword to face him.

"Before I kill you," she said through clenched teeth, "I'd like you to answer one question. Why didn't you kill me first? You would have had enough time to kill the dragon afterward."

"I was going to," Histan admitted. "I thought you had lied about Branno's plot to kill me. I did you a disservice, lady. But then I caught a glimpse of a crossbow beyond the entrance to the ravine, and realized that you had spoken the truth."

The blood drained from Janit's face. *I was right!* she thought.

"But hear me," Histan went on, "The dragon held you even as you held it. Soon you would have been no better than Ashorax or mayor Branno. Before you came here, would you have bartered men's lives for magical treasures?" The wizard did not answer. "Now you are free."

Janit was silent for some time before she spoke again. "I lied to you," she said. "I didn't know that Branno was going to have you killed until just now."

"You lied? Why?"

"I hoped I could scare you away."

"I see that I did not misjudge you after all," Histan said coldly. "But whether you kill me or not, you will not leave this ravine alive."

"I did promise to kill you, didn't I?" the wizard asked. "Well, it seems that I've lied to you again." Histan found that he could move.

Janit turned her back on Histan and knelt by the dragon's outstretched foreclaw. From it she extracted what looked like a bracelet, set with many jewels which sparkled as she held it up, even though no ray of sunlight had yet pierced the depths of the ravine. "And as for not leaving here alive..."

In spite of their orders, Branno's assassins had no intentions of facing a live Ashorax. They heard the dragon's death cry, but dared take no chances with hasty action; the soldier and the wizard could not leave without passing them.

When they finally tired of waiting and crept into the ravine, they saw nothing but a dead dragon. Though they searched every crack and crevice, no trace of the wizard or the soldier could they find, save only a curious cube of what looked like grey stone.

"I am Mobius, the Master of All Evil, High lord of All Liches, Commander of the Demon Hordes, Ruler of Darkness, and the Bringer of Death, Doom, and Destruction. Other than that, I am a pretty nice guy."

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“So Who Is This Killroy Guy Anyway?”

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For those who've had the distinction of asking, here's a week in the life of Killroy. Enjoy!

Killroy was sitting on the couch before his video center. He had finished his sweep of the area around the blimp hangers with the close circuit system and had just switched to television when Dale came in the doorway behind.

“Whatcha watchin Killroy?” he asked in his usual bubbly manner. The little chipmunk jumped over the back of the couch and sat down next to his great black friend. Ever since the incident at the “Overlook Inn” Killroy had developed a very close friendship with Dale. Closer than any of the other Rangers with the exception of Gadget, of course. It had been the only truly distasteful moment in his relationship with the Rangers. Fortunately, however, Chip knew it was mostly his fault and didn't begrudge Killroy his closeness with Dale. Anyway Chip had his hands full with Tammy.

“You're sitting on my tail again,” he said without looking away from the TV-Guide.

“Woops” Dale replied and picked himself up so Killroy could retrieve his his long feline tail. Dale looked expectantly up at his friend who was at least twice as tall as any of the others, even after Killroy had expanded them to near human size. *If he really wanted humans to like him better, he shouldn't have chosen a form that was eight feet tall.* Dale thought to himself.

“Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh” Killroy said in disgust carelessly tossing the TV-Guide away. “There ain't shit on tonight. Well Dale old buddy, old friend, old pal, let's have a look at what's going on in the other realms.”

“Okeee Doke.” Dale jumped up and got the Special Remote from its place below the TV screen and brought it to Killroy. It was a small metallic box in the general shape of a remote control but had no buttons or LEDs on it. It was operated by Killroy's thoughts and controlled the device that allowed them to view happenings in other time/space continuums right on their TV screen. Killroy had invested quite a bit of time and effort in its construction, and though it seemed a rather innocuous device, it was really one of his most sophisticated inventions.

Killroy closed his eyes for a moment and his body visibly relaxed. Dale knew the signs that indicated exercising of the great power his friend was infamous for in dimension after dimension. What he was seeing here was, though quite complicated in operation, a parlor trick. Dale had seen many parlor tricks before he truly saw his friend in action. Even after all this time he still shuddered at the memory and, unconsciously, slid over next to the great, black furred, jaguar like creature that was his friend. Killroy scooped down in the chair and crossed his feet on the end table in front of the couch. Seemingly on a second thought, he lifted his feet and kicked off his tennis shoes; the only articles of clothing he ever wore besides the Jacket. His empathic abilities kept him attuned to what his friends were feeling, and he thoughtfully put his arm around Dale's shoulder.

Dale could imagine Killroy's consciousness reaching out from the confines of his body and drawing close to the empathic receptor of the viewing system. Killroy had made sure each of the Rangers had experienced the Astral plane so they would all have a better understanding of him. The empathic receptor allowed the user to feel the currents of emotion and temporal energy of a scene to augment the picture on the screen. In this manner Killroy could ascertain almost instantly the importance of a situation. It also allowed him to center on the particular events in a realm that he was interested in, rather than having to look at years of scenes to find one important event.

The scenes flew by on the screen faster than Dale could keep track of. They were just blurs to him, but he knew it wouldn't be long before his friend latched onto some important event. A moment later, Killroy's eyes snapped full open and his back straightened slightly. Dale had seen this look before too and turned to the screen to see that it had stopped on a scene of a locker room full of very young, very beautiful, very naked women.

“Wo-ho!” Dale exclaimed leaning forward and wagging his tail. *Killroy sure knows how to use that viewer. But wait a minute, he thought he's two thousand years old. He's probably seen gobs of naked women. I wonder why he stopped here?* But then he thought of Killroy and Gadget. *Then again, maybe he hasn't seen all that many naked women.*

"I'm ashamed of you guys!" Gadget came in from the kitchen. "You're just a pair of peeping Tom's." She moved around to the side of the couch where Killroy was sitting. She crossed her arms and looked sternly at him. He ignored her, intently gazing at the screen. She seemed slightly more than annoyed. Her action seemed a bit out of character, but Dale knew why. Then they both realized how intensely serious Killroy was.

The inter-dimensional camera panned across the locker room showing a variety of young, vibrant bodies returning from their showers, but seemed to fixate on none of them. A very attractive, young girl bat stepped over the back of the couch as Dale had done and sat down next to the smiling chipmunk. Dale turned to see that all the other Rangers had come through the door into Killroy's communication center.

"What are you gawking at sweetie, you know all about females' bodies," she smilingly chided in a deep, sexy voice.

"Sure, Foxie, but I've never seen naked female humans before. I thought they didn't have any body fur at all, but they do. Between their legs. But each one is sort of - different. The patterns I mean. And some have more than others."

This was enough to catch Killroy's attention. He sent a brief smirking glance at his little friend and chuckled to himself. But almost as quickly, his serious stare returned. Foxglove and Tammy giggled too and Gadget put a thoughtful finger to her mouth and smiled. Foxglove snuggled up with Dale to watch the rest of the scene unfold.

The locker room continued to scroll by until the actual showers could be seen in the background. Killroy's chin popped up. "There..." he said as the picture zoomed in on the last remaining girl in the showers. She was pretty, but not beautiful. She appeared slightly less mature in a physical sense than the others. She was washing very slowly with her eyes half closed. "That girl, she has psi talents." He paused squinting a little. "Telekinesis I think."

Her expression contained a note of fear, or perhaps nervousness. Suddenly, the water going down the drain at her feet was tainted with blood. They could all see that it came from her vagina. The males in the room creased their eyebrows. The three females took on sympathetic looks. All these concerned looks vanished, however, when they saw the girl's reaction to discovering the menstrual blood: utter horror.

She screamed a long, lingering, blood-curdling scream and scurried away from the shower, squeezing her legs together, holding out her blood covered

hand imploringly to her classmates. The boys in the room, except for Killroy, drew back in shock and displayed expressions of open mouthed horror and sympathy. The girls however, appeared shocked, but surprised. As if they were concerned for her but didn't understand why she was quite so upset. Killroy, however, creased his eyebrows even more. His lips parted slightly and his gaze grew even more intense. It seemed he was peering right into the girl's soul, and, of course, that's what he was attempting.

Then all their faces, except Killroy's again, showed disbelief when they saw her classmate's reactions. They were all yelling and taunting her; throwing tampons at her. Killroy's lips closed again and his face became hard as a stone. Now Gadget understood. Of all the Rangers only she had experienced total psychic merging with Killroy. They knew the very depths of each other's souls. It had happened when she was despondent because she thought she had lost her talent at inventing. He had wrapped his consciousness about hers and lifted it completely from her body into the Astral plane. She had seen what talent truly was and where it fit into the great system of temporal energy that was existence. Her troubles had seemed so unimportant after that. She had seen the whole of his being too. She knew of his past and what had caused him to become what he was. She knew he empathized with this girl they were seeing now. She knew this girl was going to receive their aid, and she was glad for that; however, she also knew what was likely to happen to all the other girls taunting her.

"Gosh, why are they being so mean to her Killroy?" Dale asked.

"Because they're all stuck up, cunt eating, shit sucking, asshole bitches, that's why" he replied not smiling, still watching the screen.

"Oh" Dale said.

A look of mild annoyance crossed his face, and he shot a quick glance in Dale's direction. "She's different from them, Dale. So they reject her. They get their jollies from trampling on her. It makes them feel powerful. If they're not careful, they're going to find out just how powerful they are compared to her."

"What's wrong with her? I don't see what's so different about her." Dale asked. Killroy, squinted a little harder. "Well she's certainly not well adjusted socially, but I don't know why yet. All I sense from her is panic. If she doesn't even know what her period is, it's probably related to her home life. We'll find out if we keep watching." They did indeed.

The girls' gym teacher had come in and broken up the disturbance. She was now sitting outside the locker room with the girl talking to her about

women's periods, trying to cheer her up. Obviously she hadn't know that girls had periods and was feeling mortified at her display. But being very socially inept, she didn't know what to do but sit there and stare at the ground. "God damn, do I know how that feels," Killroy muttered under his breath. Only Dale heard it. He too understood what it was to have very little self-esteem, but could hardly believe Killroy could relate to it.

It seemed the girl's name was Carrie. Carrie White.

The picture was speeding by again as Killroy rolled through the rest of the her school day which contained no important events. They resumed their normal speed as she approached her house. Gadget had slipped up and sat down next to Killroy and put one hand on his left thigh and the other on his right shoulder. He noticed this of course, but was too intent on the situation at hand to do anything but accept it. Carrie was now talking to her mother it seemed. The first few words out of the mother's mouth gave Killroy had all he needed.

"Mamma, you should have told me."

"The blood is from the sin. The sin is desire."

"No Mamma, it's not from sin; it happens to all girls. I made a fool out of myself in front of all the other girls, Mamma. You should have told me."

"It's the lust girl! If you didn't have the lust, the blood wouldn't come." She stared at her daughter so intently she quivered.

All the Rangers realized why the girl acted so strange now. They saw the damage the blind zealous religion had done to the poor Carrie's personality. And they all knew what was coming next. All of them, including Gadget, cringed, covered their ears, and leaned away from Killroy.

Killroy's face had gone bleak, no, baleful. The finely tuned, super powerful jaguar's muscles rippled under his skin. His fists clenched. His lips peeled back revealing long lines of huge needle sharp teeth that were visibly elongating. A sound emerged. It was like super fast flying shards of glass ripping through flesh. It was the voice of Satan himself. "I...HATE...FUCKING...ZEALOTS!!" the demonic voice grated. All the Rangers' fur stood on end. When it had passed, they uncovered their ears and turned to look at him again. Dale was shivering. Tammy was clinging tightly to Chip.

"Crikey, thet made maw teeth hurt." Monty said.

"Why does he insist on these little demonstrations? We're all friends. He doesn't have to impress us." Chip said to Tammy and Monty.

"Golly Chip, he just does it to keep in practice.

It's part of his image. Besides, he never lets anything hurt us. Even in his more violent displays." Gadget wondered for an instant if Killroy had ever met the Prince of Darkness. *That's silly*, she said to herself *of course he has*. The others knew Killroy had a real hard spot for overly religious people, but only Gadget really knew why. And now she knew he empathized with this girl more than ever.

Killroy teetered back and forth on his heels. The great, lush main of pure white hair that flowed from the maiden's peak on his fore head, across the cranium and between his ears, then down his back, stopping just above his tail, which was his best known trademark no matter what form he chose to live in, was standing up at the roots and almost steaming with rage. He gestured with the Special Remote and the TV went dead. He did a smart about face and regarded the Rangers, his face now set in grim determination, but the baleful look still in his eyes. "Lock 'n load, Rangers, we're rollin." He swept out the doorway.

They all gathered in the bay of the blimp hanger. The two giant, tunnel shaped, sheet metal buildings were Killroy's home in this realm. Formerly owned by the questionable Canadian Stock Exchange, they stood about two miles east of the city of Tillamook Oregon. Mookieville, as it was known to the locals, was Killroy's first choice for two reasons. First, the blimp hangers themselves. They provided plenty of room for some of his larger inventions, like the radar invisible 747, and were well isolated. Tillamook, despite a world famous dairy, had a population of just under 1000 people. Second, Killroy had always wanted to live on the coast. He had grown up in the Roseburg area in Oregon's "banana belt" and so had a love for small towns and nature. The Oregon coast filled this bill to a tea. Not to mention the fact that the Tillamook river provided one lucky angler with a 50+ pound Chinook salmon about once a week during the spring run. During this time of year, Killroy could always be found either pulling sand shrimp from the estuary or drift fishing those shrimp for big springers.

Toward the north end of the fenced off hanger, the one Killroy actually lived in, stood a large brass colored sphere. There were many other interesting structures and gizmos in the hanger bay, but now the team stood before this large sphere. Killroy carried a large, many buttoned, remote control, and he was punching a series of the buttons in sequence. Suddenly, the side of the brass sphere slid outward and rolled to the side.

"Everyone ready?" Killroy asked. Exuberant chatter indicated an affirmative. They all piled into

the sphere which was hollow inside and the door rolled shut like the side door of a van. "O.K. Here we go," Killroy said. Every one unconsciously drew in and held their breath. A brilliant field of white light suddenly flared up around them. Space began to fold in on itself. For an instant everyone's consciousness was scrambled. Then, as suddenly as it began, it was over. The whole experience took about two seconds.

The room was different now. They stood on a platform surrounded by a ring of smaller platforms, each with its own strange looking pedestal. The room they were in was circular like a disk, not like a sphere. Then the wall slid out and rolled back, just like the one on the sphere, revealing a passage way. They all filed out this door and turned left. Proceeding down the hallway, they passed many other rooms and finally came to a large metal door that marked the end of the hallway. It automatically rolled aside to allow Killroy, who was in the lead, to enter, and the others followed on his heels.

This room was impressive. In the forward center was what appeared to be a control console. A large, black leather, strongly built chair stood before three panels full of lights and indicators. Similar control panels lined the wall on either side of the room, and there were chairs spaced evenly along them, but they weren't as big as the one in the center and they lacked the strange gadgetry that was on their backs. On the forward wall was a huge visual screen with an image of the earth from an orbital position.

Killroy sat down at the big chair and began touching controls. One by one, the power systems in the ship came on. Lights came up and low mechanical hums began. All the Rangers placed themselves in the seats along the walls. Then the planet outside the view port began to fall away as the ship turned away from earth. The ship continued to swing around until it finally stopped facing the Swan constellation: Cygnus. Cygnus X-1 to be exact.

"Hey Killroy, once we clear the solar system, why don't we try the warp drive? I've been working on it non-stop for the last week. I finished it last night, and it should work with no problems" Gadget said. The other ranger did a double take and groaned.

"Zipper, me little pal, she didn't say it, did she? Tell me she didn't say 'no problems'." Monty pleaded with his little friend. Zipper returned a disparaging squeak.

"Great! Didn't have too much trouble with the installation?" Killroy smiled his approving-anxious smile at Gadget who was sitting directly to his left.

"Golly, no. Those technical specifications from the Enterprise were real easy to read. Well, once you

have a little advanced engineering under your belt that is." She returned his smile warmly.

If it were not for Killroy's ability to generate tremendous amounts of telekinetic energy quickly, they all would have died in seconds. Killroy had engaged the impulse engines of his "Bird of Prey" style cruiser. The ship's responsive engines fired immediately and brought them to 1/3 light speed in about five seconds. The force of such acceleration would have quickly squeezed the life out of all of them, but Killroy's psychic reflexes were faster. He extended powerful fields of force around the bodies of himself and his friends, cushioning them from the force. When they had achieved their speed and the acceleration relented, he released the force fields and gasped a sigh of relief. He had exerted enough psychic power to feel the draining effect left by such power.

"Aw knew it; aw knew it. The minute she said 'no problems'..." Monty panted.

"Gadget! What did you do!?" Chip almost yelled from the seat behind Gadget.

"Golly guys, it couldn't have been me. I was working on the warp engines." Gadget said innocently.

Killroy had risen from his chair and came over and put a hand across Gadget's shoulder. "Yes Gadget dear, but to install them you had to disconnect the inertia dampeners for a while didn't you?"

"Ooops! I can fix that!" She replied with an index finger in the air.

He leaned down and gave her a big one armed bear hug, puckered up his mouth and said, "Yezz, we know you can." in a condescending but good natured manner. He was immensely proud of his pupil. Gadget returned the hug and rubbed her cheek on his shoulder. She then looked up at him with her big eyes and put on the sweetest smile she could manage. After a second of this she batted her eyelashes.

Jesus fucking Christ! Killroy simply could not understand Gadget's affection for him. He recalled again the time they had joined minds in that dark, drizzly alley. Their minds mingled and flowed like currents in a whirlpool to the music of "Silent Lucidity" which he had chosen for that particular moment long ago. He had been taken up in the revery of it; more so than he had intended. She had seen him entirely. Everything that was Robin Killroy was known to her. Even everything that was the young abused teenager whose name he had purged from his memory after finding his power, she had seen and felt. All his life's experiences, though not in fine detail, she had shared. She even knew why he had chosen the name "Robin Killroy".

He was so taken with the experience that he

had forgotten to shield her from the great loneliness. That terrible gap that he had not the skill to close or even patch. The gap that had resulted, in large part, from his 2082 years of refusing female companionship. The gap that drove him to seek out special friends and friendships like the one he had with the Rangers. He kept licking at it like an open wound, hoping it wouldn't open any farther but knowing it would. He had suddenly realized it was no longer there, and not grasping what had happened, suddenly turned his attention to it and found Gadget there. She had quietly and willingly drifted into it, filling it. The reason he hadn't noticed it before was because she had not deliberated. Not even for an instant. She had seen his pain and automatically done whatever she could to sooth it, totally without thought for herself. So shocked was he at this open gesture of love for him that he jerked back out of the mind meld and tore the mental wound open again, worse than before. He almost shrieked with agony.

"God, that must have hurt. Why did you do that?" she had said. But the question was rhetorical. She knew perfectly well why. She knew that kind of love was something he had never experienced before and was frightened of it, despite how much he wanted it. In this particular area of his life, Killroy knew only pain. Pleasure was a stranger to him. But there was more that even fear of the unknown. There was the original reason he shunned female companionship. Since that time she had made no secret of her feelings; that would be pointless and ridiculous. Even the other Rangers knew and were happy for the both of them. Gadget knew he was terrified of these feelings, but she also knew if she just held her ground, no matter what, sooner or later he would respond. No one can ignore unconditional love for long.

Killroy had gone back to the pilot's chair while Gadget reactivated the inertia dampeners. Once she gave him the thumbs up and had returned to her seat, he began setting coordinates for the hyperbolic jump. A smile touched the corner of his mouth when he recalled Gadget's reaction to the jump controls the first time she had seen them. "Golly Killroy, if the ship jumps straight through space, why do you use hyperbolic equations to set the coordinates?"

"Because space isn't a cube, Gadget, it's a hyperbolic paraboloid." he had smiled.

"Oh."

Once he had the coordinates set for Cygnus X-1 and everyone was ready, he threw the switch. Again space folded around them and their brains were scrambled with disorientation. When it was over, the Earth was gone, along with the Sun and Moon. Now they were in deep space. The constellations no longer

looked familiar. Before them was a great mass of darkness.

"All right, Gadget, here's our chance to test the warp drive." he said.

"Crikey, Aw think aw'd rather do the testing before we went into the black hole." Monty said a little nervously.

"Relax, it'll be fine." Monty might have worried a little more, but when Killroy said things would work out, they usually did. Often because if they didn't he would simply fix it so it didn't really matter if they did or not.

He hit a control and the ship smoothly went into warp drive. He had deliberately set the coordinates so they didn't come out as close to the black hole as they usually did. Nevertheless, the gravity well was racing up on them at an alarming speed. The others gripped their seats, and Killroy reached out and put his hand over a plain metal bar that stood out on the control panel. There was no indication as to its function, but it appeared to be made of the same metal as the Special Remote. The ship streaked toward the black hole even faster, aided by the tremendous gravity field. Killroy engaged the gravity bending envelope that would keep the ship from being reduced to sub-atomic particles and X-rays when they crossed the event horizon. Then they were inside. For one maddening second everything, including themselves, both existed and didn't exist. They existed everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It was worse than the previous jumps. There they were jumping through worm holes in there own time/space continuum. Now they were leaping across an infinite boundary to another in an infinite continuum of infinite continuums.

When their minds returned to normal, Cygnus X-1 was far behind them and they were streaking back the way they had come at a speed faster than was possible in normal space. They left a disrupted wake in the fabric of space behind them the way a super sonic jet does when traveling faster than sound. Killroy applied reverse thrust and the ship slowed to warp eight. "That was great," he said "I didn't have to push the ship beyond the warp barrier at all. All I did was set the trajectory and do The Trick"

Carrie White sat on the bed in her room, fraught with worry. Her mother was not going to be happy with her. That crazy boy. That crazy Tom Ross. He just wouldn't leave her alone. He had just kept on pestering her until she finally agreed to go to the prom with him just to get rid of him. Why? What was he doing? Maybe someone put him up to it. Maybe he's just desperate because he can't find a date? But no one could be that desperate. Oh

mamma's not going to like this one bit.

She wrung her hands. She thought she would probably die of worry in a minute or so. It was so subtle she almost didn't notice it. It was a touch of cool water to a traveler in the desert. A feeling of calm seeping into her consciousness. A comforting whisper starting in the distant reaches of her mind but coming closer every second. If her mother had allowed her to listen to music she might have known it was "Your Time is Gonna Come". But as it was, it was just a musical message playing through her mind. She would have been terrified of not knowing the source if it weren't for that great feeling of calm and knowing. The source was not something cold or alien. It felt understanding and friendly and supportive. It felt as though it had the power to support her, no matter what.

Then, when the song ended, it was gone. Carrie didn't know what to think. She had never experienced anything like it before. Now that the *other's* waves of calm were over, she began to fear it a little. But then she rejected the fear. This, whatever it was, had come from that special part of her mind. The one her mother said was controlled by Satan himself. Carrie had long ago, however, decided that it wasn't Satan's will. It was something that was uniquely hers. And whatever this was, it wasn't evil. She thought about it for some time and finally decided that it had meant for her to go to the prom with Tommy. It was time for her to start breaking from her mother's death grip. It was time to start living. She couldn't have guessed the rest, but guessing that much was more than Killroy had expected.

He had left the others on the ship, but they were watching what he did on the ship's monitor. And he was watching Carrie. With his mind that is. She was not attuned to psychic sensations so she didn't notice his consciousness hovering on the very outer boundaries of hers. Nevertheless, the subconscious part of her mind sensed his presence. There was a strange comforting feeling that was too small to notice, but she responded to it just the same.

Carrie began donning the dress she would wear to the prom that night. It was the best one she had. It was the only nice one she had. She took great care in making herself up. She didn't have much experience with that, since wearing make-up was shameless and sinful. She did the best she could and thought the result wasn't too bad. But as she was finishing, her mother finally approached. She had been dreading this moment. She knew her mother would try to stop her. She knew exactly what arguments she would try. She knew she would finally resort to force. But she also knew nothing was going to stop her from

going to this prom. Her mother began by speaking softly and tenderly. But she quickly became more and more insistent. Carrie didn't even hear what she was saying; she didn't need to. It was all the same old same old. It had been pounded into her head since childhood. It held almost no sway any more. Carrie had rejected it secretly long ago when she felt the first stirrings of that special part of her mind. She made the token efforts of reasoning with her mother, but she knew that was useless. Her mother was getting even more excited and insistent in her righteous fervor. She finally started grabbing at her; trying to hold her back. Now Carrie did what she knew all along she would have to.

She threw her hands to her forehead and reached out with her mind, grabbing her mother by the shoulders and forcing her back onto the bed firmly but not harshly. "Now, Mamma, you know if I just concentrate on it, I can hold you right there as long as I want." She relaxed her hold and her mother rose from the bed again. She only half heard the references to Satan and the Devil's child. Soon her mother was grabbing at her again. Again she forced her down onto the bed with her mind. Now she became angry. "The Devil's child, Mamma? Think about it! That means either you're the Devil or you fucked him!" She straightened in surprise. *Where had that come from?!* She and her mother stared at each other for a moment, neither believing what Carrie had said.

The doorbell rang. *Tommy's here*, Carrie thought excitedly. She quickly forgot her mother and what had happened and hurried down the stairs toward the door. So excited was she that she released the restraints on her mother, but she didn't follow. She opened the front door to find Tommy in a tux waiting for her with an armful of flowers. She smiled shyly and was thrilled at his reaction. He obviously found her more attractive than he had expected. She stepped out the door and took his arm wordlessly.

If she had thought of her mother she might have discovered why she hadn't been pursued. She might have seen her mother there in her room hovering two feet off the floor; an invisible force wrapped around her like a giant hand crushing her. She couldn't move in any way and couldn't breathe. She knew it wasn't Carrie who was doing this directly to her. She knew it was Satan himself, operating through her daughter without her knowledge.

How right you are. Killroy sneered to himself. *Zealot crunching; more fun than spring Chinook!* He laughed to himself.

Carrie couldn't believe the magic of the evening. It was everything anyone could ever want in a prom. The girls were so beautiful in their prom

dresses, the boys were such gentlemen on the dance floor (a most heinous sin: dancing). And Tommy was so sweet. He talked with her for a long time. He wanted to know about her. He told her about himself. When her shyness would make her withdraw, he coaxed her out with friendly, good natured insistence. They danced. She didn't know how (of course), but he showed her, and she did a fair job. Then came time to vote for prom king and queen. Carrie was reluctant, but again Tommy convinced her to live dangerously. They marked the last box on the ballot: the one that said "Tommy Ross & Carrie White".

They sat and watched the dance floor for a while. It was so wonderful. The lights flashed and the music played. Carrie couldn't believe what a wonderful evening she was having. She hoped it would never end. Then it was time to announce the new prom king and queen. Carrie was tickled by the fantasy of her and Tommy winning. She knew it was a ridiculous thought, but the evening had been so perfect so far. Why not indulge herself in one more little fantasy. Her thoughts were turned so far inwards that she almost didn't notice when the announcer did in fact say their names. Unbelievably, she rose and accompanied Tommy to the stage. She walked in a daze. She could hardly accept that this was happening. It was so dream like. Someone put a bundle of roses in her arm and she turned with Tommy to walk down the thrust stage. At the end they stopped and stood for pictures. Flash bulbs snapped all around. It was so perfect. The perfect end to a perfect evening. And of course that was where it ended.

There was a cacophonous shout and another sound she couldn't identify. Her mind had just begun to descend from its dreamy state when she was struck from above by something wet. Bewilderment brought her mind to a neutral state. She didn't know what had happened, and her mind searched for an answer. When she found it, she vanished. She realized that she was covered from head to foot in blood. When understanding struck, everything that Carrie White was before melted away. Even as the blood washed away what she looked like, the upsurge of betrayal, abuse at the hands of her mother and classmates, and the sheer hatred locked away for so long, washed away everything Carrie had been before. Even after this incident passed, she would never be the same again. But this incident hadn't passed. The new Carrie White understood something very simple that the former wouldn't have: all these monsters before her, who had tortured her for more than a decade must die.

Now that special part of her mind took over. It wasn't really in her control. She had informed it of

what needed to be done and it now set about doing it. The doors and windows to the gym slammed shut, preventing any of her victim's escape. A high wind rose flinging various items, including broken glass, around the room. The deaths began. Broken necks, burned bodies, crushed skeletons, and various other forms of death took student after student. They screamed and scurried, trying to escape, but none could.

Then Carrie's telekinetic ability brought itself to bear on the gym teacher who had told her about her period and had, unbeknownst to Carrie, tried to protect her from the very horror that had happened tonight. But before any damage could be inflicted, her target vanished through a hole that appeared in thin air. Carrie was just conscious enough to temporarily halt her killing spree. When she did, a tiny edge of sanity returned. Just enough for her to realize something. The comforting presence was still there. At first she had thought it had betrayed her like all the others. But no, it was still there. Stronger than ever in fact. This was enough to allow her to make the super human effort to stop her run-away telekinesis. She had only killed about 1/3 of the students and had stopped herself from killing the rest. She then realized just how close the presence was. She looked over her left shoulder where Tommy had been (she hadn't seen him fall, struck by the bucket which contained the blood) and found herself staring into the stomach of an eight foot tall creature that looked to be half jaguar, half human. She looked up and saw the streaming length of pure white hair. Of course, it all made sense now. Robin Killroy, the legendary wizard of time and space. He must have noticed her special abilities and come for, ... she didn't know what.

Killroy stared down at with a cynical look and said, "Whimp. Let me show you the proper way to exterminate vermin." He went down to the end of the stage, spread his hands and gave a big, evil smile. "It's time to party, kids! How about some music?" There were certainly no musical instruments in working order around, but music started never the less. Only it wasn't prom music. It carried feelings of power and dread. It gripped the listener's mind like a bear trap and tore at it. It caused more panic and terror than anything Carrie had done. It was "Thunderstruck". Carrie watched as heads exploded, bones powdered, and liquified brains poured out ears. She watched as Killroy performed one of his favorite "crunch" songs. He was really quite a good dancer. It was an unrivaled heavy metal performance, but of course no one rating performance quality here. Though Carrie couldn't have known it, Bonn Scott was never like this.

When the powerful guitar solo started, Killroy's finger nails extended into razor sharp cycles, and he jumped down into the audience and began a hand-to-hand massacre. She watched no more. She stumbled out the exit behind the stage. Just before she left the stage, that familiar presence came over her again for an instant. She could tell he had other things occupying his mind at the moment, but wanted to tell her something.

"Beware, Carrie. It's not over yet." The presence was gone now. She stumbled away from the building as it began to collapse. She realized Killroy had started a minor earthquake. She headed down the road towards her house, trudging along still in a daze. She could have been thinking about what had happened. She could have been thinking about what her mother would do when she got home. But she didn't think about anything; her mind was paralyzed. She just trudged.

Then something alerted her. Some part of her mind was still looking out for her and sent up a warning: *look out behind you!* it said. She turned to see the headlights of a car coming straight for her. Her mind reacted automatically, and the car flipped onto its side. It crashed off the side of the road and burst into flames. That is, the front and back parts burned. The flames stayed back from the passengers though. Now Carrie knew what had happened. The ones in the car were the four assholes who had taken special pleasure in torturing her all through her school years. They were the ones who had set up the cruel trick for her.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens?" She whirled around to see Killroy standing behind her with his hands on his hips. "You go and fucking waste a whole gym full of people and the real perps get away. Well not this time." She turned back to the car, mouth agape, to see that the flames were slowly creeping towards the passengers. They were frantically trying to escape their fate, but that's a contradiction in terms. The fire took them slowly. The screams lasted until their vocal cords had been burned out. The last Carrie ever saw of them was their grossly misshapen hands clawing at the windows, leaving little chunks of charred flesh which burned away shortly thereafter.

She turned around again to find she was alone.

"You see, she thought she must be the most ghastly being in the universe. I know. I felt the same way the first time. This way she realizes that there are worse things around than herself. Basically it saves on the psychological repair we have to do." Gadget knew this was going to happen all along, but it still horrified her. All those kids dead. She knew

it was part of Killroy's role in nature, the steward's steward and all. To keep the human population juggernaut from destroying other populations, like espers, but it still chilled her to the bone. She was, after all, a very caring person. Oh, well, she'd get over it. And everything would probably work out for the best.

They watched as Carrie made her way home and upstairs towards the bathroom. She'd be all right. Tammy and Foxglove were waiting to help her clean up. Killroy thought she might be overly surprised at the discovery of two strange non-human beings in her bathroom, so he kept a close eye on her emotions. She was indeed surprised, but quickly became obvious to the still stricken girl that these two creatures were here to help. After all, she had already seen an eight foot tall jaguar, that walked on two legs, slaughter everyone who had survived her senior prom. A human size squirrel and bat weren't so amazing.

But even Tammy and Foxglove couldn't seem to break Carrie out of her emotionless state. She needed one like herself for that. So, when they had finished cleaning her and had her dressed in a comfortable nightgown and robe (she would need sleep soon), Killroy performed yet one more song for her: "Ramble On". That did it. The poignant music gave her a shot of just the type of emotion she needed to melt down the hard shell her mind had created. She ended up crying on his Jacket. This annoyed Killroy a little because tears were salt water which was very corrosive to steel, and, despite its soft suppleness, that's what the Jacket was made of. Another of his best inventions.

Her first words were, "Where's Mamma?"

"I...took care of her," Killroy said, hoping she wouldn't react badly. "She...was going to kill you when you got home, Carrie."

"Yeah, I guess she would." She started crying again.

"What are we going to do with her Killroy?" Gadget asked.

A smile crept across Killroy's mouth. "Well, I think she needs time to recover first in a friendly environment, maybe one of the 'toon worlds. Yeah, maybe we'll all go see the Animalympics. That was the first other world I traveled to you know." They did. "But then we'll go to a place where everyone has talents like her." He addressed her directly, "In that world you're what they call a Tragamore. There are lots of other talents as well: Seers; Sorcerers; Armigers. There you'll learn how to use your talent. The whole point of going through the prom was to teach you something very important, Carrie. And

that is that, in this world, if you have a talent like this, you must use it to survive. No matter what you do, you'll always be forced to use it sometime or other. In that other world, you'll learn how and when to use it. Then you'll be ready to come back here. This world needs its espers. They're a rare breed."

She stopped crying to listen to him. She finally realized she was in good hands that intended to care for her. Now the exertions of the day took over and she nearly collapsed. Killroy picked her up and started down the stairs. She gazed up at him. He was really a very attractive looking creature. His body fur was soft, and she felt protected in his big strong arms. She didn't really know this person all that well, but she knew one thing: she could stay in those arms forever.

Killroy looked down at her. She smiled warmly up at him and pillowed her cheek on his right pectoral. Killroy forced a SMILE Again. *JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!!!!*

In This Land
©1990 Garry L. Faulwel
United States Air Force

In this land, touched by an ancient god's
benevolent hand:
Butterflies flutter and glide;
Little people ride on rainbow coloured moths,
and fairies chase dragonflies;
Gnomes ride squirrels,
and miniature dragons chomp apples as they
hang on the limb;
Satyrs and centaurs play,
and nymphs frolic near waterfalls all day;
Trolls and ogres sleep away the years,
and women shed no tears —
Cause men wage wage war no more.

"One should forgive one's enemies, but not
before they are hanged."

— Heinrich Heine

When Computers Dream

©1991 Josh Finney

Here are the next two chapters of the cyberpunk saga, special thanks going to Mike Smith for his artwork.

Two

The silvery grey LCD screen of the clock read 6:45 PM when Arther looked at it. He had just finished calling a public access computer bulletin board system and thought it was about time to get ready to leave. He had to meet Silver and the others at Cardoza's Gourmet. While getting dressed in proper clothing he watched the television news. The lead story was about the sale of long range bombers and electronic warfare devices to China by a renegade weapons manufacturer called Alpha Technologies. The signatory megacorporations of the Global Commerce Agreement (better known as GCA) were objecting to the sale of military equipment with offensive potential to any country, but especially to such an isolationist anticommerce nation. At the moment, General Electric's Vice President of Public Information was on the screen.

"As you know, China has been one of the very few nations since the turn of the century to restrict the free conduct of commerce across its borders. Since Communism's collapse late in the last century only China and South Africa have refused to honor the terms of the Global Commerce Agreement. As a result, their economies have declined steadily and there is a scarcity of even the most basic of necessities in those countries. Violence is commonplace among their people and they have repeatedly threatened their neighbors with military action. In each instance, only the timely and decisive intervention of the GCA has prevented war from breaking out.

"As you also know war is much too costly and produces more of a monetary loss than gain. So what reason would China have for large amounts of long range bombers capable of carrying 100 megaton fusion bombs? Obviously to attack capitalist countries. And the last thing any of the megacorporations want is a war. It would cause the world economy to decline and it would cost all of us a lot of money, money that could be put towards profitable applications," the corporate vice-president said.

Arther didn't feel like listening to the news so he turned the television off. It often got him depressed, and he was avoiding the truth. What he didn't know could not bother him, at least in his mind it couldn't. Or so he thought. Not only that, but he really didn't want to listen to a corporate vice president who was talking down to all the viewers. He definitely was not looking at the situation in the larger scale. His statements were very contradictory, and his reasoning was off in left field. Or at least in Arther's opinion it was. First, he pointed out that China was paranoid, and they were. Then his reason for China's purchase of bombers was for assault on other countries. Arther believed that they bought the planes solely because of their own paranoia. They probably felt they needed them for protection. But Arther also didn't like the idea of having a potentially dangerous country that was paranoid in possession of nuclear weapons.

Arther entered Cardoza's Gourmet. This was a classy place so he had taken care to dress appropriately. He was wearing dark black slacks and a black long sleeve shirt that buttoned up in the front. His hair style was mildly done, nothing too outrageous. It was a bit spiky and only stuck out in the front. If he had come in his usual garb, they probably would not have let him in. Inside the restaurant, classical music played in a jazz type format drifted from speakers hidden in the decorative shrubbery, and the place was very dimly lit. He walked up to the formally-dressed woman at the receptionist's stand.

"Hello. Do you have a reservation?" she asked in a light Mexican accent. She looked Latino.

"Uhhh, no. I'm supposed to meet someone here who goes by the last name of Silver," Arther said in a laid-back voice.

"Ahh yes, Mr. Silver. He has invited a large party here tonight. Let me take you to your table."

"Thanks."

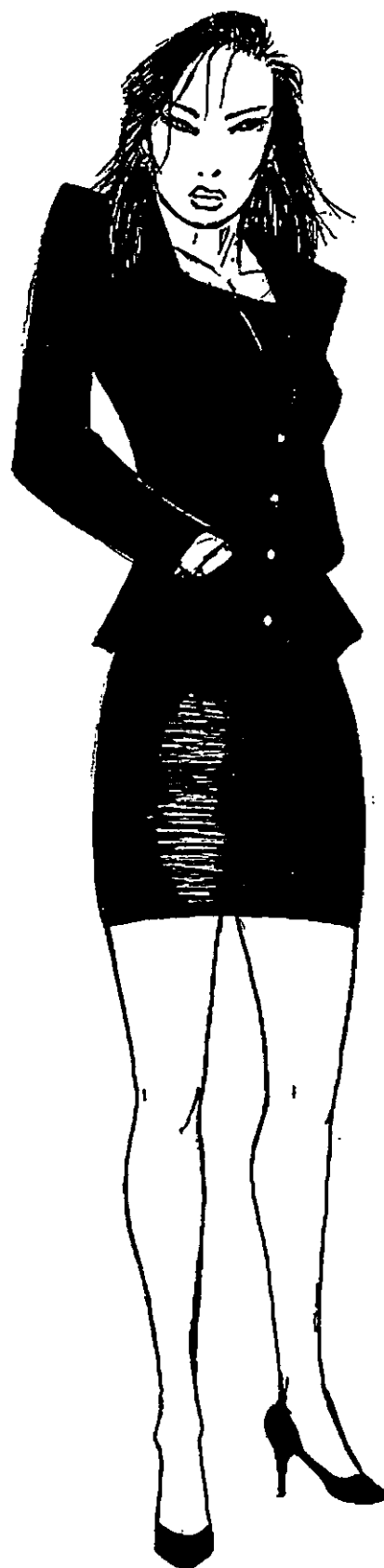
"So what's the occasion?" She talked while leading him to the private dining room.

"It's kind of a business meeting."

"Oh. Well enjoy your dinner. And, I hope your business goes well," she said as she guided Arther into the dining room.

Silver had rented a private dining room in the

Annett



back of the restaurant. He must have spent a little extra money. That was Silver's style. The place was definitely classy, all they served was real food, no tofu or krill reproductions. Expensive, but knowing Silver he was probably going to take the tab. Not that real food was incredibly high priced; it wasn't. Real food wasn't cheap either, but it was available, just not in large quantities. The most food he ate was tofu reproductions of other foods. The reason soybeans were used so widely as one of the main food source for the population was that it could be grown easily in large volumes and in a very short periods of time. Other fruits and vegetables just didn't grow fast enough for the food demands of the public. Farms still existed, but in a different way. Fruits and vegetables were produced in mass amounts in underground automated corporate 'farms'. Special artificial lighting caused the plants to grow at three times the normal rate. On the other hand, things such as meats and dairy products were very high-priced and extremely hard to come by. In Japan, real meat had a higher value than gold. Krill and algae were often used to synthesize meat products.

He opened the door and walked in. Silver was sitting at the head of the table. The metallic-silvery shimmer of his mylar-silk suit was accentuated by a thin black tie. Set on the table before him was a sable fedora that matched the suit. Next to him was his secretary, Annett, with a white plastic laptop computer placed in front of her. She was obviously of Japanese origin, her hair was a shimmering metallic black, like the casing around a stereo ROM player. The dress she wore was deep red and what was exposed of her legs were black tights. Bloodlust was sitting on the right side of the table in expensive asphalt gray business suit, his hair hanging back in a pony tail. Bloodlust actually looked classy instead of threatening. Next to Bloodlust was Stiletto. Stiletto had blond hair in a tone that reminded Arther of an old actress, Marilyn something or other. She was wearing a tight mini skirt and long sleeve top that were both an amber black and spike heel shoes. She was Bloodlust's girlfriend, he had met her in a night club called The Interface, which wasn't her (or Bloodlust's, for that matter) kind of place. It was a decker hangout. He had gone there with Neuro, and, in the course of the evening, he had picked up one of the waitresses, who happened to be Stiletto. She held the job of a waitress at the club while she did runs monthly for money. Arther sat down and started to flip through one of the menus on the table.

"Hello Neuro. We're waiting for Overdrive and Mirage before we start," Silver told him.

"Yeah, okay," Arther said acknowledging Sil-

ver. Mirage was Diane's street name, she only used it during runs. She made a point of having her friends using her real name when they were not on a run.

Bloodlust looked back at Arther briefly and left off his conversation with Stiletto. "Hey, I see you got some new sunglasses."

"Yeah, these are supposed to be shatter proof up to 300 PSI, or that's what the guy on the commercial said," Arther said taking his new sunglasses off. "I really doubt they are."

Stiletto joined the conversation, "What brand are they?"

"Sheallers."

"Sheallers are high qualities shades, man. They probably can take a good smash or two before cracking," She said making a fist with her left hand.

"Well, maybe, I'll try not to find out. I didn't buy them for that reason. They have light intensification lenses."

"Hey, that's not cheap. How much did you pay for those?" Bloodlust asked.

"Don't remind me, I'm trying to forget."

"How much?"

"400 creds."

"My combat helmet has infrared and light intensification built into the visor."

At that moment Overdrive and Diane (a.k.a. Mirage) entered the room and sat down. Overdrive was wearing an average-style business suit with some expensive driving gloves. Diane was wearing a normal grey woman's business suit.

"Hello Overdrive... Mirage," Silver said. "Now that we're all here, I'll start." All conversation stopped. "Okay, I've contracted to liberate a box from the IBM complex in north Los Angeles."

"Good, how much money will I get?" Bloodlust instantly said. He was just being irritating, though he was partly serious about the statement.

"We will receive 100 thousand creds when we finish this operation."

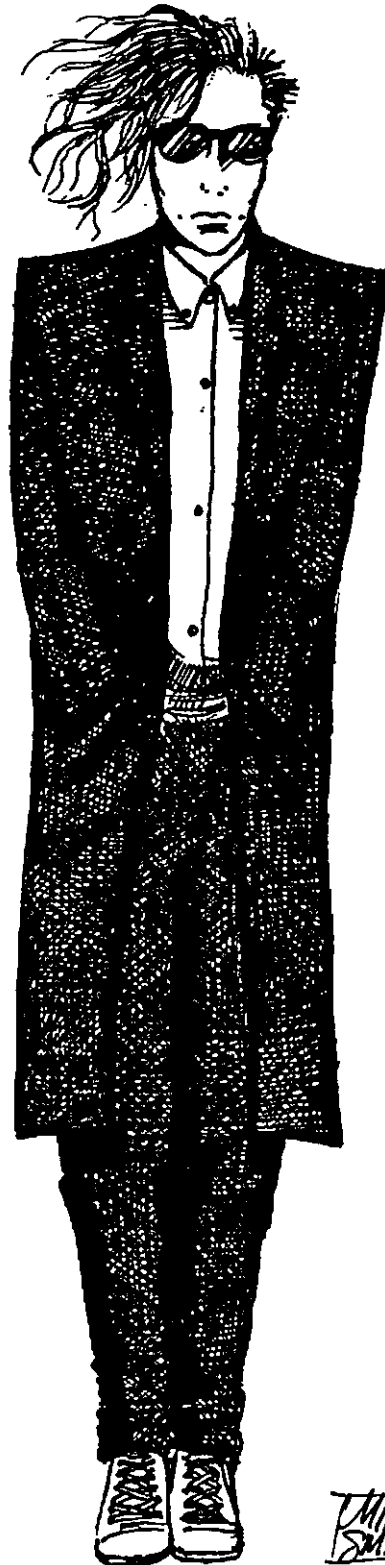
"That's not good enough." Mirage said, "I want at least one third of the money up front. The risk factor for this run is too high, we need some money up front."

"Same here." Overdrive said.

"Yeah." Bloodlust said pointing a pen he had had in his pocket at Silver, "You rip me off and things might get messy." Arther knew something about the pen that the rest didn't. The pen actually was a modified holdout needle launcher, single shot. Bloodlust was never unarmed.

"You each will get 2000 creds before the run, which I have had put into all of your accounts already."

Arther
(Neuro)



MIKE 911
SMITH

"What exactly are we going to do?" asked Arther.

"Okay, let my secretary, Annett, get the information up from the computer," he said. He hired Annett as his secretary originally, but she had become more of a business partner.

"Sure, here it is," she said, "Most of the information in here is pretty cryptic, but I have compiled the more meaningful information into one file." Annett had been working for Silver for quiet some time and had assisted him on the paperwork end of the runs. Most people speculated that Annett and Silver's interest in each other was more than business. If it was true, they sure didn't show it at the moment.

After the secretary typed a few key commands she brought the information onto screen. "Here it is," she said.

"Okay, first we are to break into the IBM research and development complex in north Los Angeles. Once we're inside we are to steal a newly developed AI."

"What!?" Overdrive said in astonishment, "What do we do? Just come in with a fork lift, rip some mainframe out of the ground and take off with it?"

"He's got a point," Arther added, "Actually, a more logical step would be to find the mainframe the AI program is in and copy it. But I don't see how we could do that. There's no way to actually copy even a small sentient AI program to what we could carry in. We'd need some large scale computer storage bases."

"Do you know what the security is like at IBM?!" Overdrive said loudly.

Annett answered that question, "The security systems are built by a subsidiary company of IBM called North Star. What exactly the security is like inside is unknown, but North Star does produce top quality security systems. As for the security guard all, that was given in the file was that they are trained and employed by IBM."

"Still, how are we going to get in and steal an AI?"

"Well, apparently this one is built into a mobile cabinet of computer memory or some thing," Silver said, "Here's the information Mr. Johnson gave." He turned the laptop screen around pointed at it. It displayed miscellaneous information on the AI and a full color photograph of the cabinet it was stored in.

Arther looked over at the information on the screen. "It's inside a ROM/EPROM cabinet. The cabinet is about the size of a refrigerator. The cabinet is on wheels, it's gonna be a bitch trying to get this thing out of IBM without getting noticed."

"It's gonna be a bitch getting past IBM's security." Overdrive said in a vile tone.

"Yeah, I guess they're planning to move the AI to another location. AI's are usually confined to a mainframe's memory banks, but when they want to move them to another location most corporations will dump the AI onto a large cabinet full of ROM and EPROM and move it. Then when they've moved it to where ever they wanted to go they just transfer the data to another host system."

"Why would they do that? Kind of a waste of time isn't it? You could just upload it to its location over the net," Overdrive said.

"Well it takes out the risk of other corporations copying the program while it's being transferred from one system to the other."

"So what's so big about a computer on wheels? Why do they want it so much?" Stiletto asked bluntly.

"I don't know; our employer didn't tell me and really it's none of our business," Silver told them. "Our business is to steal the AI and get paid. But yes, I would like to do some research on what we're getting involved with before we try and steal it."

The door opened and a waiter entered the room. "Good evening. Are you all ready to order?" he said.

"Yes, we're ready order." Silver said.

"What would you like sir?"

"I'll have the Souflakia Provencale."

"And you madam," the waiter asked Stiletto.

"Uhhh... Just give me what ever he's getting," she said pointing at Silver.

"I'll take the most expensive thing on the menu." Bloodlust said and then grinned at Silver. Silver didn't seem to be amused.

"Yes sir," the waiter said as he wrote the orders on a note pad.

The waiter tilted toward Annett, "And what would you like?"

"I would like the spaghetti."

"And what would you like, Sir?" he asked Arther.

"I'll have the Szechwan soft tacos and Tibetan Rice."

"I want the swordfish and a side dish of egg rolls." Overdrive told the waiter.

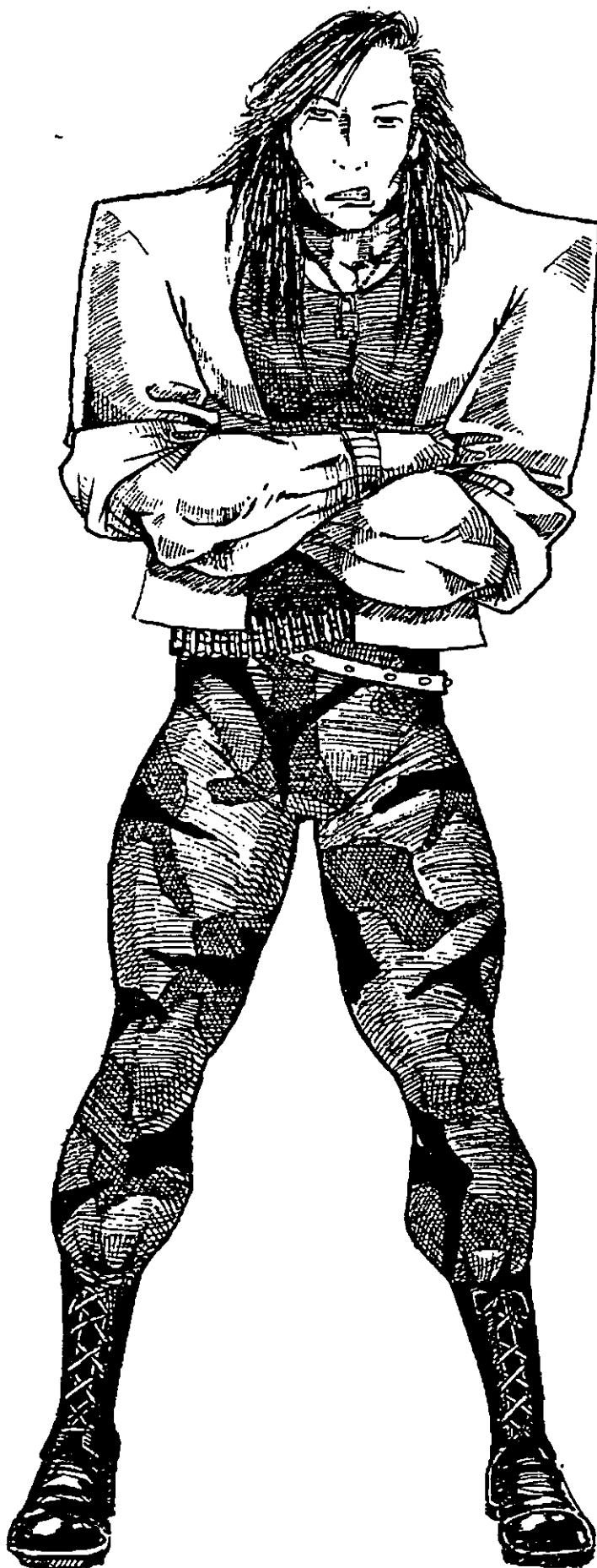
Diane looked up from the menu saying, "I'll just have a salad."

"Okay miss," the scribbled away at the pad with his pen.

"And, we'll take five bottles of your best Napa Chardonnay," Silver completed the ordering.

Silver nodded to the waiter to indicate they were finished ordering.

Bloodlust



"Okay, I shall return in a little while with your dinner." the waiter said, and then he left the room.

"Let me get this straight," Overdrive said in an annoyed tone. "We're supposed to walk into an IBM research center, grab an AI on dolly wheels, and sneak out!?! That's crazy! It would be safer if I point a gun to my head and pull the trigger. We're getting ripped on this. The pay isn't even near to what we should be receiving."

"You just let me take care of the security." Bloodlust reassured Overdrive.

"Yes. The money offered to us is not nearly worth the risk we would be taking." Mirage said coolly, "More money."

"Yes, I had noticed that risk level was very high on this very run. But there is another concern."

"What?"

"We're not the only ones after this thing. I talked to my fixer and he says that a lot of others are trying to get a hold of the computer. He says that at least two other Mr. Johnsons have hired runners to get this AI. He also mentioned a group of Fundamental Christian Commandos who want it destroyed."

"Religious terrorist...oh great," Arther said sarcastically.

"Yeah, so it's a hot item, whats your point?" Mirage said.

"So I think we should get a hold of it first and..." Silver was cut off by Mirage, a grin had formed on her face.

"Sell it to the highest bidder." She said.

"Exactly."

"I like the way you think, Silver," Mirage said, she was impressed with the idea, "We'll have to be careful in selling it. If the corps know who we are we can get the reputation of a bunch of backstabbers. If that happens, no one would want to hire us."

"Okay, I want each of us to do some research on what we'll be doing. Bloodlust, I want you to ask around town about what is known about the other runners who were hired to do the same job we are."

"I'll up Sporty and see what he says." Bloodlust was leaning back in his chair with his arms folded. "Good. Mirage, try and find out the value of the AI. Try and get an idea of what we can sell it for."

"I'll try and find how much money is being put into high priority projects at the IBM labs. That might tell us something."

"Good."

"Though most of information involving high status projects are usually withheld from the public. I guess I could try talking to some of my old friends at the Hitachi sales division," she was typing all the

information into a pocket sized digital note book, "see what they can turn up for me."

"Overdrive, I want you to talk to the deckers in the net and see what you can find out about the AI and what other deckers know about the research labs."

"Got it." Overdrive said as he pointed a leather driving glove at Silver.

"You may run into another decker in the net looking for the same information you're looking for, he goes by the name of Whizzard. He'll be coming along with us on the run."

"Whizzard?" Bloodlust said, "I did a run with him."

"Can he be trusted?" asked Overdrive.

"Yeah," Bloodlust was using an arrogant tone, "he's nothing to worry about."

"Stiletto, I want you to check the security at the labs. See what you can find out about the security guards, video cameras, and anything else of importance. Take photographs."

"I can already tell you now that the guards are probably just a bunch of rent-a-cops," Stiletto said.

"That's only external security," Mirage indicated, "if this place is working with high priority AI's it more than likely has two or three teams of corpses."

"What?"

"Corporate security experts...highly trained in indoor and urban combat...armed with state-of-the art weapons and equipment."

"How would you know?! You never see combat...you're all paperwork." Stiletto said rudely; Stiletto thought that Mirage was just trying to show her up. Stiletto had a very competitive attitude.

"Trust me. I'm from the other side. I worked for the corporations. I know how they handle runners." Mirage was aggravated by Stiletto's attitude and ignorance. But then this was Stiletto's first big-time run. Her other runs were all grunt level; they weren't even true 'runs'. The majority of her previous work had been as a bodyguard.

"Yeah...whatever..."

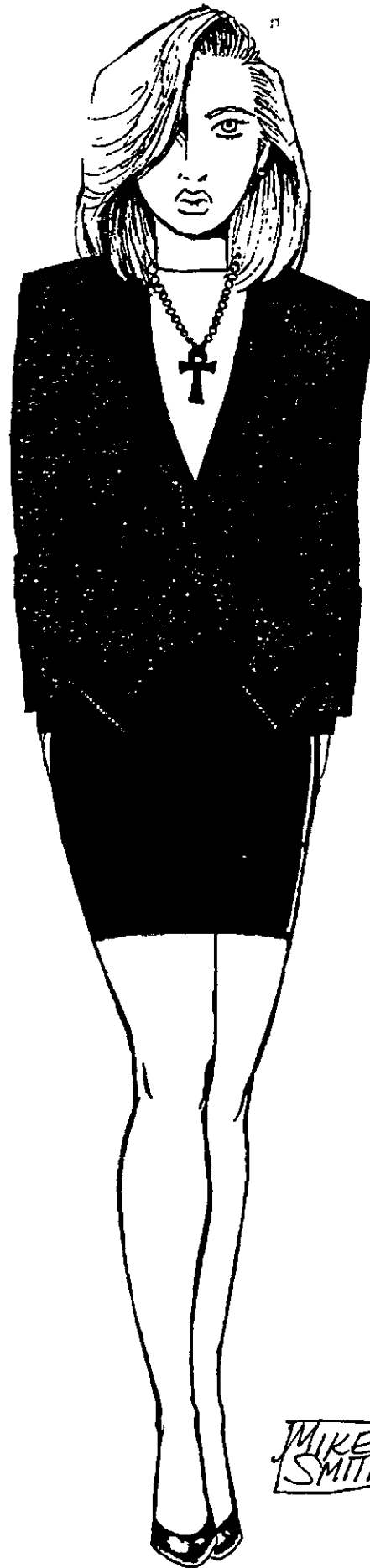
"Neuro. I want you to find out what the ICE is like at the labs. See if you can't find a way to maybe open the the doors or turn off the security system," Silver instructed him.

"Yeah, okay. You know, this won't be easy," Arther said while pondering the situation. "IBM's ICE is usually pretty hard to deal with."

"You'll have the assistance of Overdrive and Whizzard when you go in to crack the ICE."

Arther took a deep breath and slowly released it, "I'll see what I can do."

Diane
(Mirage)



After dinner, Arther, Bloodlust, Overdrive, and Mirage gathered at Overdrive's car in the parking lot. Overdrive was leaning on the side of the car next to the passenger door, Mirage was sitting in the passenger seat with her legs hanging out the open door. Bloodlust and Arther slouched opposite them. Overdrive's sleek sports car was painted a glossy black and the windows were tinted to match. Its electrical turbine motor had been modified by Overdrive allowing it to travel at exceptionally high speeds for a ground vehicle. A typical aerocar's speed was about twice that of any land based vehicle.

"Well, what do you think?" Arther asked.

"Sounds like we could make a lot of money on this one," Bloodlust commented.

"Sounds like it could be a bit dangerous if we don't do it correctly," Arther continued.

"And we will do it right," Diane said, she was using her real name now. She was among good friends.

"What about the Whizzard? Who the hell is he?" Overdrive asked.

"I did a run with him last March. He's kinda dormant. He just follows you around, doesn't say anything and then every once in a while he'll get a good idea. What he needs is to get a grip on reality though," Bloodlust said and then laughed, "you know he's so paranoid of injuring his head he wears this heavy combat helmet whenever he's outside of his house."

"Sounds like he needs some serious psychological help," Arther said.

"He probably got dropped on his head as a child, right?" Overdrive said jokingly.

"Definitely," Arther muttered.

"How's he jack into the net? Wouldn't that helmet get in the way of the interface jack on his head?" said Arther.

"He drilled a hole in the helmet so he can still plug in with it on," Bloodlust said with a chuckle, "Which is really stupid because that completely destroys the environmental seal on it."

"Is there anything else you know about him, Bloodlust?" Diane asked.

"He's a rookie from Florida; that's about all I know... that and his helmet problem. Trust me. He's nothing to worry about. He gives us any problems, I'll smack him around."

A low flying aerocar streamed overhead. Behind them loomed the huge structures of the business sector. The giant buildings' silhouettes had vertical and diagonal streaks of light from the windows of offices still being used.

"Well, Silver wants us to meet him at his

apartment at nine o'clock tomorrow night," Diane pointed out. "How about we all get together at say nine in the morning tomorrow and maybe we can find out a little more about Whizzard."

"How 'bout ten in the morning?" Arther suggested.

"Why ten?"

"I don't wake up until about nine or nine thirty."

"Stress it. Get up an hour earlier tomorrow."

"I can do that."

"I've got some work I gotta do at home so I'll see you all later. C'mon, Diane," Overdrive said as he motioned her to get into the car. Overdrive got in and started the engine. The twin electric turbine motors hummed. Then the car smoothly sped away. Arther and Bloodlust walked through the parking lot returning to their vehicles. It started to rain again.

"I hate this damn green house effect! Every winter it rains continuously here," Bloodlust complained, "This is supposed to be sunny California," he put the word 'sunny' in a sarcastic tone.

"Well over the last fifteen to twenty years the greenhouse situation has been improving," Arther reassured him.

"It's really screwed that our great-grand parents used fossil fuel and we have to live with the environmental effects of it."

"Ever since we started using electric and methanol⁴ powered vehicles, which was what?... a little over 25 years ago... our environmental situation has improved greatly. We hardly depend on environmentally hazardous fuels at all anymore."

"Yeah, but it's still messed up."

"You're right though, it really does suck. But at least we don't have drought problems."

Arther arrived at his car and started pressing the numbers on a small key pad on the car door. It was to open the electronic lock.

"Okay, I'll talk to you tomorrow. See ya later." Arther said as he got into his aerocar. He sat in the drivers set starting up the vertical take off engines. Water from the rain drops ran off the water resistant synthetic cloth of his pants onto the seat.

"See you later, I gotta get home." and Bloodlust started to walk to his Corvette (2047 model). Arther shut the door of the aerocar and lifted off.

Three

Arther awoke to the sound of pounding on his door. Looking up, the digital wall clock indicated that the time was 8:43 AM. The wake up informant program

Overdrive



clicked on. Arther listened to the computer recite basic information about the day as he got out of bed.

"Door intercom on," Arther ordered to the house computer. The visiphone screen lit up. Bloodlust's face appeared on it.

"It's about time you got up," Bloodlust complained. "I've been out here for about ten minutes."

"Hey," Arther said in a voice that sounded half asleep, "I'll unlock the door in a minute. Door intercom off." The visiphone flashed off. Arther walked out to the living room, hit the instant lock/unlock button and opened the door. Bloodlust walked in. He was wearing his usual camouflage pants and black muscle shirt, he threw in his heavy grey flight jacket, that he had been carrying, down on the couch. A few beads of rain water were on the surface of the jacket. Arther had on his blue sweat pants and a white T-shirt, it was what he usually slept in. His hair hung in his face, partially blocking his vision.

"What are you doing down here?" Arther asked and shut the door behind Bloodlust.

"Well we're supposed to meet Overdrive and Mirage. So I decided to just come down here first."

"Okay. Do you want anything to eat? I've got a wonderful selection of microwave dinners in the refrigerator."

"That's okay... I've already eaten."

"Well, I'm not hungry either, I can't eat in the morning. It makes me feel sick."

"Maybe it has to do with the fact that you're eating microwave dinners for breakfast."

"No, it's not that... that might have something to do with it... but I think I've got an ulcer or something."

Bloodlust sat down on the couch next to the arm where he placed his jacket. Arther started to open the mini-blinds, rain tapped against the large picture window.

"Where are we supposed to meet Diane and Overdrive?"

"I dunno. No one ever decided on that. I guess we'll just go to their house."

"Okay."

"Well you can watch TV or something right now. I'm going to get dressed and make myself look semi-decent."

"Fine, I'll just wait out here."

Arther went into his bedroom to get dressed. He put on a pair of black slacks and a white T-shirt that said:

INDUSTRIAL NOISE
DNA/DOA

In between the title and the caption was the picture of a double helix. He'd bought it at an Industrial Noise concert. They were an 'alternate music' band that had a hard rock electronic sound to it. The proper term for it was industrial music. After getting dressed he went into the bathroom to do his hair. He put his hair up in the usual 'Smith' style and walked back out into the living room.

"Hey. It's 9:20, we better leave," Bloodlust told Arther. He was flipping through a Time magazine that was previously set on the table.

"Okay, we can go in my car. It's aero, we'll get there a lot quicker."

Arther grabbed his trench coat and went out the door. He and Bloodlust rode the elevator up to the aerocar landing and take off area on the roof.

Arther set the car down in the driveway in front of the white house which belonged to Overdrive and Diane. To the left was the main road that lead up the hill to Griffith Observatory. Diane and Overdrive lived in the track housing built on the hill below the observatory. It was a relatively nice housing development. Arther and Bloodlust got out of the aerocar and walked up to the front door. Arther rang the door bell, a few seconds later Diane opened the door.

"Oh, hi guys. Come on inside," she welcomed them in.

"Hey," Arther said as he and Bloodlust hurried in to get out of the rain.

Inside the house it was furnished in a black and white modernistic art deco style. Against the far wall of the living room a fairly large (70 centimeter screen) television was built into the wall. A reflective black plastic casing was a frame around the screen and control unit of the TV. At the moment it was on.

"John is still busy. Why don't you take a seat now and we'll be right out," she said and then rushed down the hall to the master bedroom.

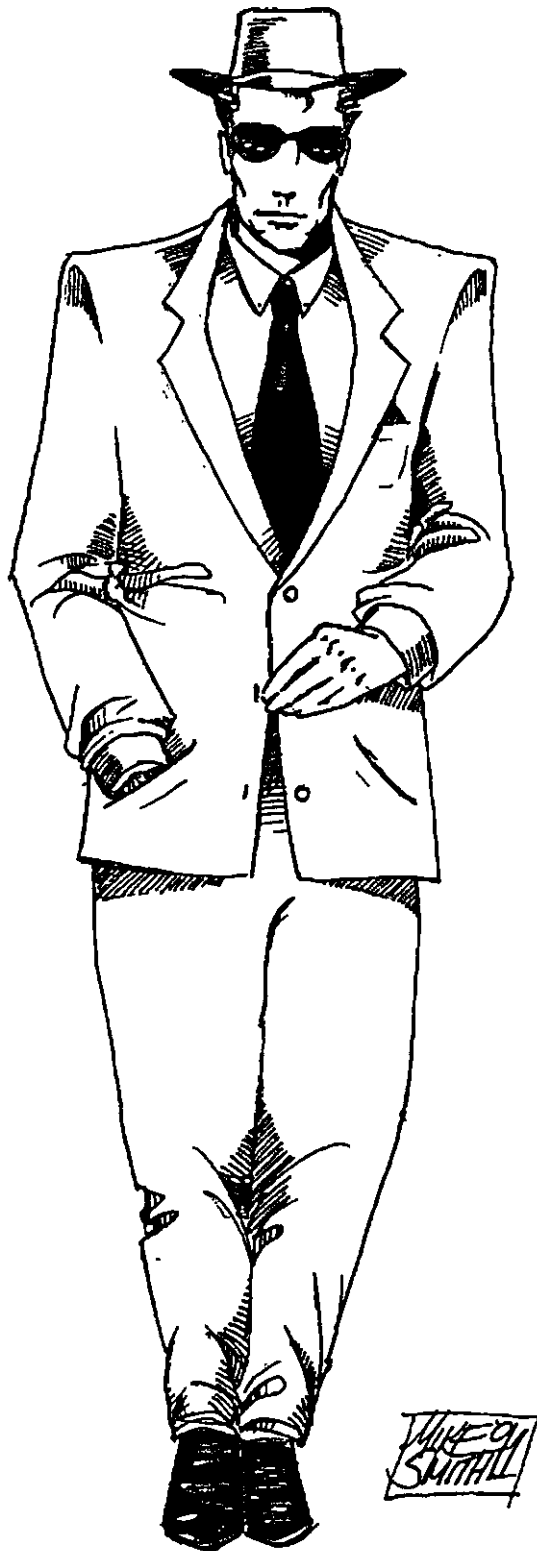
"No problem," Bloodlust said.

Arther sat down turning his attention to the television. A commercial was on the screen at the moment. It was an advertisement for Lockheed aerocars. The ad finished and a morning news show called 'Wake Up Los Angeles' came on. The anchor woman was on the screen.

"In a press conference earlier this morning IBM declared that they would be providing financial support to the Kirghizstan Republic's military," she stated.

Arther felt war was going to break out there real soon. Many corporations were assisting the Kirghizstan Republic's military build up on the Chinese border. That was a clear implication of a near-

Silver



ing war. It all started when China started to triple the size of their military. China was stocking up on more than just conventional weapons, they has taken a large interest in cyberspace warfare. And the current equipment purchased was far from defensive.

"I give it a month," Bloodlust said.

"Give what a month?" Arther asked.

"War."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I just hope they don't use anything nuclear."

"If war breaks out it will be centered between the Kirghizstan and Chinese borders. Any nukes dropped in that area would directly affect China. I don't think they would do that."

"I hope not," Bloodlust said leaning back on the couch, "The US military hasn't gotten involved."

"It's not our war and it won't directly effect the United States. Unless it actually causes any real problem for our government, we will try and remain neutral. The US government has kept a neutral posture in most world events. Let the corporations take care of it."

"If China is only going to fight in that small area, Why are they loading up with long range bombers?"

"Paranoia?"

"And what if China tries to use their long range bombers on us? Do you think we're gonna sit and not do anything? Hell no."

"We'd probably see if that Star Wars system really works or not. Personally I don't think anyone will ever actually use nuclear weapons. It's just a scare tactic. No one in their right mind would use nuclear weapons. The radiation from the weapon would ultimately effect them too." Arther only partly believed his statement about nuclear warfare. He took a great interest in discussing the situation between China and Kirghizstan Republic, but it also made him nervous.

"The Chinese government isn't in their right mind. Remember when they used a neutron bomb on the protesters in Hong Kong? That was totally unacceptable."

"The radiation from a neutron bomb only effect the immediate area of the blast."

"I know, but anybody who uses neutron bombs on their own people are not safe."

"Yeah. Nobody has ever used a nuclear weapon and I doubt anyone ever will. Okay, except for that thing in World War II and that was over a century ago. What will probably happen is they'll try and send a cyberspace special forces hacking squad in and crash their main computer networks. Then send

in the planes and tanks. You destroy the country's main computer networks and it's an almost definite victory."

"That's only if the military is ordered to knock out the country's net as a covert operation or if they want to preserve the net in a repairable state. If they just want to knock it out they'll just drop an EMP bomb on them. The electromagnetic pulse will destroy almost all computer systems around. They also use special cyberspace hacking units if the computer systems are protected against electromagnetic weapons." Bloodlust had a firm knowledge of military tactics and procedure. At one time he was a part of an elite United States military ground forces unit. He was discharged from the military for going against his superior officers' orders. That was how Bloodlust got into running.

"Well, if the US gets involved in this I'm gonna enlist into a corporate military so I'll be there. It won't be like the US Armed Forces, but I'll at least be on the same side and doing something about the situation." Arther knew Bloodlust disliked corporate militaries. He said they were an insult to our countries defence forces. At one time he even stated he would never enlist in a corporate military, since the US military would not have him.

"Wars are less physical now, computers are where most of the battle takes place."

Overdrive and Diane walked out of the master bedroom and into the living room.

"Hey. What's up?" Overdrive said.

"Not much," Arther replied.

"Anyone want a cup of coffee?" Diane asked.

"Yeah, I'll have a cup of coffee," said Bloodlust.

"Caffeine, I like caffeine, too bad coffee tastes so bad," Arther said, the comment was rather pointless.

When they left it was edging on eleven-thirty AM. They took Overdrive's car, even though it was purely a land based vehicle, mainly because Overdrive was such a good driver. He had an implant that plugged into the head similar to a cyberdeck interface jack. This implant of his allowed him to directly interface into his vehicle, which had been specially modified to work with the implant. Overdrive could control the vehicle as if it were his own body. This implant was called a vehicular rigg interface. Unlike Arther's neural interface, which was common among the public (most corporate deckers had neural interface jacks), the rigg implant was some what of an unusual piece of cyberwear. Like the neural interface jack it was perfectly legal, but it was just not very common. Rigg implants were used mainly by the mil-

Stiletto



itary, all Air Force fighter pilots had them. They were often called 'riggers'.

After doing some asking around in the more run down areas of Los Angeles they gained some information about their soon to be business associate, The Whizzard, which was the main point of the whole excursion. Apparently Whizzard was a new decker in the business who had only been in LA for less than a year. He's done a few small time runs and was still new to the trade, most people they talked to said he was kind of weird, but skilled. It cost them a couple of Ben Franks of creds to get the info, but then a little background was worth paying for.

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord
my soul to keep...If I should die Before I
wake...then someone gets another dough-
nut for breakfast!"

— Dennis Miller

"It's the old, old story. Droid meets
droid, droid becomes chameleon, droid loses
chameleon, chameleon turns into blob, droid
gets blob back again, blob meet blob, blob
goes off with blob, and droid loses blob,
chameleon and droid. How many times have
we seen that story?"

— Kryten

Casual Encounters

With Various NPCs

Jim Vassilakos · Kelly Nabours · Brian Saylor

Here are some characters your players are sure to have strong feelings for, at least one way or the other... Enjoy!

Akach of the tribe Karacgh

For AD&Dv1

By Jim Vassilakos

"Remember now... not all barbarians are barbarians."

Str:	12	Class:	Thief
Int:	9	Level:	7th
Wis:	13	HP:	26
Dex:	18		
Con:	11	Race:	Woses (class of sub-human)
Cha:	14		

Personal History

Akach was born of the Tribe Karacgh within the Clan Draug, his people known only as the Fangs of the Druatan by outsiders. His premature birth, early in the month of the Winter Wolf, was most remarkable, and during his childhood, stories were often told by elders of how his mother's womb was inexplicably chewn from the inside causing her subsequent death. Although popular, the story is a sad one for the elders as his mother was a valued Mogis (Priestess) of the tribe, and the first of her order in over a century to attain the Shewolf's blessing.

Therefore, in the proper time her son, the sacred child of the people, was traded to the wolves for one of their own (the Sacred Draug) thus reaffirming the ancient pact with the Shewolf. However, after three years the child returned, driven from the Vulfen den by the leader of the hounds. The disgrace

Thieving Abilities

	7th Level	Racial Mod	Dex 18	Final
Pick Pockets	60%	-5%	+10%	65%
Open Locks	52%	-10%	+15%	57%
Find/Remove Traps	50%	-5%	+5%	50%
Move Silently	55%	+10%	+10%	75%
Hide in Shadows	43%	+10%	+10%	63%
Hear Noise	25%	+5%	—	30%
Climb Walls	94%	+5%	—	99%
Read Languages	35%	-10%	—	25%

could not be lost upon the Tribe, and with the broken pact, Akach was committed to exile.

However, his father, Azga, still grief-stricken due to the loss of his mate, purchased his son's banishment at the cost of his own. The Sacred Draug, the second party to the trade, remained close to tribe thereafter, often visiting upon the Woses as they would move from one settlement to another.

In his 4th year, Machta, the wiseman of the tribe, conscious of the Akach's need to learn the ways of his mother, called to the Nibelung to repay a long-standing debt owed the by forest-dwellers since one of their number was named the wolf-parent of the child.

The Children of the Mist, often regarded as the most reclusive of any race, answered the wiseman's request, sending Ulma, their rain-maker. She became Akach's ward and mentor and is the only parent the youth ever really knew although dim memories of his father still linger.

It was Ulma who introduced Akach to Skylos, the sacred wolf who often followed the tribe at a distance. With her aid, he learned to speak the strange tongue of the wolf, thus making a friend of it even though it would never enter the tribal encampments. When he came into his 14th year, Akach had the right to declare himself a man, and after the cer-

emonial hunt was tattooed across his chest with a symbol of the Ngwaw (see the Legend of Canis). His became the Isil, a crescent moon which is considered a powerful ward against evil spirits of the darkness.

On his following birthday while journeying to find his place of birth, a falling star struck nearby, fragments showering for miles around. Although badly hurt, he managed to recover after several weeks and made his way back to the tribe. Afterward, he found within himself the innate psionic abilities of complete healing, absorb disease, and lend health (DM's discretion advised, see AD&Dv2 Complete Psionics Handbook for details). However, these powers tax heavily upon him, and he has not learned how to entirely control them.

He has the skills of hunting, trapping and foraging, however, he is not well accomplished at anything aside from thieving which he was taught by Ulma. Although she did not consider these skills proper for one such as Akach, she honored her duty as bequested by Machta to the best of her ability, and at the completion of the training permitted Akach the gift of her TriBlade, an ancient magical weapon of her people which is hurled at adversaries and returns of its own volition.

The Karacgh Culture

Draug, The Vulfen Nation

The Draug arise from Wose stock, their appearance primitive and apelike, with dark ruddy-brown skin, squat frames, and thick, imprecise features. Also called the Druatan and the Wardogs, these are a race of fierce warriors, their gene-pool long since polluted by the Auduin invaders of millennia past.

The Counting of Moons

The twelve moons of the year, each of approximately twenty-eight days duration are (from January to December), the moons of the Goat, Cave Bear, Gar, Ram, Bull, Eagle, Crab, Lion, Dryad, Owl, Scorpion, and Winter Wolf. Their wandering month is that of the Black Horse.

On Hunting

Most tribes hold ten hunts each year, one at the wane of each moon save that of the Goat and the Winter Wolf. Each tribe generally has between 100 and 500 people, one-third of which are hunters. The hunters typically meet at the tribal center a few days before

the new moon for a ceremony which instills strength and courage into the hunters' spirits. They then split into bands of between fifteen and thirty and hunt until the close of the moon, returning with their kills for the newmoon festival where they display their victories to the tribal chief.

Reindeer and musk oxen are hunted in autumn while mammoth and mastodon are hunted during spring and cave bear in all seasons save winter. However, many animals such as long-horned deer, wild rabbit, ground squirrel, ice toad, and numerous fish can be hunted of caught year round.

Tradition and Culture

Legend has it that the Shewolf bore the Wardogs and gave them their homeland in return for the promise that they would take care of each other as the wolves do, and that the two races ally in times need. She is said to run with the wild packs at night and in popular belief is personified as queen of the wolves.

This covenant is symbolized in the foremost right of a newborn, to be granted a "wolf-parent", usually a member of the tribe friendly with the natural parents of the child, who fulfills the identical role of the god-parent: that of caring for the child should the natural parents die. However, members of the high order must find suitable parents outside the immediate tribe and often among neighboring peoples who owe favors. These individuals are regarded as one with the tribe, thus expanding its contacts even further while still keeping the popular saying true, that there are no orphans among the wolves.

Tribes are led by chieftains, however, there is no absolute leadership at the clan level. Each clan has a Mogan selected from among the Mogi of the varying tribes. This individual is said to have a special relationship with the spirits transcending even that of a Mogis. The duties of the Mogan are to lead the clan ceremonies and keep the collective spirit of the tribe safe from demons. The Mogan is beyond the will of the tribal chiefs and serves as a connecting force for the clan. Assistants to this position are sent out to the various tribes to practice herbal medicine and spirit healing.

Both male and female children may be granted "recognition" status, however, this only comes with the ability to hunt. Thus the boys who are often physically stronger than girls are more frequently chosen for the hunt and thus more likely to gain such status. Children may be selected for the hunt as early as their tenth year.

The mating ritual is common to all Wardog culture. Unmated females play the prey and are

turned loose into the wilds for one night every year at dusk (from the last sunset of the Crab to the first sunrise of the Lion) to be hunted by the unwed males. The male must capture his prey and bring her back at dawn to show the tribe that he is worthy to be her mate. To ensure that secret deals are not made between participants but rather that the mating hunt is a contest of skill and chance, females are often drugged with a fear-inducing medicine and males with potent aphrodisiacs.

Infighting is discouraged, but when necessary, the combatants discuss the problem with the Mogis of their tribe and may request a fight to the death. If the request is judged to be unworthy or petty it is denied and the antagonists are sent to different tribes within the clan. If they fight without going through the procedure, it is a simple case of murder and the survivor is executed without chance of reprieve. If the Mogis decides that the request is legitimate, the tribal chief must set the rules governing its fair combat.

Taboos: One may not kill wolves, or owls, or each other. Chiefs are to be obeyed. When a chief is standing, lesser members must stand. They must also ask for permission to speak to chiefs. The Mogis is treated as a rank above chief in situations of honor or respect but as a rank below chief where important decisions must be made concerning the practical welfare of the tribe, clan, or nation. The Mogan, however, holds the ultimate rank in the clan.

Belief: Fire has a spirit, it is to be guarded at all times. Fire is to be respected – it can only be put out with blessed water, or if that is unavailable, then water that has been sprinkled with the grindings of a holy leaf. Pissing on fires is forbidden.

Rituals: In the month of the Winter Wolf once every several decades, the four clans join in two common rituals. Of the first, they attempt to exchange a sacred baby with a wolven cub. If the trade fails, it is a forecast of doom. Of the second, they also exchange gifts of unity which bind the tribes together as one clan under one common heritage.

The Legend of Canis

Canis is the man of legend who mated with the Shewolf and from whose loins all Wardog Clanspeople and their wolven cousins have sprung. He became

part wolf, and ruled the Clan Draug as their Ulrik or King. He hunted for his children and gave the choicest parts of each kill to them so that they could feast. Canis gave them more than enough food during the warm seasons so that they could maintain stock for winter when the game moved to warmer climes. However, in doing so, he unknowingly stole these kills from his mate, and by winter her belly became empty so that she could not milk her young and still find enough food for herself. She asked Canis if she must starve, but he answered that he would not let her starve and that she could eat him and be satisfied. In the end, the Shewolf did just that, but later sorrow overcame her so that she howled because she realized then that it was better to be hungry than lonely. Thus, we have the Ngwaw, or the Howling, the great winds at year's end which shatter all the forestlands save the Godswoods and which both begin and end the hunting season of the Vullen calendar.

The Trade

Wardog culture and religion centers around the relationship the nomads have with their wolf counterparts. The ritual which symbolizes this relationship is the covenant the Woses share with the Shewolf in "The Trade."

Once every several decades, during the last month of the year, usually on the winter solstice, a human child newborn is traded for a wolven cub. The child which is traded is not yet named as that right is reserved for the wolves. For the child to later return as did Akach is an event without precedent. It is most certain among the elders, however, that the banishment spells a disintegration of the pact which has sustained the Clan Draug for innumerable generations.

The Symbols of Unity

The clan chiefs attempt to meet annually during the Winter solstice to exchange the eight sacred symbols of unity. All these objects revolve around the man named Canis, the father of the wardog nation.

The owl feather was the tail feather of the great owl who came in the night to advise Canis on the wisest courses of action. This gift from the owl symbolizes a pledge to Canis and his descendants to aid the wardog nation with wise counsel.

The mithril ring was originally a gift from Lyn, the sylvan elf princess, who made the gift in thanks to Canis for granting the Elves the inner forest and

protecting them from the Shewolf and other barbarian tribes during their early years and for defeating the Green Drake of the Godswoods.

The Dragon's tooth is from the dragon which Canis slew when defending the sylvan elves. The misty gem was cut from its skull.

The stone axe was wielded by Canis during his wars with the Auduin and other barbarian tribes. The golden chalice was used by him at feasts. Both were presents from the Dwarves for aiding their fight against the Goblins, and later, the Solianic. One legend also states that the axe and chalice were used by the Shewolf to carve his flesh of Canis and drink his blood.

However, the greatest of the gifts of unity are the skull and claw of Canis, which are said to be the remains of the Shewolf's ancient repast.

Suggested Scenarios

1. The characters have unknowingly trespassed across the Karacgh territory. Akach is sent out as a scout in order to determine their nature and intentions. He will attempt to sneak up on the party while using Skylos as a diversion.
2. The party is currently resting after it's most recent defeat at the hands of a prominent campaign villain. In town, the party is approached by Akach who is seeking his father and has been venturing through the forest for several weeks without much success. He says that the witch in the woods (yes, the same woman who turned one PC into a toad last week) told him to seek the party on this matter, that they would know of Azga and how to find him. Unbeknownst to the party, Azga is the villain who just kicked their collective hind-quarters.
3. While wandering through the woods, Akach finds definite signs of Ulma, his ward of childhood. Hoping very desperately to find her, he follows the traces, stalking her like a wild animal for several days and nights before finally realizing himself lost within the magical realm of the faerie folk. The inhabitants soon begin to stalk him instead, tormenting him for his unwarranted invasion and leaving him tied for the vultures within a blackened corner of the dwurmygroves seldom touched by sunlight or kindness. The PCs, similarly lost, find him pleading for aid. It may just be that their only way out of these lands is by finding Akach's ward. But can they trust him?

Tymothie Crawford For Traveller

By Jim Vassilakos

"Put your hands against the wall... pretty please?"

Race: Human

UPP: 5A3B92

Skills

Recon 2	Mechanical 2
Gun Combat (ACR) 1	Computer 1
Gravitics 1	Streetwise 1
Gambling 1	Medic (Low Drugs) 1
Blade Combat (Dagger) 1	

Record

Born: Ridgecrest, Vili/Indi/Katina, 623SI		
641		Graduated Ridgecrest Secondary School Joined work-training program at Ridgecrest Labs
645		Ridgecrest Lab Term Complete Jailed for resisting arrest
646	1-1	Enlisted into Indi Armed Forces Infantry Branch, Basic & Advanced Training Military Occupational Specialty: Recon
647	1-2	Specialist School: Mechanics
649	1-4	Training: Recon
650	2-1	Police Action: Vili

Military Status

Service	Imperial Subsector Army, Duke of Indi
Division	Ground Force Command
Present Station	Ridgecrest on Vili
Rank	Private
Branch	Infantry
MOS	Recon

Personal History

While Tym was a fetus, his mother, a textiles worker on Vili, was taking drugs during her pregnancy, one of which goes by the name of Cyrspasium-hydrilexate, also called "Spaz" or "Curse" in the streetslang depending upon its form. The drug was a popular hallucinogen for the times, and is still produced and distributed in vast quantities by the underworld. Its effects on the unborn, however, have proven fatal in most cases due to a complete collapse of the immune system. Tym was found to be dependent on the drug at birth, and on the brink of death due to the unchecked symptoms of the common cold.

Through state-supplied biotherapy, the addiction in both mother and child was cured. However, as a result of early complications, Tym retains a very unstable immune system. In fact, the cold that he was born with has never subsided, and he has lived with it and a number of other minor afflictions throughout his life.

Tym's mother committed suicide only a year after his birth, and his father was never discovered as the pregnancy was a result of rape. Tym was placed in an orphan home until the age of seven when he was adopted by a 1st cousin, Steev Crawford. Although Steev was only ten years older than Tym, he was allowed to assume the role of a foster parent on the grounds of blood-relation.

Tym stayed with Steev Crawford and three other friends in a small urban apartment of Ridgecrest's poor district on Vili for four years until the group broke up after Steev was killed in a gangland war. Tym abruptly dropped out of primary school, but he tested into and attended Ridgecrest secondary. The experience was marked by violence and feuding with rival gang members, yet despite the distractions, he did manage to stay in school, and for his senior year he ranked in the top five percent of his class.

After graduation from Ridgecrest, he applied for admission to the Imperial Academy of Science and Medicine, and to Columbus College of Vili with the idealistic notion that if accepted to either school, he would be able to find a way to restore his immune system to full functioning order. His applications were refused on both counts. Through connections, however, he managed to secure a spot in the work-training program at Ridgecrest Scientific Labs. There he studied computers and gravitics, but was offered no opportunities for advancement. After four years he reapplied for admission to IASM and Columbus, and applied to Indi College of Biological Science and the Vili Spaceport Authority for a job interview. Again, on all counts, he was denied acceptance.

That same year he was jailed for resisting arrest when he ran from two watch officers for no apparent reason. The maximum sentence of a year was imposed by the court.

At an age of twenty-three years, Tym enlisted and was accepted into the Indi Armed Forces. He was placed in Infantry Recon at the request of his Recruiting Department and served a full four years of training which encompassed primarily Mechanics and Recon. In 650SI he started his second term of service as an advisor for the planetary watch on Vili in the chaotic districts of Ridgecrest.

Personality: Tym is a bit on the dreamy side, his

grey eyes often taking on a distant and stormy veil when he becomes engaged in tasks he considers boring. His job, however, which entails keeping on the constant lookout and making fairly consistent arrests, often conflicts with this aspect of his personality. Thus, he's been known to get into trouble for not being on his toes. Tym is also very polite, almost to a fault, having learned long ago that it doesn't pay to make enemies. Likewise, he is shy of gun spray, once having been found hiding under a vehicle shaking with terror after a short skirmish with the Skulls, one of the more prominent Ridgecrest gangs.

Possessions: Cr500. One Advanced Combat Rifle with eighty rounds of ammunition. An old but still usable vacc-suit previously owned by an uncle (Steev's father).

Suggested Scenarios

1. Outside the starport on Vili, the party gets attacked by the Troggs, one of the more xenophobic gangs in the Ridgecrest district. During the skirmish, the local police arrive, and one of the party members is wounded and captured by the Troggs in the crossfire. The Vili police halt the party's pursuit, as only one of them (a lowly advisor on lease from the Army) speaks even a smattering of the interstellar tongue. After some heated words, they decide to haul the party into the station for questioning. The police later make a disgruntled apology about letting the Troggs get away with their friend and bluntly advise the party that the individual is as good as dead. Tym, however, tells the party that the Troggs have recently gained a new leader who has connections with the off-world slave market and that their friend probably isn't dead. He also tells the party that he may be able to aid in finding the friend provided he doesn't have to enter combat. Of course, there will be a certain price involved if they are interested.
2. The party is attacked as before, however, nobody is captured. Instead, their medic is hit in the chest and goes down. When Tym arrives on the scene with the police, he administers drugs to immobilize the character's metabolism long enough to get him to surgery. Afterward, while answering questions in the hospital, the character realizes that Tym is a close relative. Due to cut-backs in the IAF (Indi Armed Forces), Tym has the option of mustering out early; that is if

their captain wants to offer him a position on the crew.

3. The party is attacked as before, however, over the course of the initial investigation, it is determined that the attack was not xenophobic in origin, but merely painted as such. The police believe the attack was a contracted hit, perhaps by somebody off-world whom the party has somehow managed to piss-off, perhaps even by somebody in subsector government. Due to the strange nature of the case, Tym is quietly transferred to the investigative division and told to apply for a position on the crew so as to keep an eye on the party while they are inside the subsector. Thus, regardless of his skills, his resume will be impeccable.

Flash For AD&D

By Kelly Nabours

"Flash ...AAAAAH Saviour of the Universe!"

Character name: Flash	
Gamesystem: AD&D	Str: 8
Class: Illusionist/ (thief?)	Int: 20
Race: Gnome	Wis: 5
Hp: 52 (+2 for jokers! hehe)	Dex: 17
Ac: 7 / 3 If armor spell on	Con: 14
Lvl: ? (15)	Chr: 15
Al: CG	Com: 12

Well... Here goes ...kinda weird though But you've been warned.

Equipment

Short Sword called Valkyrie. minor artifact.

It is +3 to hit/damage, of quickness, glows on command, and when pulled it trumpets quite loudly "*The Ride of The Valkyrie*" Anyone within a quarter mile will be able to hear it.

Cloak of the Arachnid

Spider Climb at will. Double strength *Web* 2/day, immunity to webs and +vs spider poison. (See its description in DMG)

Cursed Boots of Sloshing and Slurping

No matter where he is, it sounds like he's walking through a swamp. Sluurrp when lifting foot and Squish when dropping it. Some get confused and think that these are what give spider climb ability. These seem to have been "afflicted" on him in some incident in which he acquired the Valkyrie. Treat as created by a DemiGod. Remove Curse won't work.

Feather

His hat contains a feather. No matter how high the ceiling, the feather stretches up to it and bends an extra two feet along. It disappears completely outside.

Ring of Wizardry (1-3rd)
and Ring of Regeneration. (another story)

Other

Various spellbooks, spell components, etc.
No thief gear!

In addition:

Permanent Audible Glamour with a Program. Flash spent over 3 years researching the spell to enable him to cast this. It cost one CON point and quite a fortune. He was having an incredible problem with his EGO at this point and since then has rethought the wisdom of it but has been unable to come up with a counter to his spell. Its affects are: When ever he mentions his name (Flash) an audible glamour at 12th lvl (48 person chorus) sings out "*AAAAAH Saviour of the Universe.*" This all came about after the story of the Rings. Never mind...

Despite his numerous (self-inflicted or not) curses, he remains quite jolly. He likes to accompany the occasional adventuring party he hires to help him with some of his problems, but for some reason they seem to get quite tired of his jokes. Example: party has just met their arch-enemy but have already been decimated removing his guards; the enemy proposes a reasonable truce, and the party withdraws out of ear shot to discuss it privately without the enemy overhearing the results. Flash (unable to pass up the opportunity) casts a phantasmal force of a whole bunch of ears all over listening in on

the parties discussion. He's always doing things like that and memorizes as many 1st level Phantasmal Forces as he can get away with.

The Phantom for AD&D

By Brian Saylor

Nothing is safe from *The Phantom*!

Character Name:	Jonathan Guy	STR:	17
Author:	Brian Saylor	INT:	18
Gamesystem:	AD&D	WIS:	9
Class:	Magic-User/Assassin	DEX:	16
Race:	Human	CON:	16
Level:	8	CHA:	15
Ac:	2	COM:	15
Hp:	32		
Al:	CE		

Equipment:

Cloak of the Bat

+2 protection, 90% invisibility in shadows or darkness, 15" flying (MC:B), and transformation into ordinary bat. Flying and transformation works only in darkness and for one hour maximum before like amount of dormant time is necessary.

Pearl of the Sirens

Waterbreathing, underwater movement 24", and immunity to Sirine's touch.

+3 Short Sword

Bracers of Defense, AC6

Spell Book:

Charm Person
Magic Missile
Hold Portal
Darkness
Knock
Locate Object
Vocalize
Protection From Normal Missiles

Personal History

Jonathan was born into the merchant's guild. His father was a very prestigious member. Jonathan and his father, Garech, did not get along well. Sparks flew whenever they were in the house together. This was not all that often, since Garech was away on business much of the time. His relationship with his mother Maria, was not much better. Jonathan was very independent and despised all who tried to influence his life. His father wanted him to be a great merchant like himself, and his mother wanted to make him a "good boy."

As a boy, he would spend a great deal of time by himself as far away from home as possible. On one such occasion, when he was twelve, he found an old man caught in an animal trap. Jonathan decided to pretend the old man was his father. He taunted him and threw rocks. One of the rocks hit the old man in the head and killed him. Jonathan was a little stunned for a moment, then found it hilariously funny. He searched the man and found a few coins in his pocket and a pearl strung about his neck. This was a Pearl of the Sirens, and Jonathan soon learned it's powers. Jonathan had heard of an island that sailors avoided like the plague. It was rumored that a group of Sirens lived there and people tended to "disappear" around it. After a particularly bad episode with his parents, he decided to go there. The swimming abilities acquired from the pearl allowed him to reach it easily. What he found there was in fact a group of Sirens. The pearl protected him from their songs, so he was not in danger. From then on, he would go there whenever he couldn't handle life at home. He got to know them and would even help them catch sailors on some occasions.

Garech tried to get Jonathan into the family business. He continually applied pressure. For this reason, Jonathan joined the ranks of the Mages' Guild at the age of fourteen years just to spite his father. His great intelligence allowed him to learn quickly, but his chaotic nature hampered his advancement. He soon became discontent with the pompous mages.

At about this time he met Rekar, a young thief. Rekar showed Jonathan how to steal. Together they pulled off many petty crimes. During this time, Jonathan kept up his magical studies, even though he had lost much of his passion for it. Being a small time crock did not sit well with Jonathan; he wanted something bigger. He decided to rob his father. Jonathan did the inside work, while Rekar did the actual robbery. They planned it perfectly; Jonathan stole the keys and gave them to Rekar, immobilized the dogs,

and distracted his mother and the maid with a loud display of minor magic at the far end of the house. Rekar entered the house during Jonathan's show and stole the money box from Garech's study. There was only one problem. Garech choose just that moment to come home. He surprised Rekar coming out of the house. Rekar was killed in the conflict that followed.

Jonathan did not forgive his father, instead he vowed to avenge Rekar's death. Three months later, two days after returning from a two and a half month business trip, Garech was found dead. He had apparently fallen from a bridge crossing the river on the edge of town. It seemed he hit his head and drowned. This was not of course an accident. Jonathan just arranged for it to look that way.

With the death of his father, Jonathan withdrew from the Mages' Guild and took over the family business. At the age of eighteen, with no merchant experience, he was running a large merchant company. Even though he hated the business before, now he jumped into it with relish. The company grew quickly with Jonathan's business methods. They tended to be a bit Mafia style. A major competitor fell from the walls of his keep and died. Similar accidents happened to those who stood in the way of his business. During this time, one of Jonathan's old instructors at the Mages Guild was murdered and all his magical books stolen. Jonathan wanted to continue his magical studies.

He soon became quite good at causing "accidents." He was always very careful not to let any suspicion fall upon him. Mostly because the tedious details of running the company did not appeal to Jonathan, at the age of twenty he took up assassination as a trade. He still looked after the company, but he had other people doing most of the actual work.

Jonathan is currently known as a wealthy, though reclusive merchant. He is well respected in society. While he doesn't attend any temples, he does donate to their funds. He also donates funds to worthy causes in his home town as well as abroad. This is all a cover for his work as the most notorious assassin and thief in the region. He steals things that can't be stolen, kills people who think they are protected by the best security. Nothing stops "The Phantom." He likes to use his magic when he works: charm a guard, open/lock doors, protect himself from arrows and such. He also loves to use magic items. He has collected several over the years which he keeps with him. His *Cloak of the Bat* has been particularly useful in getting into fortified places. He can fly over the walls or transform into a bat and fly through a small window. If things get tough, he can just fly away. He

loves to make dramatic death scenes. After an assassination, when the guards are chasing him and firing arrows, he arrives at a bridge, pretends to be hit by an arrow, and falls to the water below. His body is not, of course, found. He does this with the help of his *Pearl of the Sirens*. Because of this, many people have claimed to have killed him only to have him show up again a few months later. When "working" he dresses in costume, all black with a face mask and a leather cloak.

Because of his love for drama, he is rather notorious in the region. Many people would like to see "The Phantom" dead, and some have tried. He is mindful of this, but his ego keeps him from taking his enemies too seriously. Given the opportunity, he likes to make them look foolish. When things get hot, however, he visits the Isle of Sirens.

Services

The Phantom does assassinations and thefts of hard to steal items. On occasion he even does "political" work for town officials, usually stealing documents or planting incriminating evidence. He does not like spy missions, so he will not do them. He is not likely to do other types of missions. If he does, it would only be with a sizable quantity of persuasion and money.

Contact

The Phantom is not easy to meet. He maintains a network of low level thieves throughout the region. To hire the Phantom, one must contact one of these thieves. The Thief then notifies the liaison person in Jonathan's home town. This man is currently Borchers, a 4th level thief. Borchers notifies the Phantom that someone wants to do business by the use of some signal. At the moment, the signal is a black flag in the window of the business Borchers uses as a front for his fencing operation. Borchers is very loyal to the Phantom because he pays well, and Borchers doesn't want to end up like some men who betrayed the Phantom. Jonathan then sets a time and place to meet with the prospective client. He realizes that these meetings are potentially dangerous, so he takes precautions. For security, he doesn't actually meet face to face, and he always keeps an escape route near, often keeping something between him and the client; a wall, hedge, etc.

Suggested Scenarios

1. The Party is hired by the town Mayor to track down the Phantom and bring him to justice. The Mayor has used the services of the Phantom and does not really want him out of business. He only hires the party to keep up his public image. The Phantom will be well prepared for the characters and keep a close eye on them. The Mayor will tell the players of a cave that the Phantom is suspected of using as a hideout. The Phantom will meet the characters at the cave and stage a fake death. The Mayor will pay the party 2,500 GP upon completion.
2. The wife of one of the Phantom's victims hires the party to hunt down the Phantom and kill him. The patron is genuine and will help in any reasonable way but does not know how the Phantom may be contacted. She will pay 5,000 GP if the party completes this task.
3. One of the characters has been targeted for assassination. The Phantom will have a charmed bar maid place poison in the character's drink. On a successful save *vs.* poison, the character takes 30 HP damage; otherwise, he dies. The Phantom will immediately follow the poisoning with a *Magic Missile* attack and then a back-stab attempt. If the victim survives, the Phantom will engage in combat until he himself is hit once or the victim dies. He will then fly away. If the assassination is unsuccessful, the Phantom will try again at a later date. The party may wish to track the Phantom down to stop another attempt or for revenge.

GM: The fighter carves his initials in your chest...like Zorro.

Player: Yeah, so?

GM: He's using a mace.

— Mike Basinger
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Mounds of Mottley Monsters

For More Mischievous Mayhem and PC Maiming

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These monsters are the property of their respective authors.

Here are a few new monsters to spice up (and possibly stamp out) the lives of your least favorite heros.

Advanced Dungeon & Dragons Master List of New Monsters									
Monster Name	A l	S i z e	M o v e	Hit Dice	AC	T H A C0	Special Attacks	Special Defenses	Exp. Pts.
Aerophant	N	L	24	10	4	14	Trunk, trample	Immune to Cold	2200
Sodius	CE	M	15	5+1	3	16	Drain Salt	none	475
Concord	CN	L	12	9+1	-1	11	strafing run	none	1800
Tarkon	CN	L	12	7	3	12	Poison tail	50% mag. resist	1000
Cyclic	CE	M	12	6	4	15	none	Immune to cold	475
Spamalope	CN	S	12	4	2	17	none	none	180
Dragons									
Grey(Ash)	NE	L	24	12+1	-3	10	Breath,Poison	none	6000
Prismatic	LE	L	48	40	99	5	Breath & Spells	AC -10	0
Stone	CE	L	12	18	-5	8	Sandblast	need +3 weapon	15000
Ice Wraith	CE	M	18	9	-5	12	Breath	need +1 weapon	2500
Demi-Shadow	E	M	20	14	-2	9	Spell casting	need +3 weapon	7500
Mud Golem	E	L	12	90hp	4	9	none	need +2 weapon	5500
Hoolk	N	L	15	5-7	3	15	Poison	None	700
Ploorian	NE	L	15	11	4	12	None	None	3300
Grendel	N	L	45	5-20	-2	0	Charge,Impale	Speed	0
True Troll	NE	L	30	20	-1	8	Throat Rip	Dam. Reduction	13000
Animator	NE	M	6	9+5	2	9	Par.+Animation	+1 weap. to hit	3200
Alien	NE	L	15	10	-1	9	Acid	Immune to acid	18000
Silver Twist	N	L	12	4	7	17	Transportation	Transportation	175

AEROPHANT This creature looks like an elephant with wings. It attacks in two ways: either wrapping its trunk around the opponent and throwing the opponent to the ground (d10+3), or trampling (3d10). It will automatically attempt to CHARM any characters it meets, and generally is of GOOD alignment (the CHARM is for defensive purposes only — however, if it is under the influence of another players charm, that charm can be *forwarded* to other opponents).

Creator: Mark Oliver (LCO102@URIACC)

SODIUS This creature is exactly like the "Salt Creature" in the Star Trek episode "The Man Trap" (a.k.a. "The UnReal McCoy"). It can shapechange (like a Doppelganger) into any creature that its victim knows (past or present). The Sodius' main goal is to hypnotize (-2 to save) it's victim, and then draw the salt out of its victim. The victim loses 1 point of Constitution per round until either (1) the sodius stops, or (2) the victim loses ALL its Constitution, in which case it dies (resurrection possible). The victim can regain its Con by resting (1 point per day) or eating food with salt in it (1 point per 6 rounds). If forced to fight, the Sodius does 2-12 damage with

its open hand (2 attacks per round). REMEMBER THAT WATER HAS NO SALT IN IT!

Creator: Mark Oliver (LCO102@URIACC)

CONCORD This creature has the body and wings of an eagle, and the head of a ram (the head is AC2). It has black slitted eyes (at DM's discretion, can paralyze), and a thin pointed tail (can strike for d4 damage, save vs. poison). The normal attack of the creature is to do a *strafing run*, where the Concord swoops down on an opponent and rakes its claws on the victim as it flies by (3d4 damage). It can also charge like a ram and use its horns for d6 damage. The Concord LOVES elves! It will ALWAYS attempt to subdue an elf first, because it considers them a delicacy. It can secrete an odor that repels all races except elves (who are attracted to the smell). If necessary (or applicable), the Concord can also gate in 1-10 more Concorde 25% of the time.

Creator: Mark Oliver (LCO102@URIACC)

TARKON This creature dwells in the mountains of cold regions. It has a crocodile head and a rat-like body (it is bipedal). It has a long barbed tail, and has claws for hands and feet, and has greenish fur. A normal attack for the Tarkon is to attempt to grab its opponent with both claws (d6+3 damage per claw, 2 attacks per round) and hold it. If both claws hit, the opponent is *held*, and the Tarkon will sting it with its tail (d4 damage, save vs. poison). It is immune to ALL cold attacks and has a 50% magic resistance.

Creator: Mark Oliver (LCO102@URIACC)

CYCLIC This creature looks like a man that has been frozen solid, except for a pair of albino eyes. It is formed almost entirely of living ice. The cyclic can attack with two *arms* for 2d6 damage (2 attacks/round). It is immune to all cold attacks, but takes double damage on all fire attacks (the touch of a lit torch would probably do d4 damage).

Creator: Mark Oliver (LCO102@URIACC)

SPAMALOPE The Spamalope is a can of SPAM with antlers and legs (this originally was an inside joke of some sort). They are usually found in groups of 6-12, and will be gathered around a Hormel Ham worshipping it. The Ham is their only treasure, and it is worth 5gp. The Ham is edible, the Spamalope is not.

Creator: Sam Huntsman
(SH06078@UAFSYB)

DRAGON, GREY (ASH) Grey Dragons are far less intelligent than other evil dragons. They very rarely can speak, and never have spell casting abilities. They make up for this lack of brains with their size and viciousness. The breath weapon of a grey dragon is a cloud of foul-smelling gas, which causes choking for d4 rounds as a Stinking Cloud (save vs. spell negates) and will age the victim d20 years (save vs. spell negates). This power of aging and decay also affects claw and bite wounds. Any wounds caused in this manner will heal at half normal rate unless a Cure Disease spell is first used (e.g. a Cure Light Wounds which would normally heal 8 pts. of damage will only heal 4). Any armor, shields, or edged weapons may corrode and crumble to dust, due to the Dragon's corrosive demeanor (magical weapons will be at a plus to save). Because of the Dragon's corrosive nature, their treasures tend to be gems and powerful magic items only.

Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

ICE WRAITH The Ice Wraith is a creature that resembles a man-shaped cloud of mist. It survives by draining all heat from any available source near it (for example, a campfire. Because of this, cold-based attacks do double damage and heat-based attacks HEAL the Ice Wraith for half the damage points the attack would normally cause. A +1 or better weapon is required to hit, but any metal weapon passing through the creature will become intensely cold and may be dropped. The Wraith can cast Affect Normal Fires to make a heat source hotter, but this will cause the fire's fuel source to be consumed more quickly. Of course, body heat is also an acceptable source of heat for these creatures, so if a PC tries to douse his campfire to get rid of the Wraith, he may be in for an unpleasant surprise...

Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

DEMI-SHADOW A Demi-Shadow is an alternative to a lich for a magic-user (MU). A spell caster can, through the use of a shadow lanthorn, a Time Stop spell, a protective encasement for his body, and various other components, preserve his body forever while his mind roams free in shadow form. A Demi-Shadow appears as an ordinary shadow (the monster), but somewhat more substantial. His touch drains d6 points of strength or dexterity (divided evenly between the two) for d20 rounds. A +3 weapon is needed to hit, and the Demi-Shadow is immune to all spells except the following:

Fireball & Lightning	-1/4 damage
Light	-d20 damage
Continual Light	-d20 + d10/round not dispelled

The Demi-Shadow may use all spells he had when *alive* (except any that produce light). He will only be found in areas of darkness and will avoid lighted areas (unless he can use a Darkness spell, which is an innate ability). At 0 hit points, the Demi-Shadow will flee to his physical body, which will awake in d10 rounds as a VERY angry MU. Any spells cast while in Demi-Shadow form are used up in MU form as well (he doesn't get the spells back).

Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

MUD GOLEM A Mud Golem resembles a stone golem, with the obvious exception that he is made entirely of mud. A mud golem may not change his shape at all; his substance is malleable but always retains the same structure. A +2 weapon is required to hit; anything less just passes through the mud without doing any damage. Fire-based and cold-based spells do half damage and may harden an area of the golem's body. The hardened area may be hit with normal weapons for half damage, and a spell of the opposite temperature cast the following round may shatter that part of the body. No other spells have any effect.

Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

DRAGON, STONE A Stone Dragon is just that — a large dragon made entirely (to all outward appearances) of stone. They are only found in one size (as opposed to other dragons) and age group, and originate on the elemental plane of earth. They are too slow and stupid to cast spells, but most can learn one or two languages. The breath weapon of a Stone Dragon is a sandblast in a 60 degree cone for up to 100 feet. The sand does d20 damage, may blind the victim (save vs. petrification), and may get in the mouth and lungs and choke the victim (no action for d4 rounds — save vs. petrification again). A +3 weapon is required to hit the stony hide of this dragon. It has a 30% magic resistance and only hoards jewels as its treasure. It is too heavy to fly. The spells Stone-to-Flesh and Stone-to-Mud raise the Armor Class of the affected area of the dragon to 1. The Dig spell causes d4 times the level of the Mage casting the spell.

Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

DRAGON, PRISMATIC The Prismatic Dragon (Diamar) is a unique creature that inhabits the first layer of the Nine Hells (he was created as a replacement for Tiamat, who was *permanently slain* in the author's campaign, but could work equally well as her prime consort). He derives his name from the crystal-like scales that cover his 150 foot body. These scales glitter when struck by light, producing a Hypnotic Pattern-like effect. The scales also provide immunity to fire, electric, and acid attacks, and take only half damage from cold-based attacks (observant PC's will notice that during cold attacks, Diamar will close his eyes and mouth to protect them from damage). Diamar also has claws of sharpness (as the sword) and a highly venomous bite (save vs. poison at -5). He can use the breath weapon of any evil dragon, provided it is a color dragon. He has the spell casting abilities of a 30th level MU, a 20th level illusionist, and a 15th level Wu Jen (Oriental Adventures), and has a magic resistance of 75%. As a lesser power (as if he's not bad enough already!), he can use the following spell-like abilities once per round: Polymorph Self, Charm Person, Dispel Magic, Know Align, Teleport, Suggestion. He also has the following innate abilities: Vocalize, Detect Lie, Detect Invisible, Read Magic, Read Languages. He has both a wisdom and intelligence of 20, a charisma of 21, and a comeliness of 22. His single greatest weakness is his vanity. He will never polymorph into anything he considers ugly. A clever MU once bought escape for his entire party by molding a large diamond into a small statue of Diamar and presented it to him. Diamar was so flattered he let the entire party pass unharmed! He prefers to use spells that reflect his nature, like Prismatic Spray, Prismatic Wall, and Chromatic Orb. He should be played as very intelligent, very proud, very evil, and VERY DANGEROUS. Diamar has 300 hit points, 40 Hit Dice, and has a suggested EP value of 80,000 (if killed *permanently*, XP should be 800,000). Creator: Rob Sanders (Y13RCS1@NIU)

HOOK The Hoolk is the result of genetic experimentation. This creature inhabits any region of temperate or warmer climate. The Hoolk are always hungry and prefer human meat. It will continue to attack until dead, and attacks with poisonous claws and fangs. When encountered in their lair, double the numbers will be present along with 1-2 young (20-80% grown) plus a *leader* that gets +1 per die on hit points and +1 to hit, damage, and saving throws. Hoolk are humanoid reptiles with wings. Their scales are green and their heads are smooth. The eyes are yellow and look like the eyes of a snake. In proportion, the build of a hoolk is larger than almost any

human of comparable size (8 feet tall).

Creator: Gary Samek
(C133GES@UTARLVM1)

PLOORIAN Ploorians are half evil cloud giant and half elephant. Ploorians have lost the ability to levitate. The Ploorians hate all other life forms, especially cloud giants. They are thought to be the last remnants of several thousands of cloud giants that dared to confront the gods and demand equal status. The gods punished the giants by torture and then cursed them with the elephants that the giants used as pack beasts. Ploorians have a keen sense of smell and are surprised only on a 1. In any group, one will be considered as *chief* (AC 3, 12 hit dice, very intelligent). Ploorians are 18 feet tall and appear to be a giant/elephant representation of a centaur; the elephant half is normal, but the giant half has a light blue skin and silver hair. It is suspected that the Ploorians will band with the fire and frost giants against the gods in the battle of Ragnarok.

Ploorians are 10% magic resistant.

Str: 23 Int: 9 (chief:11) Wis: 11
Dex: 10 Con: 15 Chr: 3

Concept derived from the Lensman series by E. E. Doc Smith.

Creator: Gary Samek
(C133GES@UTARLVM1)

GRENDEL These amphibians appear much like stegosauri, only smaller and lower, and with big pointed teeth. Curious, intelligent (IQ of about 75) and omnivorous, they have racial memory passed down through DNA/RNA and can understand relatively advanced concepts, such as revenge. They generally range out from a deep pool or slow-moving river, where they spend most of their time, if they smell any disturbance (very good sense of smell, both in water and in air). They are extremely territorial. If attacked or attacking, they can speed up their metabolism many times over, increasing their running speed to as much as 100 mph. In this mode they act as if doubly Hasted and move at 300" This Speed drops their AC to -10 (DEX bonus). They may attack up to 4 different targets while on Speed. The effects last from 2-7 rounds and the Grendel will start to *overheat* after the 3rd round of Speed. There is a 30% chance per round after the 3rd that the Grendel will overheat and drop dead in its tracks. This happens automatically after the 7th round. This heat sensitivity while on Speed causes it to take double damage from fire or heat attacks, while cold based attacks will allow it another 2-7 rounds of Speed (start

over), but do normal damage due to the sudden temperature change.

Any character with Infravision who sees a Grendel going on Speed must save vx. Paralyzation at -3 or be blinded in the Infrared spectrum for d4 rounds. While on Speed, a Grendel may dodge up to 4 missile attacks per round as if it were a Monk of 9th level. If it is raining or very foggy, the chance of overheating is only 5% per round, and the Grendel can go up to 12 rounds before dropping. If immersed in water or snow, the chance is only 2% per round (starting on the 10th round), and the Grendel can go up to the 20th round before dropping.

If the tail attack is a natural 19 or 20, the victim is impaled unless he can roll under half his DEX on a d20 (round down). When impaled, the victim loses d4 hit points per round in blood, loses and DEX bonus to AC, and all attacks are at -5 to hit and -1 on damage. To disengage from the spikes, the victim must roll under half his STR on a d20 (round down).

On a Speeded Charge, the prey of a Grendel must roll for surprise (1-4) or be knocked down for 1-2 rounds and take d6 hit points. This is in addition to any attacks from the Grendel. A Grendel will normally keep fighting until it is at 25% of normal hit points or for 3d4 rounds. Grendels are solitary, meeting only to spawn. The young are born alive in water, and are fishlike and very small (less than 1" at birth). Often 50,000 will be born at once. Once they are 6" or longer, the adults will eat them if no other food is available. After about 3 or 4 months they become amphibious and are recognizable as being Grendels, and will crawl up on the land and attack and eat everything in sight, including each other! Young get no special Charge attack.

Creator: Jeff Fulford (care of Charlie Fineberg (FINEBERG@WUMS))

TRUE TROLL The True Troll seems to be the oldest member of the troll family, and the base stock from which the others sprang. While lacking the regenerative powers of its evil offspring, the True Troll is perhaps even more dangerous, for it is resistant to the spells of all but the most powerful mages and clerics, and because of their thick, stony hide and inherent toughness, take only 1 point of damage for every 2 points done (50% damage reduction). True Trolls are usually found in deserted fens, far from civilization, and although they will occasionally raid isolated settlements, their numbers have been reduced to the point where they do not pose a threat to society — as opposed to wandering adventurers. Greedy, bloodthirsty, and mean, they love to taste the blood

and flesh of humans and demihumans, often pausing for a round in combat to rip the throat out of a victim (requires two claw hits the previous round). If this attack (bite) is successful, the hapless victim loses all but 1d4 hit points and loses 1 hit point every round thereafter until dead or healed. Even then, the victim is incapable of speech or eating solid foods for 2-8 weeks, or until healed through regeneration. True Trolls have both infravision and ultravision with a range of 90'. They speak the languages of trolls, ogres, orcs, and the local common speech (25% of the time). One in 20 (5%) will be magic-user, specializing in necromantic spells and summoning. If using weapons, they prefer the two-handed sword or halberd (with which they are +5 to hit and +13 on damage).

Creator: Jeff Howe (care of Charlie Fineberg (FINEBERG@WUMS))

ANIMATOR Animators are vicious creatures who kill for the pleasure of doing it. Their appearance resembles that of a lich, but with a spectral look. They usually don't leave their lairs, in which they never keep treasure. However, since they're found in inaccessible places (dungeons and ruins), there is a good chance of finding magic items from their unfortunate victims:

30%	Magic Weapon
20%	Magic Shield or Armor
10%	Potion
05%	Miscellaneous

The animator can attack with 2 claws, each of which inflicts a cold chill causing 2-12 damage, plus paralysis unless a save is made. However, they normally attack by animating objects to attack the party. The animated object can be any smaller than human size, and it will attack as a living creature (not as a throw object). The animated object(s) will usually be stones, logs, or anything in sight. All objects will take 25 HP of damage before being destroyed, and will have 2 attacks per round, each doing 1-8 HP. An animator can control up to 5 objects in a range of 120". If an object is destroyed, the Animator will automatically take control of another. The animator is immune to all non-magical weapons and missiles. It is also immune to all spells affecting the mind, and cannot be turned (because it's not undead).

Creator: J. Anotonio Chavez
(BL197903@TECMTYVM)

ALIEN These horrible creatures are found in the deepest of caverns where they prey on unsuspecting adventurers. They have 60' infravision. If found

in a group there will be from 5-20 leather egg-like sacks which pulsate when approached. The eggs contain the face huggers (FH). The FH will attempt to attach to the mouth of a victim and deposit an egg in the victims body. Once attached to a victim the FH must be cut off, releasing the alien's acid upon the victim, inflicting 1d4 of acid damage per round until washed off. It takes 6 turns for the FH to deposit its egg. A Cure Disease will kill the FH with no ill effects if done within 3 turns. A Cone of Cold will cause dormancy in the egg sacks for 2d6 days. The egg will mature in to chest burster (CB) in 1d3 days. The CB will come out of the victims body via the chest (hence the name). The victim is killed instantly, no save! The victim may be resurrected only if a Heal is performed first. The CB matures into an Alien.

Full grown Aliens attack with their claws, bite, and tail (-3 to hit). The mouth attack inflicts an additional 3d4 of acid damage per round until washed off. Anyone viewing an Alien from the front must save vs. magic or be rigid with fright for 1d6 rounds. The Alien is not affected by charm, sleep, feeblemind, polymorph, cold, insanity, death spells/symbols, but take +3 damage from fire and electricity.

Clearly the acid damage is the worst aspect of these creatures. All acid damage may be halved if a save is made against breath weapon. Any hit upon an Alien causes a spray of acid in a 5' radius (all in range take 3d4 points of damage per round until the acid is washed off). The Aliens communicate telepathically. They are VERY smart and cunning.

Creator: "ToeJam" (C471040@UMCVMB)

SILVER TWIST A silver twist is considered more of an odd phenomenon than a monster. The twists are thought to be the result of a backfired experiment in magic. Appearing as a constantly shimmering mobius strip, the twist can stretch into a fairly thin 12' long, 2' wide rectangle or expand outward into a 12' diameter, 2' depth cylinder. Its size and relatively clumsy means of locomotion make it an easy target.

The danger associated with it comes from the twist's magic. If a successful strike is made by the twist, the victim is transported to a random location as if a Dimension Door spell was cast upon the victim. If a character strikes the silver twist, there is a 2 in 6 chance that the character will be equally affected by a Dimension Door. The effect of the Dimension Door is as if a 15th level mage cast it to its maximum distance of 450 yards (1350 feet). There is, however, a random direction associated with the effect. Roll 2d8 (one at a time) and use the table below to deter-

mine where in 3 dimensional space the receiver goes:

die 1	Direction	Θ	die 2	Direction	Φ
1	N	90	1	Up	0
2	NE	45	2	Up	45
3	E	0	3	Flat	90
4	SE	315	4	Down	135
5	S	270	5	Down	180
6	SW	225	6	Down	225
7	W	180	7	Flat	270
8	NW	135	8	Up	315

- Radius of Rho = 450 Yards (1450 Feet)
- Location in 3-dimensional space is given by:

$$X = \rho \times \sin(\Phi) \times \cos(\Theta)$$

$$Y = \rho \times \sin(\Phi) \times \sin(\Theta)$$

$$Z = \rho \times \cos(\Phi)$$

- Double check the calculation with the formula:

$$\rho = \sqrt{X^2 + Y^2 + Z^2}$$

The first die roll gives the direction in the X-Y plane for the first point of reference; the second roll gives the direction in a plane perpendicular to the X-Y plane. The point determined is the destination for the victim/striker. A truly vicious alternative is to have two more dice rolled to determine the bodily orientation once the destination is reached (you can make this table up on your own). If the destination point is found to be a solid object, then the *Astral Plane* rule of Dimension Door applies. The weight restriction rules of Dimension Door also apply. The best way to oppose a silver twist is to attack it in a non-physical (magical) manner. Better still, running away never hurts.

Creator: Jeff Contompasis
(JCONTOMP@TUFTS)

“Never send a monster to do the work of an evil genius.”

— Joe Block
jpb@umbio.med.miami.edu

The Grasslands of Merakai

Mark Hassman

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Behold gentle reader, the Grasslands, a place of wonder and beauty, yet also a land of danger and death where the only sure laws are those of nature, eat or be eaten... and so the saying goes. If you judge yourself bold enough to survive, just remember that Hassman is watching, and that the next blood curdling scream may be your own. Many thanks to Boudewijn Wayers for the original compiling.

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1 The Geography of the Grasslands of Merakai

The Grasslands of Merakai are a large set of plains which cover the central portion of a small continent. They are similar to the Great Plains of the United

States. Upon these plains are six settled towns or villages. Other than the areas immediately around the towns, the Grasslands are relatively wild and dangerous.

The Grasslands cover an area of 400 miles x 400 miles. Only one major river enters the grasslands and that is near the capital city of Dresan. Various small streams appear on the plains either from the mountains to the north or from the aquifer under the grasslands. To the north of the Grasslands is a large chain of mountains which arise between the northern coast of the continent and the northern border of the Grasslands of Merakai. West of the grasslands, the land changes into a brushy scrub with a canyons and an increase in woody vegetation (scrub oak, junipers etc.). East of the Grasslands is a cold desert dominated by sagebrush, creosote bush, and pinon pines. Below the grasslands is Korton forest.

The Thornbrush River is the largest river on the continent and is formed from its two forks on the western side of the Grasslands. At the fork sits the capital city, Dresan. The river is navigable by river boat all the way from Dresan to the coastal city Martillan.

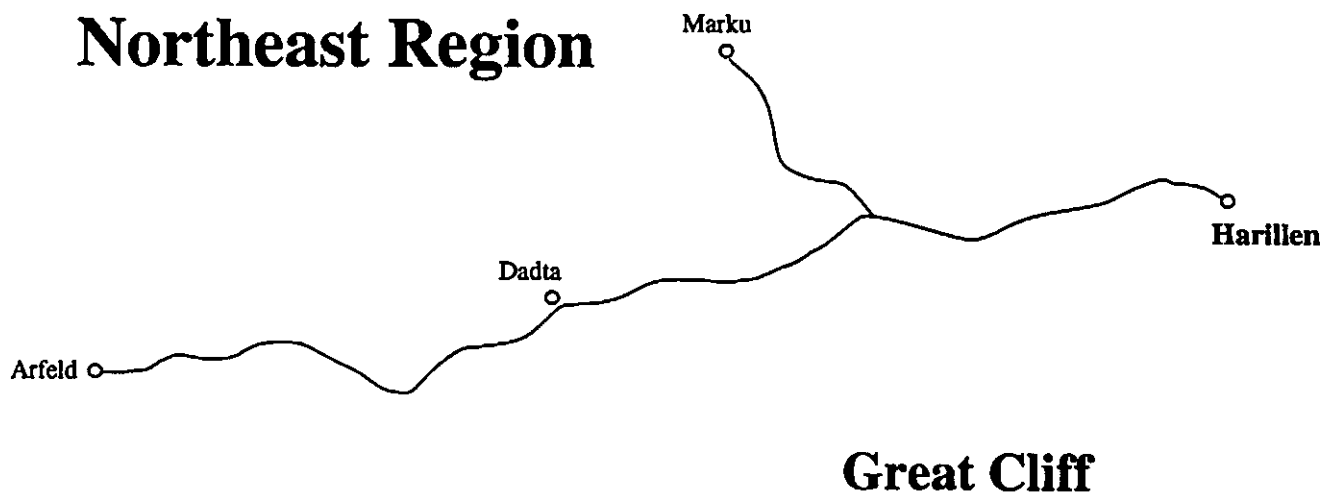
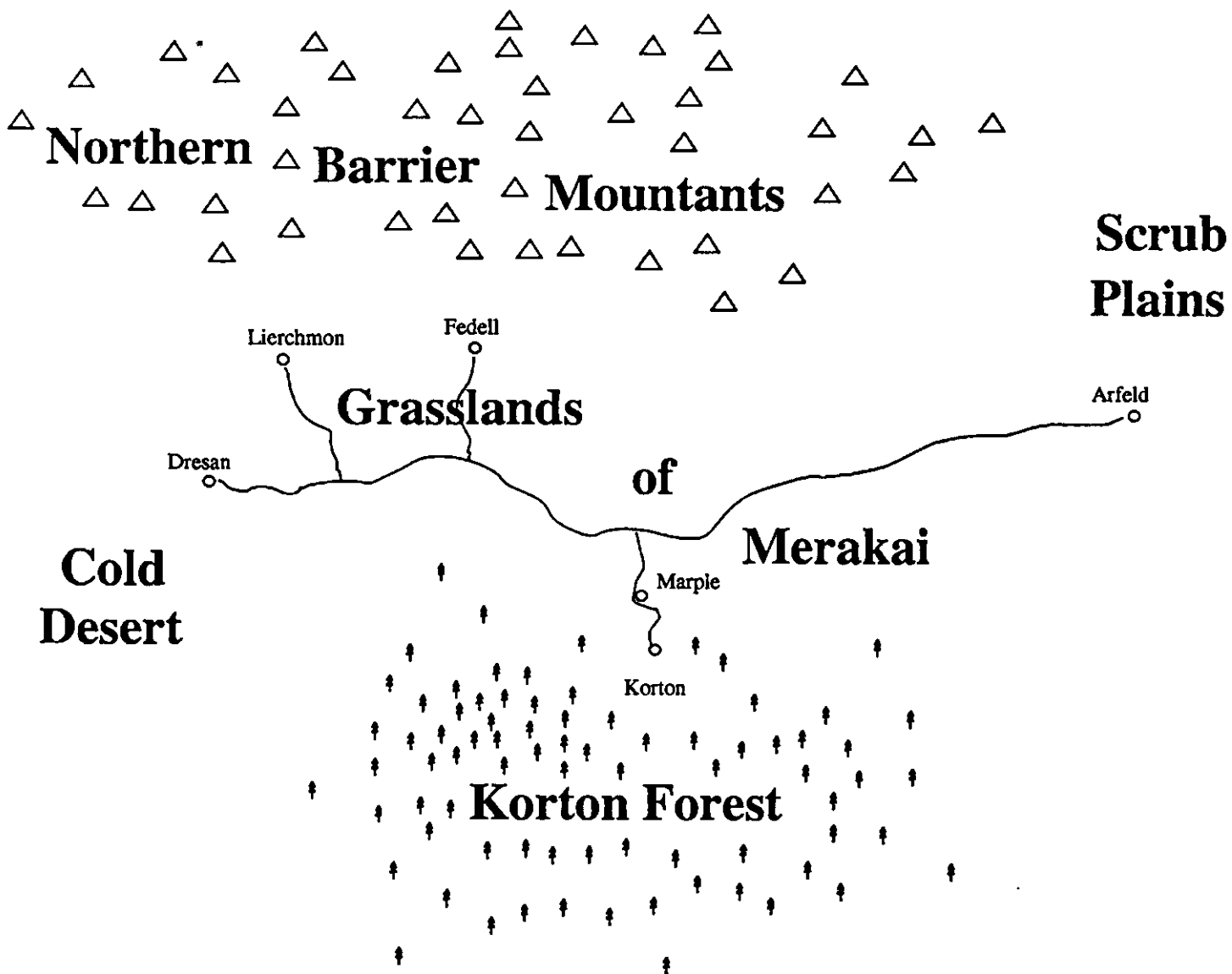
2 Descriptions of the Town Areas

2.1 Lierchmon

This small village has about 35-40 buildings. Most items can be purchased here but everything is 125-150% of the book cost. The trail to Dresan is well used and is usable by wagons and carts. Most of the populus is human though other demi-humans are scattered within the population.

2.1.1 Encounter Suggestions

Lierchmon is a pretty small village with quite a few problems. To begin with, there have been several murders right in the village. No one knows what has happened but several citizens have disappeared and



several areas showed signs of a struggle. This stems from the group of Troglydites living in the basement of an abandoned inn called the Roaring Mug. They wander late at night ambushing unwary citizens.

Secondly, several visiting clerics have been poisoned. Many clerics have fallen ill after about 2 days in Lierchmon. They all have the same symptoms but nothing ties them together. Actually, the cook at the Red Merc Inn has been slipping poison into their food which takes 1-2 days for the affect to occur. The poison can kill but it usually just incapacitates the cleric for 1-8 days. The cook, Snivel Graltar, is a 3rd level assassin who despises clerics. He will attempt to poison any cleric who travels through Lierchmon and stays at the Red Merc Inn. Also, once he has poisoned the cleric, he will sneak into the cleric's room and rob him blind while the cleric is still delirious from the poison.

2.2 Fedell

Fedell is a wild town of 50-60 buildings. It is a very rough city with many thieves and adventurer types. Most of the business charge 175% book cost for supplies and various items. The proximity of Fedell to the barrier mountains makes the area very difficult to civilize.

2.2.1 Encounters for Fedell

- One of the few poor farmers in the area has had a terrible misfortune. His wheat field has been invaded by a hill of giant ants. These ants wander about the area eating all the vegetation which is beginning to cause a food shortage in the town. The council of merchants has offered a reward to any group of adventurers who will destroy the ant-hill. The reward is about 500gp for the body of the queen ant. Follow the guidelines for the ant population printed in the Monster Compendium. Run several encounters of worker ants in the field and then a few warrior ant encounters as the PC's make their way toward the hill. Eventually, the PC's will need to fight their way inside the ant-hill and kill the queen. This ends the scenario — except for getting the large queen's body back to the city. Remember if the PC's destroy the body of the queen (ie by fire) no reward will be given.
- The PC's are hanging out in one of the several inns/taverns in Fedell when a group of wandering bandits hit the town. A portion of the bandit group will bust into the tavern with swords drawn. They intend to rob the bar and make off

with the expensive alcohol not to mention any women who may be in there (PC women can be subject to this). If the PC's destroy the first group of bandits another set will show up to find out where the first is. Or the PC's may enter into the street where the bandits will attempt to run them down. Throw a few NPC's into the bandit group and have them escape — this gives the PC's someone to chase down. My PC's followed a couple of NPC's clear into a cavern system in the mountains!!

2.3 Arfeld

Arfeld is an outpost of civilization lying only a few miles within the bounds of the Grasslands of Merakai. Arfeld is a very small town (15-20 buildings); the basis of life here are a few farmers, an inn, a general store, a blacksmith, and few other odd merchants.

2.3.1 Encounters for Arfeld

- The foremost rumour within the town are of the towns Dadta and Marku to the west (into the scrub area). The rumors say that anyone who travels to these areas never returns. There is a small trail leading west out of Arfeld which is very overgrown due to lack of use. It leads to the Wayward Inn. The inn is the last stand of the humans who used to dwell in the area. Very recently, a large force of hobgoblins descended from the mountains and swept over Dadta and Marku. They have taken over both towns and are living off the stores of food and other supplies the fleeing humans left. Many of the settlers who remained in the towns are now dead or have been enslaved. Let rumors slowly trickle into the PC's. Enough rumors will make them journey into the area. All told, there are about 500 hobgoblins divided between the two towns and wandering about the surrounding areas. Killing hobgoblins should keep the PC's busy for a couple of weeks. Eventually, after enough hobgoblins are slain, they will retreat to the mountains. Of course, other NPC's will be in the area competing for the treasure (and gratitude of the old settlers).
- The second scenario which I have prepared to spawn from Arfeld is the introduction of the Great Cliff. Many years ago, an earthquake caused a section of the scrub area to sink about 350'. This caused a great cliff of limestone to be exposed. Weathering has since opened a variety of caves up and carved ledges from the soft

stone. Utilizing these caves for lairs, many different encounters can be set up. The cliff varies from 200-500' tall and averages 350'. It runs almost 40 miles and is potted by numerous caves.

One idea for the Great Cliff is to have the PC's climbing along trying to reach a large cave opening about 50' above them. The cave is actually the lair for a wyvern who just happens to come home while the PC's are on a very thin ledge, say 1.5'. This will make the characters scream as the wyvern repeatedly dives, knocking PC's off the ledge and letting them plummet a couple hundred feet.

To make the climbing even more difficult, a had a nice spring thunderstorm roll into the area. It rained quite a while, dropping 1" of precipitation. Try adding a little hail with the rain! :)

At ground level of the Great Cliff, a nice tribe of minotaurs make their home. This is a great encounter since the minotaurs love to appear at various levels from cave openings and drop rocks & debris on the players.

2.4 Dresan

Dresan is the capital city of the Grasslands of Merakai. It holds the king of this province, the head of the royal church and the school of the mages. Dresan is by far the largest city of the Grasslands and is home to the majority of the people in the area with over 500 buildings encompassed within its walls. Most everything can be purchased in Dresan at approximately book price.

Dresan is positioned on the East and West Forks of the Thornbrush River where they come together. The city is spread across all three natural divisions and the culture of each section is separated from the others by the size of the river. The left bank of the western fork is home to the humanoids who are not 'civilized' races. Yes, that's right you can find everything from goblins, to orcs, hobgoblins, ogres, half-ogres, and even a few hill giants in that sector of the city. These chaotic races control the western bank so it is understandable that it is dangerous for humans and demi-humans to visit that sector, especially at night. The middle sector is the old city. This portion is completely surrounded by 40' tall wall. Access is permitted only during the day and visitors without night passes from the various organizations are escorted out of Mid City at dusk. The royal family, the royal church, and the high magus, all reside in Mid City. The right bank is the home to the civilized races. They try and keep the other

races on the western bank. Here is the area where most PC's will visit and reside when they are not out adventuring.

Dresan is still a very chaotic city where sites unknown to civilized races take place commonly. The only region that is under control of the law abiding portion of the population is Mid-City. It is not really in control of the city but is instead a fortress of law with in an otherwise chaotic hell. The Mid-city residents believe in protecting themselves in order to advance the laws. They do not allow any non-resident into Mid-city with out a pass. The pass is only obtainable with in Mid-city unless it is applied for in writing which can take up to 8 weeks to process. Many lawful mages have made homes with in Mid-city and the larger temples all have buildings there also. These 'law abiders' are currently trying to impose their beliefs upon the other sectors of Dresan but have not been very successful.

2.4.1 Western Sector

The western portion of the capital city is by far the roughest area within the city borders. Humanoids of all races are commonplace here with hobgoblins and goblins running rampant in the streets. The only law here is survival of the fittest. Only PC's with substantial power (or a death wish) go here. West Sector is home to corruption and the outright influences of chaos. The area is extremely dangerous during the day but becomes the pits of hell during the night hours. Assassins walk the streets looking for people with a few gold to steal. For every 10 minutes on the street at night, there is a 20% chance that someone is pick pocketed. During the day, this chance is only 10%. Killing and murder is a normality. A murder occurs about once every five minutes in this sector.

2.4.2 Eastern Sector

The east part of Dresan is intermediate between Mid-city and the western third. It is home to the majority of the middle class and to the larger share of the wharfs and shipping industry. People who do not share the beliefs of the Mid-city residents but want to remain fairly secure in their homes tend to settle here. Small temples abound in this section with deities of every origin. If the god has been mentioned in history, there is problem so place of worship within this sector. Crime is at a much lower rate here. This decline is mostly due to the faction of red-robed mages who have a guild here. They tend to keep things pretty much under control so they can continue their research in relative peace. Irregular patrols are also

part of the eastern section with the chance of seeing one at about 25% per hour. However, the patrols have no formal routes and areas of patrol are completely random. The middle class business men abound here also. Most of the supply shops for adventurers lie in this area including armorers, weapon-smiths, alchemist, general goods and almost anything else the average person would need. In addition, the 'head offices' of the Dresan thieves' guild are in the East sector. Various fronts are actually outlets of the guilds and contacts are fairly easy to obtain. East Sector is truly the commerce portion of Dresan and is the common place for PC groups to base from. A variety of inns and taverns are available.

2.4.3 Interaction between Sectors

Movement between the various sections of Dresan is relatively easy. There are numerous ferry operators along the shores of the Thornbrush River. The charge is generally 2 silvers per person and 5 per horse to travel between Eastern and Western sectors. If one wants to go from a lower portion of Dresan up to Mid-city, the price ranges up to 2000% of normal rates. Only a few ferrymen operate from the shores of Mid-city and they also charge outrageous prices to take people from Mid-city to the lower shores. Unfortunately, there are currently no bridges between the various sectors of Dresan due to the size of the Thornbrush. (However, the gnomes are working on a 'hugesuspensionbridgetogocrossthebigriver'.) Within each sector, walking or riding are the most common modes of transportation. Although in Eastern and Mid-city, carriages are available for special travel circumstances.

Trade is a popular business within Dresan's lower two sections. Commerce of all kinds takes place between these two portions of the city. Mid-city rarely imports anything and when they do it comes from the eastern half of Dresan. Mid-city has never been reported to export anything to the lower class residents of the town. West Dresan is the entry point for raw materials. Miners and such bring their goods to Dresan from the Barrier mountains and usually stop in West sector for a drink. Bars frequently trade credit for the materials and then sell these supplies to the craftsmen of the Eastern Section. East-trades finished goods to the folk on the western bank and usually is the importer of the food stuffs from the farmers on the plains. This food is then distributed with the low quality produce ending up in cheap inns on the western side.

2.4.4 General Other Information

Most of the buildings in Dresan are made of wood as it is less expensive to have transported the great distances to Dresan from the source. More expensive buildings (eg Mid-city) are made of stone but these are rare occasions. To build a stone structure in Dresan requires that the rock be carted all the way from the Barrier Mountains. This is at least a 3 day journey one way and the Grasslands are no place for those weak souls to be traveling. However, some stone is always available and more foolish merchants are gathering it all the time.

The streets of Dresan are narrow and wind around quite a bit. Most of the streets in the lower sections of Dresan are unpaved (not cobbled) except for some of the more major travel paths and the open market squares. The streets of Mid-City are all cobbled and are quickly repaired if any damage occurs. The Mid-city streets are fairly straight and more organized. Mid-city is of newer construction and was planned instead of just growing haphazardly.

All of the standard races can be found in Dresan though some are very rare indeed. Most races that are generally looked down upon face the same fate except in the Western sector where anything and anyone are tolerated. Even the humanoid races are allowed within the western section.

2.5 Encounters for Dresan

- There is a bar in the western sector of Dresan which is run by a full blooded ogre. A variety of female "companions" can be purchased for an evenings entertainment. The ogre is especially mean and will watch strange customers. If he notices that they have quite a lot of money, he will set up an ambush. First he will contact a few of his ogre buddies and they will follow the PC's. After about five blocks, Ironarm (he wears spiked metal forearm protectors) will spring from an alleyway and the other ogres will close from behind. The ogres use two-handed swords when attacking. Don't forget to use that 18/00 strength and the bonuses to strike from behind.
- A mage from Mid-City has lost a book in the Thornbrush river and would like to recover it. A reward of 500gp is offered for the books return. He knows the basic location where the text is from a few scrying spells. He also offers free potions of water breathing to those adventurers looking for the book. The book is wrapped in seal skin (waterproof) which is dyed black. It is lying in the cabin of a riverboat

which sank several years ago. The text is actually a 4th level spell book. Remember metal armor does not function underwater to well and all attacks are made at half speed as is normal movement. Duration times of potions is critical for this scenario. (You cannot drink potions underwater.) Also, it is a good idea to re-read the Dungeon Master's sections on underwater combat and spell use.

The boat where the spell book is located was once a river boat where upper class citizens traveled into the wilds of Merakai. It had gambling parlors and expensive wines along with lush accommodations for its wealthy passengers. During an unusual storm, the captain (who tipped a few to many that evening) ran the boat into the rocks at the fork of the Thornbrush River. It caved in a large section of the boat's hull and lead to a quick demise for most of the passengers. This caused the generation of the main encounter on the ship. One of the passengers was a wealthy thief who died most horribly. As the ship sank, the water rushed in and held the door to the cabin shut so he could not get out. Then water slowly seeped in and the man drown very slowly. This early demise was so harsh that the thief became a Revenant and haunts the ship for eternity. The Revenant is not an extremely difficult encounter but it keeps coming back to hassle the PC's. Also, the revenant is a real stickler to kill while underwater.

Encounter two for the ship takes place in the hold where the rocks penetrated. Inside the area was where the wine casks were stored while the boat was in operation and is where the Giant Fresh Water Octopus now makes his home. The fresh water octopus will add a twist to the scenario. Other suggestions for "wandering encounters" are the fresh water scrag (listed under troll) and the koalingh (listed under hobgoblin).

- The last scenario involves a merchant. Heldo Braggart is an "alchemist" who specializes in magical oils. He readily tells customers that he can make any type of magical oil. Heldo actually believes that he can but in actuality, Heldo has only discover a segment of the refining process which divides crude oil into several different layers of fine/good quality oil. They are not magical and do not confer any bonuses but stop all rusting of weapons or armour. One of the oils is actually greek fire but Heldo does not know this and happens to sell that one as oil of fiery burning. Make up types of oils from anything. Even

give a few 'bonuses' here and there but most of all, charge exorbitant prices and unload the treasure from those gullible PC's.

2.6 Marple

This is a small town of 60-70 buildings. All supplies are 150-175% of the original cost. Rare items will be 200% or more. Marku is a relatively calm town. It sits along a major trade road which ends at Korton 25 mi to the south. The road leads north then west and eventually ends in Dresan.

2.6.1 Encounters for Marple

- One well-to-do farmer has had a few problems lately. He has been discovering places in his fields where something has been burrowing. This is really cutting into his profit margin so he is hiring adventurers to solve the problem. His explanation to the people is that burrowing owls have invaded his farm. Burrowing owls are, in fact, in one field but are a minor problem. The major problem is that the farmer has started farming over the field of an ancient battle. The 100th anniversary of the battle is drawing close and the undead are restless literally. The type of undead should be decided according to the party level but make it a strong encounter with a mixture of at least three types of undead. I used ghouls, ghastrs, and some 4HD zombies. If you would like to get really nasty, try throwing in an evil cleric who has coated the zombies claws with poison (not deadly, but damage causing w/ or w/o a save.

Have the party arrive in the area just a few days prior to the anniversary of the battle. Then each night have various encounters with the undead. Let them arise just after sunset and wander aimlessly around including in town. Anything that is living is in serious trouble and will be attacked on sight. The undead will return to their graves just before sunset.

2.7 Korton

Korton is fairly well described in the Korton Forest material (see below). It is a small town with 50-60 buildings and any purchased supplies are at least 150% normal cost. The scenarios for spawning from Korton should lead the PC's into Korton Forest for the set encounters (again, see below). Other than that, Korton sits on the forest-plains transition. It is a small town but one that can protect its owns. Most

of the populus distrust halflings because two years ago a group of 30 of the little buggers wandered into town and didn't leave for a week. When they did leave, so did half of the citizens material possessions. Therefore, no halflings are allowed in the bars or most stores for that matter. However, they can get food delivered to them in the street for 300% the normal cost.

Encounters for Korton

2.7.1 Werebear Scenario

This encounter is placed in a small forest called the Korton Forest just south of a large grassland (The Grasslands of Merakai). It is one of several encounters which can occur in the woods. Place this encounter on one side of the woods as there is are other encounters.

As the PC's are strolling through some fairly uncivilized woods, they come across a small cabin in a nice open glade. The glade has obviously been expanded by the work of some humanoid. Along with the cabin stands a small barn with an attached corral. On one side of the cabin is a stack of logs.

The corral holds two draft horses which are feeding on some hay. An extra supply of feed for the horses is stacked along the outside of the corral. In the barn is a wagon which the 'lumber jack' uses to haul his logs to a small town north of the woods. A barely visible wagon track leads out of the glade in a north-westerly direction (a ranger or other tracking-type PC would immediately notice it but it is otherwise undetectable to the untrained eye).

From behind the cabin, the PC's hear the distinct sound of someone chopping wood. This is about 100 yards into the forest directly behind the cabin. Its source is the 'lumberjack'. He is splitting firewood for his own use. If the PC's approach in a friendly manner, he will greet them and offer to let them camp that night within his glade which he assures the PC's is absolutely safe. He also feeds the PC's a hearty stew for supper of lamb, carrots and potatoes.

The 'lumberjack' is not openly hostile but will be extremely offended if the PC's do not eat his meal or if they post a watch at night. Any slight opposition to his hospitality will offend the 'lumberjack' and he will attack the PC's at night in his werebear form. Otherwise, he will just leave his cabin for his nightly hunt (check to see if any of the PC's notice) in his werebear form.

The lumberjack is actually a werebear taken from the 2ed Monster Compendium. If a stronger encounter is desired, add a wife for the lumberjack or

possibly a second lumberjack. Werebears are Chaotic Good and will cooperate. This one is just easily offended.

Inside the cabin, are rustic yet comfortable living materials. The table is massive with four huge legs. Each leg is hollow, and detachable. Any treasure the werebear has acquired is hidden in one of these four legs. In a nicely crafted china closet, are two potions next to some dishes. They are obscured from view by a large bronze platter. Partly buried in a corner of the cabin is a large cask of Dwarven ale. An empty mug sits on top of the cask.

2.7.2 Seriphilia scenario

This is another encounter/scenario which occurs in Korton Forest. Korton Forest lies south of a large grassland (Grasslands of Merakai). The small village, Korton, is on the northern forest-plains transition zone.

The most interesting aspect of this village is the common rumour of a middle-aged lady and her beautiful daughter who live in the western part of Korton Forest. The lady, Seriphilia, makes potions of healing and sells them to adventurers at low prices. Her husband, a mage, was killed by a group of marauding orcs a few years ago but his magic saved his wife and daughter.

The small hut where the lady lives is very old and in disrepair. Her daughter is not at home — she traveled to the capital of the Grasslands of Merakai for supplies.

The lady, however, is here and is very comely. She is in fact an annis and uses her polymorph/change self ability to appear as a half-elf/human woman. She is very beautiful and offers the PC's healing potions for a small price. If anyone in the party is injured, she will give that person a potion — it causes sleep not healing. The potion will make the person fall into a coma for 1-10 days if a save vs. poison is failed. If successful, the imbiber is still led to believe it was a healing potion but no effect occurs.

After the lady sells potions to the PC's (hoping they will drink them and fall asleep) she offers any PC's remaining awake a meal or drink as they prefer. She explains that the healing potions have a sedative effect and that is why the sleeping PC's fell asleep. Any food or beverage she provides is laced with the same sleeping poison. All saves vs. the sleep poison are at a -2.

Seriphilia will wait until the odds are in her favour and will then attack the remaining PC's. Her strength and HP make her a very tough opponent.

Treasure should be given on an equal level to the monster.

At this point, Seriphilia is looking for halfling toes, hairs from a dwarven beard (preferably female), and the ears of a gnome to complete a potion she is working on.

All information on the annis (hag) is taken from the second edition Monster Compendium. Selection of the particular type is annis is left up to the DM according to the party strength. In order to increase the difficulty of the encounter, allow Seriphilia's daughter to be present also. In my campaign, the daughter was actually human and did not know of her mother's true heritage. The Daughter is a mage (5-6th level) and will hire assassins to track down her mother's killers.

The hut contains various furniture 2d8+6 potions of sleep, 2d4 other potions, 1d3 miscellaneous magic items and various coinage.

2.7.3 Goblin/Orc scenario

The PC's should be bumbling along looking for something to do when they hear a large commotion up ahead. Acting as most PC's do, they will sneak up and see what's going on. When they get close, they will see two groups of humanoids in a major battle. This encounter works best at night when PC's cannot determine what race they are.

Anyway, the groups are one of goblins and one of orcs (or it could be hobgoblins and bugbears). They are scouting/hunting parties which ran across each other in the woods. As soon as the PC's get within sight of the battle at least one member of each group will spot them. At that point, both groups decide to attack the PC party since they hate humans, dwarves, etc. much more than they hate each other.

In order to complicate this a little, the DM should allow the PC's time to decide if they want to fight on either side, leave, or just watch the fight. If they choose to leave or to watch, have them get spotted immediately. If they jump in the fight on either side, continue the battle for a couple of rounds before both groups center their efforts on the PC party.

For a variation on theme and a more difficult encounter use owlbears and trolls, ogres and trolls, or other high level monsters. Of course, a third group of some humanoid monster arriving in the midst of combat really leaves the PC's in a bind.

3 The Northeast Region

This region is very wild and rough. Recently, Hobgoblins have been streaming out of the east end of

the Barrier Mountains and have been raping and pillaging ever since (see scenario A for Arfeld in Cities of Merakai). Current conditions show the hobgoblins are on top but are not very organised. Treat the area as unpatrolled/non-civilized on encounter tables.

3.1 Geography, Population & Adventure

Arfeld, lies inside the transition of the grasslands to the scrub area. Marku, Harillen, and Dadta are in the scrub plains area. There are more bushes and dwarf trees in this area due to its closer proximity to the coast.

As a matter of fact, Harillen is only 2-3 miles from the coast line and lies on a semi-navigable river. Only small boats and river boats can make it upstream from the ocean. However, most of the boats that existed have been destroyed by the hobgoblins.

South of Harillen is Great Cliff (see below). The hobgoblins have not yet traveled this far south and probably will not. Further south of Great Cliff, is the beginning of the Cardas Mountains. The Cardas Mountains follow the eastern coastline of this island continent except for one area of shallow warm sea that creates the Olkivan Swamp.

The surviving residents of the area have fled the towns and are currently occupying an inn on the crossroads. The Wayward Inn is built at the crossroads to serve customers traveling either way. It was built from stone and strategically placed so defending it would be easier. After the hobgoblin attacks, about 75 people fled to the safety of the inn and supplies are dwindling. A group of about 35 hobgoblins will attack 2 hours after the PC's arrive at the inn. The people in the inn are suspicious of strangers especially those that travel in these dangerous times. If the PC's help defend the inn, they are given free room and board. Rumors abound in the inn of Great Cliff, the destruction of the towns, and of various minor monsters in the mountains.

Since this region has never been tamed it should have lots of wandering monsters. The area is very wild and should be played that way.

4 The Great Cliff

The Great Cliff is located east of the Grasslands of Merakai about 65 miles southeast of Arfeld. A few adventures for Great Cliff can be found with the city of Arfeld. Following in this chapter are some further scenarios for the Great Cliff and the surrounding area.

4.1 The Cave

Along with the ideas for wyvern and the minotaurs, here is another Great Cliff lair.

Almost clear to the top of the cliff is a very small cave entrance. It is about 4' tall and has small footprints leading into it. The occupant of the cave is a halfling who has a slightly insane streak in his personality. The halfling is a Magic-User/Thief of medium levels but has retired to this cave due to his dislike of most people. He is relatively wealthy but almost everything of value is some heavy art object. Bigley (the halfling) got these objects into his cave using a winch with 600' of silk rope attached to it. This rope is cached under a pile of rock debris near the entrance to the cave.

Bigley uses the winch for other purposes also. If PC's drop ropes from the top of the cliff, Bigley attaches the rope to the winch and begins to tighten it. Due to the leverage the winch adds, Bigley can break almost any rope this way. Roll percent dice to determine where the rope breaks. His next action will be to determine where the PC's are coming from. If there is more than one rope descending from the cliff top, He will cast a Grease spell to cover as many ropes as possible. If the PC's are climbing up the cliff, he will grease the ledges and cliff face thereby making it difficult to climb. After that, he will retrieve several flasks of oil from the cave and attempt to drop them on the PC's as they climb up. Treat PC's as unarmoured for this because he is just trying to coat them. Also, any Dexterity bonus is negated due to the circumstances. If oiled PC's are still climbing, Bigley will cast burning hands on one of them in order to light them on fire.

The cave has three rooms: a bedroom with a locked and trapped chest which has coinage in it, a study with a desk that has spellbooks and several scrolls in it, and a cooking/living area. The art objects are scattered throughout all three rooms. If Bigley did not use the winch to break ropes, it will still be hidden in the alcove behind the debris. Most of the Art Objects are too heavy or too bulky for the PC's to even think about carrying down. The bedroom has the chest with some coinage (not much, Bigley spends all his wealth on Art).

Remember the insane streak: Bigley used a fireball spell when the PC's reached the cave mouth. It expanded within the cave, frying two PC's, himself and two-thirds of the art.

4.2 The Gnomes

To the far eastern edge of the Great Cliff there was once a clan of gnomes who lived mid-way in the cliff

in a large number of inter-connected caves. Here is their tale of woe and the scenario.

The PC's should be traveling along the top of the cliff looking at the edge for some excitement. Well, they see what appears to be some kind of wooden structure which hangs over the side of the cliff. As they get closer, they discover a wooden platform which supports a huge iron pot. A rope (very thick) is attached to the handle of this great pot and then it goes through a pulley and is finally tied off on a handle attached to the pot's side. This is actually a lift and the only access to the gnome lair. Each gnome has a personal mini-winch which attaches to the pot's handle and is used to lower or raise the pot. Unfortunately, the PC's don't have a winch. A PC can successfully use the pot for transportation if his strength is high enough for him to be able to lift his weight, his equipment's weight, and the 400 pound pot. The rope attached to pot is long enough for the PC to lower it to the gnomes platform 150' below just by moving hand over hand on the rope. If a PC who is not strong enough to do this unties the rope from the handle, the pot will plummet downward. There is a 50% chance that the gnomes "safety mechanism" will catch the PC & pot. This is a net which has not been perfected yet.

Anyway, there is a similar platform 150' down the cliff which sits at the opening of a cave. Upon landing here, the PC's will immediately smell sickness, decay and death. Inside the cave are 23 gnomes in various chambers all of them appear very sick. All of them have been stricken by the plague. There is a 10% chance the PC's will contract the disease per round cumulative up to 80%. The gnomes are wealthy as they have a mine which is deep in the cliff (electrum mine). If the PC's have a cleric who can heal the disease, the gnomes will give each party member two-10 pound bars of electrum. If the party cannot heal the gnomes, they just ask the PC's to stay long enough to bury the dead. If the PC's agree, the last gnome alive will reveal the hidden cache of fifty-six 10 pound electrum bars. If the PC's kill any gnomes or do not agree the gnomes will not tell anything even under torture. The disease causes a delirious state which gets worse if pain is inflicted.

The electrum is actually deep in the gnome lair. It is hidden behind a series of 3 secret shifting walls. It is not in chests but just rests in stacks in a large room behind the consecutive hidden walls.

5 The Barrier Mountains

5.1 Geography

Like most barrier mountain chains, this one is north of the Grasslands of Merakai. They are very high and also very steep. However, the mountains are not in the northern wastes but they start about 50 miles inland and continue to the very edge of the coast.

The mountain chain continues along the length of the northern coast and gradually fades into the grasslands along its southern face. The closest village to the mountains is Lierchmon (about 35 miles from the base of the mountains).

5.2 The Stronghold

Deep in the barrier mountains is a large keep which is extremely well defended and in a very strategic setting. It is the home of a monastery of sorts. The keep is the last stronghold of the followers of an evil god (any CE god will work). The keep is home to a brotherhood of 42 knights which are actually anti-paladins. Each knight holds a rank and the upper level knights are very powerful. The Grandmaster Knight has a +5 Unholy Avenger and +5 Full Plate Armour with +5 shield. Other than him the ranks work slowly downward with magic according to their level. Along with the circle of knights, are 64 clerics of the god in the congregation (similar levels along with ranks). Besides these, there are various magic users, monks, and other followers who base out of the keep.

The knights are bonded during the knighting ceremony and any loss of life to a single knight will be felt by all the other knights. A group of followers will immediately be sent out to seek out the person who slew the knight and inflict revenge.

5.3 Adventure

I currently have a PC who is playing one of the knights of the circle but other than that, I would have the PC party meet one of the lower level knights along with a mage, a cleric and a monk follower. If the PC's kill the knight, then you can continually run them into stronger groups from the Keep. This will build into an antagonist thereby forcing the PC's to try and eliminate the problem when they are higher levels.

5.4 Glade Of The Giants

This glade is very large and is located in a valley with mountains on three sides. The glade opens to

the south but also has exits to the northeast and northwest. The mountains are very rocky and difficult to climb. The forest is similar to the Englemann Spruce/Sub-Alpine Fir forests of today. Buried in the forest in the sides of the mountains are numerous cave entrances. These caves have been widened to allow access for the large occupants. The glade is home to about 35 mountain giants. (If these giants are converted to 2ed AD&D like the other giants add 4HD to the original listing in Fiend Folio. That makes them 16HD.) This is a very difficult encounter for even high level parties.

The PC's are traveling through the mountains and a "wandering monster" happens. Two Mountain Giants attack the PC's. The giants were about 4 miles from the glade hunting when they found the PC party. These giants should be lower hp monsters to lure the PC's into the glade. An obvious trail leads to the glade. When the PC's arrive at the glade 1-8 giants will be frolicking in the central region while the remainder of the giants are in or near their cave homes. As the battle heats up, more giants will appear each round (1d4) until it is obvious the PC's are outnumbered and about to lose terribly. Remember mountain giants do a wonderful 4-40 HP of damage per attack and a 16 HD monster has a THAC0 of 5.

5.5 The Citadel

5.5.1 Location

North of Fedell at the transition zone between the foothills and the mountains. The citadel sits in a valley between two mountains.

At a distance, the citadel looks like a normal keep set in a mountain valley. Something however appears very strange. The keep appears to be sitting slightly above the normal height of the ground.

In actuality, the keep was once a stronghold for a powerful evil warlord but he has long (stress long) since been defeated. During the battle, the combined strength of the good and neutral mages utilized powerful magical spells to lift the keep from its normal resting place. Needless to say, this disorganized the enemy and drastically lowered the moral of his army. Being lifted from the ground, keep and all, tends to unnerve even the best soldiers. Anyway, as the PC's approach they should begin to get the feeling that the keep is not quite normal. At a hundred yards, the PC's will be able to determine that the keep has been lifted from the earth. Many buildings have been toppled and others are leaning at such angles that they could collapse at any time.

5.5.2 Current Conditions

The present occupants of the keep are a mage and a cleric both very evil. They are combining their abilities in order to create an army of undead warriors. They are still in the early stages of development. The outlay of keep is just a small keep with two structurally sound towers. One houses the mage and his apprentices and the other is home to the cleric and his acolytes and other associates. The main building of the keep is where the army is being created in what was once the great hall of the king's dwelling. Various other outbuildings are in use as barracks for the undead or for equipping the army. The mage has three charmed dwarven metalsmiths currently making armour and weapons for the army. The "Generals" have not made any outward attacks on society yet but humans in the area have reported "masses" of undead in the woods heavily armed and directly controlled by some "god." The undead were in fact in the woods but the cleric was just out practicing control of a small legion. Altogether the number of undead should be designed for the level of your party, add 15% to the strength (DMs always underestimate).

5.5.3 Adventure

The PC's can be assigned the keep as a mission or they can just run into it while out adventuring in the mountains. My PC's flee anything that looks like a tough adventure, so I let them inside the keep and then had them get blocked off by a band of undead. They immediately fled deeper into the keep and did right-well barring two small PC deaths. Rumors of the keep are flying about Fedell but haven't really penetrated to Dresan yet, but they keep moving and getting exaggerated.

"The road goes ever on and on,
down from the door where it began,
Now far ahead the road has gone,
and I must follow, if I can.
Pursuing it with weary feet,
until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet,
and whither then, I cannot say."

— Jered "Lehrer" Moses
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New Classes & Weapons for AD&Dv2

Tanoa Stewart

Wayne Wallace

Spirit Warrior

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The Spirit Warrior is of the Amerind Mythos for the most part, and out of role-playing as well, created to fill a certain role-playing niche, somewhat of a cross between ranger and druid, but not as powerful, and missing most of the abilities of both.

The Spirit Warrior may be male or female, and has the shaman-granted power to gain the essence of, if not become in fact, an natural animal. S/he is concerned with stopping the poaching of animals vital for people's survival and uses their forms to right these wrongs. Since a Spirit Warrior's home village is generally safe, s/he often adventures to help other communities and in general, see the outside world to sate their wanderlust.

		Level	Experience
		2	3500
		3	7000
		4	14000
		5	35000
		6	70000
		7	140000
		8	262500
		9	490000
		10+	+525000/level
Prerequisites			
Str	11		
Dex	11		
Con	11		
Wis	13		

Game effects

- Fight as Warrior.
- Save as Mage.
- Knowledge of herbal medicine (herbalism NWP).
- Tracking.
- Can have HP bonus for high con.
- HD type: 1d8
- HP after 9th: 2
- Animal empathy (as per ranger).
- Climb trees/cliffs (i.e. climb walls).

- Casts spells as priest, Animal sphere only.
- Can only own what s/he can carry.
- Armor and weapons: You start with Amerind-style armor and weapons, and can use anything you pick up later.

When a Spirit Warrior shapechanges, she/he becomes that animal fully, not a hybrid form. Mentally the Spirit Warrior is still the same but does feel the instincts of the creature s/he has become. Special abilities are only available in creature-form. Use the chart on DMG p23 for thief's abilities, no modifiers.

Level 1	Fish	Swim 24, hide in water as thief's hide in shadows.
	Frog	Leap 8, Swim 16, grab small items such as rings with tongue on a successful pick pockets roll.
Level 2	Bird	Fly 24, blind opponent with successful attack roll for 1d4 rounds plus the current one.
	Rat	As per MC/MM.
Level 3	Cat	As per MC/MM.
Level 4	Wild Dog	As per MC/MM.
	Large Spider	As per MC/MM.
Level 5	Lizard	Size S, Move 8, Bite 1d8+1, AC: 6
Level 7	Riding Horse	As per MC/MM.
Level 8	Dolphin	As per MC/MM.
Level 9	Shark, Normal	As per MC/MM.
Level 10	Bear, Brown	As per MC/MM.
Level 12	Elephant	As per MC/MM.
Beyond	???	Truly inventive powergamers may shapechange into Leviathan or something.

Final notes: This class was a bit expensive with a final multiple of 17.5. Role-playing-wise, remember that this class is good-aligned and has an ethos to follow. Spirit Warriors aren't just shapechanging fighter-types.

Valkyrie

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TSR has it's own Valkyrie class in Legends and Lore v2. This one was made before then, and is more warrior-like than their cousin priests. The Vikings sourcebook is due out soon, and should be out by the time this journal is printed, with probably another version of the Valkyrie class. Your mileage may vary.

The Valkyrie character class is based on the Valkyries of the Norse Mythos. Only human females may be this class unless the DM powergames. A Valkyrie must be a beautiful woman with blond hair as well as a warrior-born. Her preferred weapon is the spear, and long hours of practice make this 'cult' deadly with it. (+1 to hit and damage) She fights as a warrior-true, and is able to heal herself or her friends of wounds more than a paladin, but less than a priest. All Valkyries are taught of their culture to scholar level, and frequently amaze men with their battle strength and intelligence.

		Level	Experience
		2	2000
Prerequisites		3	4000
Str	12	4	8000
Con	9	5	20000
Int	9	6	40000
Cha	16	7	80000
		8	150000
		9	280000
		10+	+300000/level

Prime requisites: Str & Cha

"Everyone has a dark side to say the least,
Dealing in death is the nature of the beast."

— Pink Floyd, Dogs of War

Game effects

- Attacks as warrior.
- Saves as warrior.
- HD type: 1d10
- HP beyond 9th: 2
- Must be of good alignment.
- Can lay on hands to heal someone (including herself) 3hp/level/day.
- Can have exceptional strength.
- Can have HP bonus for high CON.
- Cannot own more than 10 magic items.
- **Armor & Weapons:** All, but spear is the preferred weapon, and the Valkyrie must spend a proficiency on it.
- **Proficiencies:** 4 + 1/4 weapon (-3 NPP) and 4 + 1/4 nonweapon.

Final notes: This class is approximately as powerful as a paladin or ranger, and about as expensive, even though v2 DMG class creation rules were used. The multiple is 10.

"I refuse to include a profound, enlightening, or otherwise cute quote."

— Choudet "Jake" Khuon
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Weapons of Tanoaworld

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The following are rules for new weapons. They were created after 2nd Ed. AD&D came out but before the Forgotten Realms book, the Fighters' Handbook, and the much awaited Arms & Equipment Handbook. The newest issue of Dragon Magazine (#169) also has some new weapons, some similar to the ones below and others not so similar. The authors direct the discerning weapons hobbyist to the above TSR products in general and to any local public library in particular. Prices for weapons are given in gold pieces.

Weapon	Size	Type	Price	Weight	Damage	S/M Large
Baseball Bat	M	B	70	8	1-8	1-4
Spiked Bat	M	P/B	350	15	1-8+2	1-4+3
Claws (1' long)	S	P/S	1000	2	1-6	1-4
Saurial Sword	M	S	5500	12	1-8	1-10
Rake Long Sword	M	P/S	2000	15	1-8	1-12
				removal	1-6	1-4
Blade Staff	L	S	250	10	1-6+2	1-6+2
Hook(hand)	S	P	10	6	1-4	1-2
Krull Star	S	P	200	2	1-6	1-6
Spiked Flail	M	P/B	450	14	2-8+3	1-6+4
Boot Blades	S	P	500	N/A	1-4	1-2
Boomerang	S	B	150	1	1-4	1-2
Bladed Boomerang	M	S	250	2	1-4+2	1-2+2
Ridged Arrows	S	P	200	N/A	1-6	1-6
				removal	1-6	1-4
				break on 1,2 on 1d6		
Impal. Lt. Quar.	S	P	20	N/A	1-6+1	1-6
Impal. Hy. Quar.	S	P	50	N/A	1-10	1-8
Impro. Bull Whip	M	S	800	1	1-6+1	1-2
Firearms (optional, 2nd Edition)						
Pirate Pistol	M	B	20000	8	3-18	3-18
ROF: 1/2						
Musket	L	B	50000	20	1-30	1-30
ROF: 1/4						

"The most exquisite pain is self inflicted."

History of the Empire of the Isles

©1990 Aaron Sher

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Phrixus, Lvl 1, Room 15, S3

This is an addendum to Aaron's article in the 3rd Guildsman.

Almost a thousand years ago, the ancestors of the people of the Empire lived on the mainland, Ilishtha. There they had lived for ages uncounted, and there was peace. The Ilishthans were ruled by a benevolent monarchy, under the Imlash dynasty. Their rule lasted for two centuries.

In the year 20 B.F. (Before the Founding), a revolt of the aristocracy unseated the monarch, and the throne was taken by one Atyan, later to be known as the Tyrant. Atyan was not a good ruler, being too absorbed in his power to be concerned with matters of his people's well-being. Ten years later, a man named Lorien the Explorer discovered an island, far over the Northern Ocean, which was named in his honor. On his return, there was very little reaction; after all, who cared if there was an island out there? Who would want to leave Ilishtha?

Over the next ten years, that attitude slowly changed. Atyan's rule became more and more tyrannical, and he grew obsessed with eternal life. He hated the thought of ever dying, and ruthlessly eliminated anyone who he perceived in his ever-more-warped mind as a threat. Finally, he went too far. He had the heads of five of the greatest families of Ilishtha assassinated at council, because he believed (falsely) that they were plotting against him. This could not be borne, but Atyan controlled armies far greater than the nobles'.

Thus, the Five Families (as they came to be called by their descendants) fled Ilishtha in great ships, and sailed across the Northern Ocean to Lorien. Where they made port, they founded a great city, which they named Lan. It was to become the heart of the Empire of the Isles. This was called the Founding of the Empire, and Lorien's calendar was dated from this day.

The Five Families slowly colonized Lorien, and found that it was bountiful and uninhabited. Fearing reprisals, they forbade all contact with Ilishtha. And so the Empire grew. At the time, it was the Kingdom

of Lorien, but when, in the Year of the Empire 283, Oleand was discovered, the descendants of the Five Families began to think about expanding. In the Year of the Empire 294, Oleand was colonized, and the city of Olan was established.

Oleand was found to be a land of jungles, far more hostile than Lorien, and the creatures that lived in the jungles did not take well to man's incursions. Nevertheless, Oleand was colonized and subdued, a process which continues to this very day.

In the Year of the Empire 312, an explorer (whose name has been lost to history) discovered the Tormish Isles, a small archipelago far to the north. The Tormani were already very civilized, and trade was established. In the year 343, the Tormish Treaty was signed, officially making the Tormish Isles part of the Empire of the Isles.

In the year 427, the island of Matibar was discovered. It appeared to be a land of plains, great sweeping prairies which could easily produce fruitful harvests. The city of Mati was founded the very next year, and colonists began to come by the shipload. In the Year of the Empire 439 (by Matibarian calendars, Rathin 11) the city of Delvornia was established at the fork of two great rivers. All seemed to be progressing smoothly.

In the year 443, the twin cities of Dominor were established, and the explorers began to attempt the great mountain range to the north. The ships could not easily sail up the coast, because the mountains did not stop at the water's edge, and there were treacherous rocks and reefs barring the way. Some explorers failed to return, but this was not unusual for people pioneering into terrain as difficult and dangerous as these mountains. In the year 445, a man named Brin discovered a clear pass through the mountains, and it was named Brin in his honor. Explorers began to attempt crossings of the mountains, but none returned. Finally, a large group of settlers with armed guards set off through the pass, intending to colonize the North once and for all. Two days later, they were attacked and massacred by orcs, and the Delvor-Neb wars had begun.

Delvor-Neb is a giant orc tribe, or group of tribes, that has lived in the mountains (named the Swords of Delvor-Neb for this reason) for time immemorial. They had no real desire to live elsewhere, but the presence of men upon the island was intolerable. Orcs began raiding any settlements that were not strongly defended, and hundreds of men and thousands of orcs were killed. The Regian armies could not counterattack, because of Delvor-Neb's lack of a fixed stronghold and because of the hostile terrain in the Swords.

The war dragged on for years, and in the year 458 an army of humanoids (for Delvor-Neb had the support of ogres and giants as well) attacked the great city of Mati. In a battle which lasted two weeks, they were repelled at great cost to both sides. Three years later, Dominor West was attacked, taken, and razed completely. Years passed. Finally, in the Year of the Empire 473, the forces of Delvor-Neb were driven back into the Swords by the Regian armies, and the Delvor-Neb wars were declared to be over. Still, the orcs were not completely defeated, and raids persist to this very day.

Brin Pass was still uncrossable, for the orcs attacked in force anyone who dared to try, and the terrain was so much in their favor that they could not be repelled. Therefore, in the year 485, construction of a great citadel at the mouth of Brin Pass was begun. Legend states that this construction was accomplished by the dwarves of Mish-ar-Neth working together with the greatest archmage of all time, Amish-Tor. It is certainly true that it was completed in record time, only 8 years for the whole great edifice, and using materials beyond any known to the common man. Its walls are unbreachable, and its gates indestructible. It is guarded by magical sentries and defenses, and none save perhaps the Commander of the Keep itself know them all.

Delvor-Neb attacked it furiously (apparently they had been held at bay during the actual construction, though no one knows how), but to no avail. Its defenses were too strong to be penetrated by the likes of Delvor-Neb. It has been, and is still being attacked about once every five to ten days. The Regian soldiers stationed there are the elite of the entire army, and still must be rotated every few months. In fact, the Keep has actually been taken twice, by unknown means. Both times, the Regian armies marched out of Mati and retook the Keep almost immediately.

In the year 524, the settlers (who could now cross Brin Pass in relative safety) carved the city of Ciator out of the Endless Waste, and caravans of supplies began crossing the Swords regularly. Seven years later, one of the nomads of the Waste, Pir-

ran the Wanderer, discovered the islands southwest of Matibar, and named them after the four gods of the nomads. Due to the island's congenial climate, colonists began moving in, and they established the city Amrea on the largest island, Orea. In addition, a port was established on the "mainland" to ferry supplies over to the islands. This eventually grew into the city of Ithiaport, the second-largest port city on the island.

"The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

— Thomas Jefferson

Magic Items

Tim Prestero Jeffrey Contompasis
Neuromancer Sandman Whizzard Scourge

Miscellaneous Magic

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Black Cauldron: Once the cauldron is filled with humanoid blood, corpses placed in it emerge two rounds later as powerful zombies (HD:5 AC:8 + armor D: 1-8 or by weapon, MV: 9" SD: +2 or better needed to hit). These zombies are controlled by the cleric or mage with the highest value for (wisdom + level) touching the cauldron. If no one is touching the cauldron, the zombies will continue their last command (ie, they'll continue attacking, or standing still, if that was the last thing they were doing). Zombies emerging from the cauldron all appear as hairless, 6' tall, muscular humanoids, with nearly identical facial features.

Iron Robe: When worn, the wearer is AC:0 versus slashing and piercing attacks, AC:8 versus bludgeoning attacks. Bludgeoning attacks, however, only inflict half damage.

Gem of Illusions: When concentrated upon, the gem casts an illusion (visual components only) of whatever the wielder can mentally picture, covering up to a maximum of thirty cubic feet. The illusion lasts as long as the wielder concentrates, and can be used a maximum of twice per day.

Gloves of Miffis: While worn, everything the wielder touches must save versus magic or be turned to stone. This will only affect creatures or items of large size or smaller.

Figurines of Fabulous Power: These are slightly less powerful items than usual figurines of wondrous power. There are several types, each appearing as a small, 2" high statuette of ivory. When the figure is placed on the ground, and the command word spoken, it grows to its full size. Most types obey the user (whoever spoke the command word) to the best of their ability and comprehension. If the figurine is broken or destroyed in statuette form, it is rendered permanently useless. If slain in animal form, it reverts

to statuette form, and is reusable. Here are some different types:

- Kobold (F3/T3 AC:3 (Studded Leather + Shield) HP: 24 S17 D17 Dagger +1)
- Skeleton (HD:3 HP:21 AC:7 D:1-6 SD: regenerates 1HP/rnd, reattaches severed limbs, 50% magic resistant)
- Hill Giant (HD:8+2 HP:50 AC:4 D:2-16 SA: Rock Hurling)
- Owl Bear (HD:5+2 HP:36 AC:5 #At:3 D:1-6/1-6/3-12)
- Rust Monster (HD:5 HP:40 AC:2 #AT:2 D: Rust) This figurine looks extremely weathered, the details are hard to discern (ie the party has no idea what it is). When used, it ignores the commands of the user, and will not return to statuette form.
- Leprechaun: (HD: 1 HP:5 AC:8) This one is also booby-trapped. When summoned, it will annoy the summoner for 1 day, before wandering off.

Wheezing Bottle: This ornate bottle will suck in or blow out, alternating once per round. It can suck in up to 125 cubic feet of air (gas, etc).

Bottle of Gaseous Form: This bottle appears to be a wheezing bottle. When opened, however, it turns the opener gaseous, and sucks them inside, stoppering itself up. The next person opening the bottle will release the trapped individual. The next opener gets sucked inside, etc.

Bag of Rations, Brand X: Always full of bland food of high nutritional value.

Magic Cards: There are several types of magic cards, and they differ in that the drawer usually has some control over what happens. Some types are listed below.

Card of Teleport: Picture of some area, concentration will teleport the user to the area depicted, minus card.

Scroll Card: Roll for random scroll. Darn tiny print.

Card of Imprisonment: First person to gaze at an empty card is imprisoned on the card, with the command word to free them written on the card below their image. Damage to the card affects the victim.

Wanted Card: The card holds the image of the wielder, in the form of a wanted poster. 100 full-sized copies of this wanted poster will appear, scattered about in a 50 mile radius.

Ball of Endless String: This ball of 5 lb test string is always 4" in diameter, regardless of how much is pulled off of it.

Gauntlets of Septugenarian Power:

This cursed item cuts the wearer's strength to a third of the original, and confers +2 to Wisdom, -4 to CON, and -4 to DEX.

Gauntlets of Betelgeuse: The wielder of these gloves is able to hurl fist-sized fireballs, every other round, up to 5 times per day. The fireballs take a segment to form, and the user must successfully hit the target, consulting the missile misfire table on a miss. The fireballs can be thrown up to 1" per point of STR. The gloves themselves are fireproof, protecting the user's hands from any fire damage (magical or not), though they convey no other protection to the rest of the user's body. The gloves are considered sacred by the cult of Betelgeuse.

Flying Gauntlets: These gauntlets will fly off the user's hands upon command, poking eyes, wringing necks, deflecting arrows, pushing levers, and other pugilistic actions, at 18/00 STR. The gauntlets are +3 to hit, if flung at somebody, and +6 to damage (d4) if they do successfully hit. They are incapable of complicated actions.

Cloak of Invisibility: One side of this immense, hooded cloak is invisible, always.

Slaybells

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This is a particularly nasty magic item because it is both blessed and cursed. This seemingly innocuous weapon appears as a simple set of bolos. When detect magic is cast upon it, the strands connecting the metal balls will appear thicker and it gives off an overall cyan glow. Used as a magical weapon, it is merely +1 to hit and one must have a proficiency in

bolos to use it without the standard non-proficiency penalty. When it strikes an opponent, toss a d6. 1-3 indicates a low hit about the legs, feet, or lower portion of the physical body of the victim. 4-6 indicates a high hit about the neck, head, or upper portion of the physical body of the victim. In the former case, 1d10 damage is done. In the latter, 2d10 damage is done. This is without regard to the size of the victim. The strands will expand or constrict to bind the feet of a kobold or the throat of a titan. The throwing range is about 20 yards at best and requires a six foot radius to get the weapon swinging properly.

If the victim survives the initial hit, its trouble is far from over. The bolo will then fuse about the struck portion of the body making the victim either unable to run, or unable to turn its head. Furthermore, the item transforms itself into a thick leather-like strap with two bells on its surface. Any sudden motion by the victim in the afflicted area will cause the bells to sound a high pitched klaxon. If the victim manages to crawl away noisily or walk cautiously with its head pointed straight forward, the bells will continue to sound with any sudden motion. This effectively marks the victim for future slaying. Dispel magic will cause the loop to slacken for a round and allow the victim to remove the bells silently.

There are additional penalties while wearing the slaybells. Thieves will not be able to move silently. Mages and clerics will not be able to use the somatic components of their spells and concentrate at the same time. Fighters will not be able to properly give orders because the noise drowns them out. Bards can no longer play and sing properly. The noise stands a 1 in 20 chance per day of permanently deafening the victim if the victim is not somehow deaf already or lacks aural senses. The ringing also stands a 1 in 100 chance per day of driving the victim insane if deafness does not occur first. Normally, the sound will increase the rate of random encounters from 1 in 6 to 3 in 6, so the victim will usually wind up fighting more frequently. If slain, the loop will slacken, fall off the victim in some manner and revert to its bolo shape.

If the thrower of this weapon rolls a non-adjusted 1 on a d20, the wielder must roll again against his own armor class with the +1 bonus and any non-proficiency penalties to determine whether the wielder is struck by the weapon instead of the intended target. If someone steps within the six foot swing radius while the wielder is attacking, there is a 50 percent chance that the person stepping into the swing radius will receive the effects of the attack instead of the previously intended target. Appropriate rolls to hit are made in this case.

Magic-Mania

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The Gloves of Batman

These are skin tight blueish black gloves with three fins that go down the forearms. The gloves are well armored and give a +1 AC. When punching with these gloves the users gets some interesting effects. For every punch the wearer does, a large red or yellow bubble will appear with words like POW!, WHAM!, BOP!, BLOWIE!, SMASH!, and BOOM! within the bubble.

Ring of Fly Paper Touch

When this ring is put on it cannot be removed without amputation. Whatever the wearer touches will automatically be stuck to his hand forever.

Headband of Duct Tape

This looks like a normal headband, but when worn it turns into duct tape. This looks very idiotic, when removed much of the character's hair will go with it.

Coward Sword

This appears to be a magical long sword, but whenever a character tries to use the sword against a monster whose level is greater than the plus of the sword, the sword will scream "Oh Shit!" and put itself back in its sheath. The sword will not come out of its sheath until the monster is no longer within striking distance. The sword is cursed so that the character who gets it will think it is the best sword in the world and will *never* get rid of it no matter how many times it gets him beat up and/or killed. The only way to free yourself of the sword's curse is to touch it to a Vacuum Hole or the like or to have a 20th level cleric remove curse.

Sword of Dancing

This appears as a fine rapier with a golden hilt, and when identified will be identified as a Sword of Dancing +3. Of course, this is not the normal Sword of Dancing that the players will expect, and when commanded to "Dance" in the middle of a battle, it will proceed to grow arms and legs and will disco

dance for 1d10 rounds and then return to its wielder. Anyone watching the sword must Save Vs. Spells or start to dance with it. After all, it's a very attractive sword.

MC Hammer

This appears as a large black hammer with the letters MC inscribed on the side of the head. It does standard hammer damage in combat. It will identify as an MC Hammer +2, but no other properties can be found. Only through much research can the true powers of the Hammer be found out. The powers are as follows:

U Can't Touch This: Whenever

the wielder of the Hammer mutters the ancient words "U Can't Touch This" his AC will immediately become -10 and missile attacks will NEVER hit the character.

Pray: Whenever a cleric wields the weapon and says the word "Pray" he will regain all of his spell points and everyone who is friendly to the wielder will have Cure Serious Wounds cast upon them.

Have You Seen Her: Whenever the words "Have You Seen Her" are asked of the weapon, The Hammer will respond by telling the wielder where the item or person that he/she seeks is.

Proper: Whenever the wielder of the Hammer says "Proper" a strange young black man will appear out of nowhere and hand the wielder a paper cup with a strange liquid in it. Drinking the liquid makes the character very hyper and he/she won't be able to get to sleep for 1d10 days because of all the caffeine.

Go Hammer: Whenever the words "GO HAMMER!" are screamed at the top of the wielder's lungs, the Hammer will attack the nearest evil creature at +5 To Hit and +5 Damage. When the creature is dead, the Hammer will lose its advantages until "GO HAMMER!" is screamed again. Screaming "GO HAMMER!" a second time will cause the effects to be cumulative.

Stop! Hammer Time: Whenever the words "Stop! Hammer Time" are uttered by the wielder the Hammer will cast Hold Monster.

Shared World

A Multi-Gamemaster Campaign

May 31, 1991

Herein follow the guidelines for the Shared World Campaign. Credits go to Jeff Horne, Jim Vassilakos, Wayne Wallace, and Ray Wong.

1 The Basics

1. The purpose of the shared-world campaign is to have fun. This is the first and foremost guideline and should be treated as such.
2. These guidelines are just that...guidelines, not rules. In all cases, the GM governs the rules and not vice-versa. Any disputes between GMs regarding the handling of the campaign should be taken up privately. In cases where a consensus cannot be reached, then the policy of "to each his own" should be respected.
3. We'll be using AD&Dv2 rules with numerous modifications. These rules are primarily defined by the PHv2 & DMGv2. Additional materials (such as the class handbooks) are considered optional. Individual GMs may bring in monsters and magic items as they see fit, however, particularly powerful monsters or magics should first be screened by the other GMs as a matter of courtesy and to establish a consensus.

2 Character Generation

4. We'll be using Method V character generation (modified for seven stats). For each stat, roll 4d6 and take best 3. Place as desired. No points shuffling.
5. Comeliness replaces Charisma as a stat. It is expected that players should play-out the required charisma of their class (leadership for paladins, silver-tongued devilry for bards). Perception (ala The Guildsman #3 pg.102, thanx to Tim Prestero) becomes a new stat.

6. The -1 to charisma normally applied to dwarves becomes a -1 to comeliness. Elves, Half-elves, and halflings are given a +1 to perception. Racial restrictions on perception are 3-18 across the six primary races.

7. Ability requirements and prime requisites are modified for paladins and bards from standard AD&Dv2 rules in the following manner:

Paladin		
	Before	After
Ability Requirements:	Strength 12 Constitution 9 Wisdom 13 Charisma 17	Strength 12 Constitution 9 Intelligence 9 Wisdom 9 Int+Wis 25
Prime Requisites:	Strength, Charisma	Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom

Bard		
	Before	After
Ability Requirements:	Dexterity 12 Intelligence 13 Charisma 15	Dexterity 12 Intelligence 13 Comeliness 9
Prime Requisites:	Dexterity, Charisma	Dexterity, Intelligence

Druid		
	Before	After
Ability Requirements:	Wisdom 12 Charisma 15	Wisdom 12 Perception 15
Prime Requisites:	Wisdom, Charisma	Wisdom, Perception

8. We're playing by racial attribute ranges and racial/class limitations. We're also playing by racial level restriction, however, we're revising

this rule, allowing non-humans to progress beyond their maximum level at the expense of halving all further experience attained. We're also applying DMGv2 table 8, pushing back this "maximum level" based on high prime requisites. Finally, 15th (as opposed to unlimited) is considered the "maximum level" for half-elf's progression into bardhood (modified from DMGv2 table 7).

9. The infravision normally given to elves and half-elves becomes ultra-vision (starlight vision); this vision relies on the observer being outdoors without the interference of a normal light source. Halflings, dwarves, and gnomes stay with infravision, however.

3 Alignment

10. Aside from merely choosing an alignment, each player must further define his character's alignment in some detail. This definition may be modified by the player any time during the first gaming session, but not afterward. Alignment is considered a personal matter of the character and is not open to the scrutiny of other players.
11. There are three ways one may change alignment: voluntarily, functionally, and by force.

Voluntary: Both the player and the GM agree that the change is for the "good" of the game. There is no penalty for such an alignment change.

Functional: The player has been professing one alignment while functionally playing another. The GM rules that this functional alignment is now the character's new alignment (usually over the player's objection). The character drops to the minimum experience required to attain his current level and receives only half experience while he remains at that level.

Forced: The character has been taken over by a spirit of another alignment or has been somehow (magically) manipulated into committing acts removed from his professed alignment. The character may not receive any experience as long as such manipulation is taking place. Afterwards, the character should repent and may seek atonement.

12. In the case of acts which violate class alignment restrictions, the GM is encouraged to temporarily revoke the character's status as a member of his chosen class without going so far as instituting a functional alignment change. After the gaming session, the *God's Court of Appeals* may render a verdict as to whether the character must undergo functional alignment change or whether he may seek penance for his violation of alignment.

4 Magic

13. First and foremost with respect to magic: the general consensus is that the more powerful a magic is, the more chaotic its outcome. DM's discretion, especially with respect to powerful magic items, is advised.
14. PHv2 spells are accepted as written subject to future modifications.
15. Mages are generally assumed to be carrying all minor material components necessary to their spells.
16. Mages are awarded bonus spells based on intelligence in a manner analogous to the bonus spells awarded to clerics based on wisdom (table 5, PHv2). Bonus spells are considered "off the cuff" for both classes in the sense that they do not need to be previously memorized/selected in order to be successfully cast.

5 Combat

17. A *d10* (trying to get low) is used for initiative. In the case of joint initiative (where one roll is being made for several individuals), the reaction (dex-based) adjustment is not applied, however, if initiative is handled individually, then it is applied. There is DM's discretion as to whether initiative is rolled once every round or once for the combat (or something in between).
18. At 0 hit points, characters are considered to be wavering between consciousness and unconsciousness. A constitution check is made during any given round to determine if the character is conscious. If conscious during a round, the character may attempt any action with negative modifiers (DM's discretion here).

19. At below 0 hit points, there is DM's discretion as to whether bleeding (additional hit point loss) occurs. No skill check is required to bind the wounded and unconscious character, thus stopping the bleeding.
20. A character may only stay below -10 hit points for d4 rounds (hidden roll) before the character's death is assured.
21. Once healed to positive hitpoints, the character may immediately wade back into combat or cast spells (to be consistent with *high fantasy*).
22. There is DM's discretion regarding the application of casting times and weapon speeds during combat and regarding the application of critical hit and fumbles. Where the DM plays without casting times in combat, it is assumed that all spells requiring 1-9 segments go off immediately.

6 Experience

23. Experience is given at the discretion of the DM for both combat and role-playing.
24. When the character attains experience for a given level, his is assumed to automatically advance to that level with respect to hit points, THAC0, saving throws, proficiency slots, and spell slots. The character must, however, find a mentor in order to attain new proficiencies (as opposed to advancing in a proficiency already held). The rate of learning is at the DM's discretion.
25. Mages are assumed to be studying magic continuously, and are therefore allowed the chance to learn one new spell with each new level attained without need of a scroll, mentor, or other materials. The mage may choose to try and attain a specific spell in such a manner, rolling his percentage change to learn based on intelligence. Success means that the spell is successfully learned. Failure means that no spell is learned automatically for attaining that level. If the mage prefers to take his chances, however, he may forego the learning roll and allow the DM to randomly select an "automatically learned" spell for that level. If learning by the use of a scroll or with the aide of a mentor, the mage must still make his learning roll.

7 World

26. The world is a flat, infinite plane with local climate essentially controlled by local magics. The changes from one climate to another are gradual. It is assumed that there are universal seasons which following with the standard length of a year, and that days are also standard length subject to the whim's of the DM. The moon however, there being only one, is subject to random cycles and is the sole setting-device of DM whim. Horizons, despite the flatness of the plane, are considered standard (three miles at sea level), and the sun is assume to rise in one part of the sky and set in the other in a constant cycle. We are adopting the *swiss-cheese* theory for the underearth, allowing full and scattered dissemination of underground denizens. The advancement of technology is considered a no-no. Canons are okay, but handguns are not.
27. All characters of character-class standing are *jumpers* who have the power of teleporting at the will of the gods. These are the chosen people of the world who bear birthmarks that only others like them may see. These marks glow when a jump is in progress.

7.1 Astoria Archipelago

The Astoria Archipelago is a chain of mysterious islands at the edge of the Sea of Shalamar, stretching roughly north to south. There is no known explanation for the many bizarre mixes of climates, topographies, flora, or fauna. It is said by the various inhabitants that responsibility for the wide spectrum of climates falls either to an insane arch-druid or a mistake in the wake of creation.

There are three major islands, dozens of lesser isles, and hundreds of small crags jutting upward from the ocean floor.

Ixtapa: This island is made up of two major regions, the northern being a large marshy swamp and the southern begin a cold glacial area with ice-cliffs jutting proudly (three-thousand feet at some places) over the Shalamar.

Achira: This island is also divided into two major regions, the western being a volcanic rainforest, and the eastern being a rocky desert with little to no moisture above

ground. Within the desert, there is no sand, but only flat stones, windswept rocks, and large, polished boulders.

Daphne: Although the climate on this island is largely temperate, the weather fluctuates very rapidly, each of the four seasons each lasting only a month. As might be expected, the island's wildlife is extremely adaptive to the natural conditions.

8 Protocol

28. Where we arrive at points of contention between the DMs, it is expected that compromise should rule the day, however where resolution through compromise is unworkable for even one DM, majority vote is the only recourse. The DM who proposes a motion, however, may not vote except to break ties between the others.
29. Players will start their characters at first level. Only one character may be actively played by a player at any given time.

9 Other

30. We will not be playing with encumbrance unless things begin to get ridiculous.

10 The Divine Framework

10.1 Cups

Element: Water

Alignment: Good

Knight: A graceful dilettante, passively amiable, quick to respond to attraction and easily enthused, exceedingly sensitive but with little depth of character, sensual and idle, untruthful, prone to melancholy.

Queen: Reflective of the nature of the observer, dreamy, tranquil, poetic, imaginative, kind but unwilling to take much effort on another's behalf, much affected by surrounding influences and thus more dependent.

Prince: Subtle, secretive in violence, crafty, an artist whose calm surface masks intense passion, yearns for power and wisdom and ruthlessness, intensely evil and merciless with overweening ambition.

Princess: Infinitely gracious, sweet, voluptuous, gentle, kind, romantic, dreamy, indolent, selfish, luxurious.

Ace: Fertility, productiveness, beauty, pleasure, happiness.

Two: Love.

Three: Abundance.

Four: Luxury.

Five: Disappointment.

Six: Pleasure.

Seven: Debauch.

Eight: Indolence.

Nine: Happiness.

Ten: Satiety.

10.2 Disks

Element: Earth

Alignment: Law

Knight: Patient, labourous, clever in material things, somewhat dull and preoccupied by material affairs, avaricious, surly, petty, jealous, grasping.

Queen: Ambitious, affectionate, kind, charming, timid, practical, quiet, domesticated, dull, servile, foolish, capricious, moody.

Prince: An energetic manager of practical matters, capable, steadfast, competent, sometimes dull and resentful, slow to anger but implacable when aroused.

Princess: Young, beautiful, strong, beholding secret wonder, pregnant with life, generous, kind, diligent, benevolent, preserving but wasteful, at war with her essential dignity.

Ace: Material gain, power, labor, wealth, contentment.

Two: Change.

Three: Works.

Four: Power.

Five: Worry.

Six: Success.

Seven: Failure.

Eight: Prudence.

Nine: Gain.

Ten: Wealth.

10.3 Swords

Element: Fire

Alignment: Evil

Knight: Active, skillful, clever, fierce, delicate, courageous, unreflective, often incapable of decision, deceitful, tyrannical, crafty.

Queen: Graceful, intensely perceptive, subtle in interpreting, individualistic, confident, gracious, just, cruel, sly, deceitful, unreliable, superficially attractive.

Prince: Intellectual, full of ideas and designs, domineering, intensely clever but unstable of purpose, elusive and elastic in thought often supporting various contradictory opinions, slays with the one hand while creating with the other, harsh, malicious, plotting, unreliable, fanatical.

Princess: Stern and vengeful, destructively logical, firm and aggressive, practical in wisdom and subtlety, dextrous in the management of practical affairs, cunning and frivolous.

Ace: Conquest, whirling force, activity, strength through conflict, an affirmation of divine authority, the sword of wrath, punishment and affliction.

Two: Peace.

Three: Sorrow.

Four: Truce.

Five: Defeat.

Six: Science.

Seven: Futility.

Eight: Interference.

Nine: Cruelty.

Ten: Ruin.

10.4 Wands

Element: Air

Alignment: Chaos

Knight: Active, generous, impetuous, proud, swift, evil-minded, cruel, bigoted, brutal.

Queen: Adaptable, persistent, calm when in authority, attractive, generous but impatient to opposition, obstinate, vengeful, domineering, quick to take offense.

Prince: Swift, strong, impulsive, violent, just, noble and generous with a sense of humor, proud, intolerant, cruel, prejudiced, occasionally cowardly.

Princess: Individualistic, brilliant and daring, sudden and violent in love or anger, enthusiastic but superficial, theatrical, shallow, false, cruel, unreliable, faithless, domineering.

Ace: Energy, strength, force.

Two: Dominion.

Three: Virtue.

Four: Completion.

Five: Strife.

Six: Victory.

Seven: Valor.

Eight: Swiftmess.

Nine: Strength.

Ten: Oppression.

11 God Descriptions

11.1 The BlackAngels

11.1.1 Moragar, The ShadowKnight

Spheres of Power: All, Astral, Divination, Creation, Elemental, Combat, Summoning.

Specialty: Combat.

Alignment: Neutral-Evil

Symbol: One-Horned Helm

Moragar is the ShadowKnight of the Evil Gods, riding into battle against his enemies in a storm of blood suckled from those he has slaughtered. His symbol is a black, one-horned helm. He is the creator of many evil artifacts, a weapons-smith while he is not busy killing, although his most diabolical magics are woven with the aid of Nöle (see below). His breath is fire that scorches all who approach him, and he has the ability to summon any evil creature to do his bidding. It is said by scholars that he is fiercely desirous of Lisilin, yet all attempts to woo her have seemingly been thwarted by her brother. Priests of Moragar are expected to drink the blood of those they kill and are thus empowered with fiery breath (d4/lvl) once per day (this may be modified as deemed appropriate at the GM's discretion). If they do not sate their thirst often enough, however, they are said to decay like rotting corpses until death finally ensues.

11.1.2 Illea, Queen of Deceit

Spheres of Power: All, Astral, Divination, Weather, Charm, Protection.

Specialty: Weather, Charm.

Alignment: Neutral-Evil

Symbol: Dark Cloud

Illea is the Enchantress, preferring to charm and deceive her opponents rather than fight, however, when her mood grows dim she can summon great storms which shatter the landscape and bring ruin to whole countries. Her clerics are able to summon ill-weather once per day and to charm person, animal, or monster once per week.

11.1.3 Nöle, Prince of Evil

Spheres of Power: All, Astral, Divination, Combat, Necromantic, Sun.

Specialty: Divination.

Alignment: Chaotic-Evil

Symbol: A Severed Head

Nöle is affectionately called *Little Prince Whiplash* as much for being the younger child of Illea as for a bizarre combat technique he utilizes to decapitate his victims via the twisting of their necks. It is said also that among the evil gods, he is feared most, as his wisdom is all-encompassing in things which are evil, and that his mind,

though immensely powerful, is also twisted beyond mere intellect. Many sages postulate that he has the ability to see into the future and that his psyche has access to the reigns which manipulate reality, his subconscious weaving and toying with time and fate creating bizarre events via his least pretentious musings. His clerics are granted the powers of dream-vision once per day and the power to effect the future by acts of will committed within their dreams.

11.1.4 Lisilin, Vengeance-Taker

Spheres of Power: All, Astral, Divination, Charm, Plant, Animal, Guardian, Healing.

Specialty: Animal

Alignment: Lawful-Evil

Symbols: Black Panther & Crescent Moon

Lisilin, also called *Isil* in some temples, is the seeker and taker of vengeance, stalking her prey as an animal. Her forms vary, but most often she is personified in the symbol of a black panther. She has also been known to assume humanoid forms, and within a social setting, her vengeance is the most diabolical yet is usually taken in dim moonlight. Her priests must take swift and creative vengeance against those who have wronged them or incur her wrath. They are empowered to know the general location of such adversaries once per day and are often given hints as to the form of their expected revenge in dreams filtered through Lisilin's brother, Nöle.

Tol Torogon

— Troll Isle —

A Shared-World Setting
in the Astoria Archipelago

The archipelago... a place of mystic wonder and deadly beauty where PCs go to say their ignoble last words before meeting an equally ignoble end. Fishermen call the great mistake of the gods, and perhaps they are not so far off from the truth. However, on Tol Torogon there is a mage who holds the knowledge, knowledge he might share for but a drop of Troll's blood.

Players' Knowledge

Geography

Tol Torogon is situated between the deadly reefs of Angkaragion and the floating marshes of Galinae. The only *safe* route to the island, thus, is through the north-east passage, however, even this is a hazard, as it is the domain of a sea creature known only as the Great Maw of the Deep.

As for the isle itself, it seems to be the result of undersea volcanic activity which has produced a island in the form of a single peak jutting up from the sea-level to a spectacular height of some six-thousand feet. The peak, called Hell's Chimney, was believed by original explorers to ascend from the pits of Hell itself. As to be expected, the volcano spews forth a wide variety of lava, ash, pumice, and coals, much of which seem to be the by-products of reactions between the very rare and magical earths trapped deep below the island.

One particular variety of coal was noted by explorers for its property of glowing a bright amber and retaining heat for many days under normal conditions. Some sages of diabolic earths have conjectured that this coal, called blood-stone or Seregon, is a by-product of in the formation of the venomous element known as adamantine, and that as such it holds magical properties which counter those held by the dark, life-sucking alloys often used in drowic weapon enchantment.

The peculiar topography of the island is another point of interest, for unlike most other islands, a good portion of its outer fringes seem to be bordered vertically by seawater. It is speculated that as the magma spilled down the chimney over many millennia, it cooled as it met the water and froze in place, held back as an axe stuck in the trunk of a tree, unable to descend any further into the murky waters which surround Tol Torogon. One sage even likens the isle to a spinning top, its tip frozen on the deep ocean floor and its equator lying just beneath the water's surface.

Thus, due to the hard stone core, rain water is unable to absorb itself into the isle's terrain. On the southern side, this results in hundreds of small rivulets which carry rainfall back to sea. Here, the entire landscape is often bone-dry only a day after torrential rains. On the

northern and eastern sides of the island, however, the rainfall accumulates in large pockets, informally known as the Bogs. These marshlands stretches to the east, becoming a swamp and eventually linking with the floating marshes of Galinae. It is said that souls of the damned linger beneath the soft, muddy surface of these parts, waiting patiently for unfortunate wanderers who they might add to their number.

History

It is speculated that the Island was first explored by humans in the later half of the 3rd century and was named Isle of the Tall Tower by Norhic colonists from East Helluin. In those times, it is written, the Bogs were no more than a damp forest with sinkholes and tempestuous wurmwoods. However, during the 5th century, the early colonists discovered a Green Drake asleep deep within the wurmwoods and it is said that they foolishly awoke the fearsome beast with spears and arrows, thus leading to their collective demise. However, a small band of warriors were said to overcome the Green Drake only two years later, in 547 CY, and it is remarked by modern scholars that it was this event which gave birth to the order of Green Knights on that island.

The island was peaceful for 160 years thereafter, and despite its remote location and difficulty of access, a fortification, Keep Atamanir, was built on the western slope of Hell's Chimney overlooking the ocean as a warning against increasing pirate activity on the high seas. During this time, numerous mining expeditions were conducted, some say to the heart of the Chimney, intent on finding the source of the rare and precious elements necessary to both thaumaturgy and commerce. In the defense of their territory, however, trollish denizens of the UnderEarth undertook an invasion of the island in the first decade of the 8th century. Coincidentally, a full lunar eclipse of the sun took place during the year following this invasion, and since that time, the island has been predominately inhabited by trolls, most living within the Chimney Mines, however, some are known to inhabit the sacked keep as well which remarkably stands in its state of abject ruin.

During this period of troll occupation, piracy has been on the rise, and it is rumored that the pirates utilize a secret cove somewhere on the island for the importation of slaves and of

durang (dark meteoric iron), an essential ingredient in the venomous alloy of drowic adamantite, the hardest substance yet known to man. It is even suspected that the pirates are largely subsidized in their overall operations through this trade with the TrollKing, and there are strange reports of a drowic deity who is worshiped on the island.

We are now in the 960's, and there is strong evidence that a sorcerer thaumaturge has gained residence on the island somewhere within the immediate vicinity of the volcano, and it has been hypothesized that the Trolls are presently experimenting with alchemy for use as a war-magic and are mounting plans for an invasion of the surrounding islands.

GM's Knowledge

The Drowic-Troll Wars

One of the major events which nearly all surface-dwellers are oblivious to are the series of Drowic-Troll wars in the vicinity of the under-earth immediately beneath Tol Torogon. The wars resulted in the almost total extinction of Trolls within that region, however, the drow failed in preventing the trollish exodus to the Norhic Isle of the Tall Tower which was made possible by both the foolish mining beneath Hell's Chimney and by the now defunct Order of the Green Knights which held off drowic attacks against the trolls until the Drow Queen lost patience with the extinction efforts and made a truce with the TrollKing, thus forming a new but isolated province of the drow kingdom.

In theory, Tol Torogon is ruled by Leucetia, a drowic necromantress, who has been condemned to rule the surfaceworld province for her Drow Queen until her grandmother, Princess Neelock, a warrior-mage and one-time general of the drowic armies completes her original mission, the extinction of the Troll race. Unfortunately for the mission, Neelock now stands, petrified, on a stony terrace of the Chimney's southern slope, the trolls often paying their respects to what they regard as the black jade statue of a fearsome war-goddess. The Queen had Neelock petrified via an astrological enchantment causing the island's full lunar eclipse of the sun in 708 CY after it became apparent that the Trolls

would be more useful alive than dead, however, at the time it was not politically expedient to reverse her orders that the trolls be exterminated thus giving Neelock, her daughter, grounds for assassination and subsequent assumption of the Drowic throne. The final result has been that Neelock has remained petrified (but conscious) in very good sunlight for the past two and a half centuries, and boy is she pissed!

The Troll-King

The real (de-facto) ruler of the island is the Two-Headed TrollKing, also called the Two-Headed Abomination by his faithful admirers. The head most often attributed to making wise if blunt decisions is named Elegnem, a warrior by trade and well respected by his subjects. The other head is Ghelos, a necromantic mage studying his black arts from Leucetia in exchange for the import of slaves and durang which he arranges through the pirate admiral, Nipul. Ghelos is the more feared if less respected of the two heads, but taken together, they serve as a good balance of wisdom, warriorly might, and magic discouraging any uprising against the stable leadership the trolls have thus far enjoyed.

As for the troll's relationship with the drow, it is unsteady at best. Even after two and a half centuries, the trolls still harbor a deathly, almost instinctual fear of the drow or anything drowic, regarding the statue of Neelock as a thing of horrible beauty, demanding of trollish reverence and submission. Even the mighty Elegnem fears it and sees in it the appearance of Leucetia fearing her as an incarnation of this Goddess even though she has demonstrated no other powers than of but of a single mage who against a powerful warrior such as he wouldn't stand a fighting chance at close-quartered combat. Ghelos fears her also, yet less so since his understanding of magic permits him to rationalize her powers into a framework where she becomes less than this incarnation of Neelock which Elegnem sees. Ghelos lusts for her and her powers, secretly scheming to overthrow her "alter" and place a statue of himself in its place, but first he realizes that he must learn from her all there is to learn.

Memories of Neelock

As mentioned before, Neelock is the daughter of the drow queen and the grandmother of Leucetia. Scrolls buried in the keep's basement tell of

her adamantite scythe which, when drawn from its sickled scabbard at night oozes forth a black venom which turns those she slaughters into undead zombies beckoning to her command. The scrolls also note, however, that the bloodstones which are relatively common to the island may be used to cauterize wounds, neutralizing the demonic venom and protecting the slain from spiritual servitude. These glowing coals are often placed around her statue as a form of symbolic protection for her trollish worshippers.

Ekneix

The Thaumaturgic Mage said to inhabit the island is actually an avatar of Ekneix, the God of Science, hiding within the guise of a powerful astrologer who uses alchemy to provoke relationships between the celestial bodies. He is on the island at the beckoning of Lisilin, the Vengeance-Taker and Princess of the DarkAngles who wishes him to hear Leucetia's pleas that her grandmother, Neelock, be freed from her eternal imprisonment in stone. However, in order to free Neelock, he must unwind the astrological enchantment within which she was bound, this requiring the opposite of the full lunar eclipse that drew the dark veil of jade across the warriorress-mage. In short, he needs the sun to pass in front of the moon in such a way that the lunar rays might pass through the heart of the sun to melt the black, icy jade which contains Neelock. It is, of course, a chore of the most unlikely impossibility yet one for which this avatar of Science anxiously attends his labors striving intellectually through this passage of difficulty into the possibilities beyond.

Ekneix has a firetoad familiar named Kermit who warns him of intruders into his domain, a deep crevice within Hell's chimney where the soupy waters of the Boglands dip into the fiery path of the lava's flow creating a place known only as the Swamp of Mists. Deep within this fiery swamp, he uses a wide bowl of polished lavastone to reflect the constellations even during periods of dense fog and daylight. From Leucetia, he gathers a quota of troll's blood as a magical base to his alchemy.

The Swamp of Mists

The Devil's Chimney rises to over a mile above sea-level, its magma spilling down two deep con-

duits, one flowing east and the other south-east until both eventually meet the sea. However, between the bogs and the mountain slopes, both conduits branch out with minor forks which carry the hot, lava sluice into a jagged moat which surrounds the eastern border of the Swamp of Mists. Lava children occasionally cascade down these conduits and into the moat from the depths of the Chimney which gives their birth.

The entire swamp is enchanted, utilizing the regenerative magic of troll blood with the spiritual essence of the lava itself. Within its misty depths, wanderers occasionally witness the ghosts of centuries past, spirits of green knights and drow elves locked in eternal combat. One particular specter might visit upon travelers, this being the Ghost Knight, Kalen, Lord Protector of the Isle. He wears armor of green dragon scales and rides a great, shadowy steed, charging individuals who he detects as having evil intent. He may stop to warn the particularly pure of the evil influence of the drow on the island and of the mad mixer, Ekneix, who plots their return.

The avatar of Ekneix also does his work here, mixing the lava sluice and the foul rainfall which gathers within the bogs creating a rancid fog which rises to move the heavens and delight the old alchemist. Continually he mutters about the elements and about troll's blood, continually cursing the skies and singing about bones and the ways they are connected. Occasionally he even brings up the gods, calling them each by the elements and calling himself a flame of hope and glory.

Deadman's Cove

The Pirates utilize a cove on the western ledge of Hell's Chimney which they use as a home base for their operations. Here the sea flows into the heart of the volcano via a conduit dug out by the early miners in order to cool the fires of the mountain and manage lava flows via proven dwarven architectures. There is still the capacity within these tunnels the force or delay eruption of the volcano, although the mechanisms have been largely untouched for hundreds of years.

The pirates have three sea worthy vessels: the Donatello, a longship commanded by Rocksteady, a minotaur mage; the Michelangelo, a cog commanded by Splinter, a ratling monk; and the flagship galleon Leonardo commanded by Admiral Nipul, a rakshasan illusionist. Nipul has

within the last several decades made a deal with Ghelos, agreeing to provide him with captured slaves from surrounding islands and raw durang from the craterous isle of Angremyn. In return, the pirates are provided with a safe harbor, with undead zombies to help sail the ships and conduct raids without risk to the living crewmembers, and with access to illusionary magics which help disguise the predominately half-orcish crew and zombies as human sailors. Nipul has a gall-trit familiar he has named Two-can which is similarly disguised via illusionary magic to normally appear as a parrot while it is not attacking.

For all his good fortune, however, Nipul is constantly plagued by Rhianon, a sea hag whose lair he pillaged stealing her trident of fish command. Rhianon seeks the trident, often appearing to the half-orcs as a beautiful mermaid before casting her charms and luring them to their watery deaths. Occasionally, she sneaks aboard one of the ships to search the cargo hold for her trident, turning the zombie guards or forcing them to start fires aboard the boat. Her persistence in re-attaining the item isn't merely due to her fascination with it's power. She needs it both for the protection of her new lair and in order to summon Anto, the Great Maw, which she herself raised from a pup and has utilized to destroy shipping on the high seas so that she could feed on the crew and passengers. Often she lays in wait outside Deadman's Cove for the ships to leave so that she may try again to regain what she feels is rightfully hers.

Anto, meanwhile, seeks her by the foul scent of her rotting flesh while he isn't destroying ships which pass nearby. To underwater observers, he appears as a gigantic jellyfish, often using his inner tentacles to stir the water and create whirlpools beneath small vessels. Once rotating quickly, he grinds them within his maw using his nine-foot fangs to break them apart and devouring anything which is organic.

"In the beginning the universe was created. This made a lot of people very angry and has been widely regarded as a bad move."

— D. Adams

Tol Torogon

Keep Atamanir

Deadman's Cove

Neelock

Bogs

Swamp
of
Mists

Moat

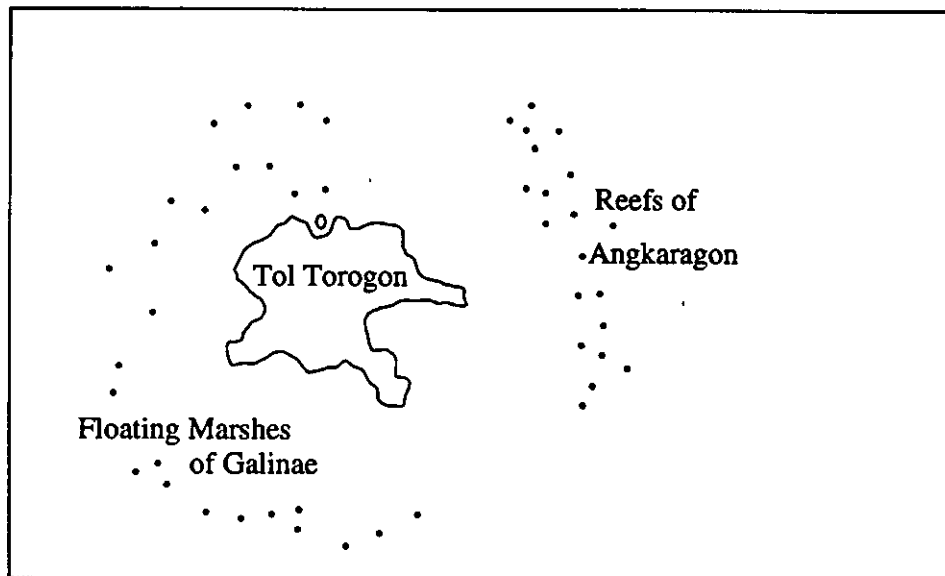
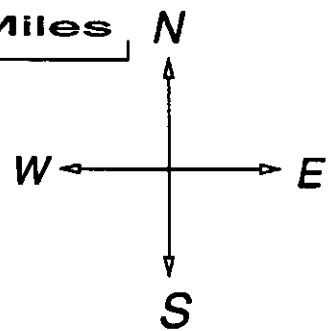
Hell's Chimney

Mines

Lava Channel

Lava Channel

Ten Miles



A Shift in the Balance of Power

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Theft, assassination, and mystery bring a well-regarded band of adventures within the balance of power, but the clues are few and far between, and time is of the essence. Rick's adventure is for AD&Dv2.

1 Players' Background

As the winter's frost begins to lose its bite and the snow begins to disappear from the ground your thoughts turn once again toward adventure. Two weeks have passed since the first merchant ship left Bisselburgh, the capital city of the Empire of Harmonosa, to get an early jump on this year's trading. An hour ago, the biggest question for your group was where to go and what to do next? This problem may have just been solved. Just an hour ago, when you were all gathered together at the Everfull Mug Tavern enjoying dinner and a good brew, you all received summons to see the Emperor, immediately! Aha, adventure at last!

You all were escorted to the castle and then through various halls and chambers and finally, just now, into the Emperor's Throneroom. Emperor Hy-lar Ironhouse III is a young dwarf of less than 120 years. When you enter into the throneroom you note that he is standing in front of his throne. The Emperor's four feet and 160 pounds frame is donned in deep blue robes, with his bejeweled crown resting upon his head. A wide braid in the center marking his noble blood is only one of many in the course black beard that falls to the middle of his chest. Since your group has worked for the Emperor before, and the Emperor is obviously impatient, as you enter he begins to speak, "Friends, I am glad that you were able to come on such short notice. As you are all aware the war with the Kingdom of Gersone has now lasted twenty-eight summers, and although our troops have fought with great courage and valor, we have not been able to secure a lasting victory. The reason that I have summoned you here is that I have an adventure of the utmost urgency which may prove a challenge even for a group with your great talents. In brief,

are you willing to work toward the end of the war, and earn say...5000 gold nobles each for your troubles? I can say no more than that until you accept my offer." (He will go up to 8000 g.p. and an extra healing potion for each member. After the party agrees continue.)

"Now with that out of the way," he continues, "Five years ago, my long time friend and advisor, the Great Mage Ensaril Garrid, tried to use his magic to find a way to end the war. His magic showed him that the war would not reach the age of thirty summers and much to his dismay, he found that the victory would come to the power that recovered the long lost Headdress of the Elements. Garrid has subsequently spent all his time since then in an attempt to find the location of the Headdress. As of late Garrid became increasingly focused and desperate. Three weeks ago he locked himself in his tower and said that he would not leave his tower again until he knew the location of the item. Two days ago, he was found dead in his tower. All attempts to raise him from the dead...have failed. All other known magics of the divinatory nature, have also failed in gaining any additional information."

"Our only clues are as follows: first and foremost, a black handkerchief was found around his neck. This is the mark of the Blackcowl, the Guildmaster Assassin of Gersone. Second, Garrid's white parrot keeps repeating the phrase, 'I found it, I found it...'. And last, although certainly not least, Garrid's logbook was stolen by the Blackcowl, but some notes were found in his room. My scribes have made copies of all of the notes found and they have been sealed and delivered to the Captain of the Sandshark. I hope that you will have the wisdom to solve mysteries contained therein. Captain Silvertooth will take you as far as he can, and he has horses on board to take you the rest of the way. If you need any last minute mundane supplies tell my steward and he will have them sent to the Sandshark. Make haste, the ship will leave as soon as you are on board, and remember that the enemy may already be in route!" At this point the Emperor steps around his throne and disappears behind it, and his Steward steps out...

2 DM's Background

All of the information presented to the players is a completely accurate account of the actions made by both sides. There are however, a few important things to consider. The first is time. It will take the group the rest of the night to reach the drop off point. From there it is a full two days ride to get in the area of the Headdress and part of the third day will be required to find the Jagdpurr. It will take the enemy group only five days from when the group is dropped off to reach the same location. The enemy will start at the branch of the river that is west of the players drop off point, and head north to where the two rivers meet and then north to the shaded area. The NPC party is included at the end of the module.

The second important detail is the powers of the Headdress. The powers were intentionally left vague, at best. The Headdress can be kept, but not worn by someone that it deems unworthy. However, placing it on your head should, at the G.M.'s option, either kill the offender or it should just not function at all. The powers if formally defined should keep in mind the lawful neutral alignment of the item, and the role that is to play in ending the war.

Third, and most importantly, the Headdress is owned by a lawful and honorable society and it can be obtained by a lawful person or persons, without bloodshed on either side. An ideal "script" for this would be: First, the party "champion" (i.e. the toughest hand- to-hand fighter) would defeat Yag or Phaun (see the Jagdpurr entries) in unarmed combat. Then Sanpurn will take the group to see the "manifestation" of Mekyon which will ask his riddles. When the riddles are answered correctly he will then have the entire group swear on their gods honor that they are telling the truth and that they will return the headdress and it will only be used for the reason described(while using a detect lie) and then he will give it to them.

3 On to the adventure...

After the group get organized and heads to the Sandshark, Captain Silvertooth will give them the three handouts (the riddle, puzzle, and map) in his cabin as the boat pulls out of the harbor. The dark night passes without incident, and in the morning as the sun rises over the horizon the Sandshark glides easily into the small bay that will serve as the groups drop off point. The group then unloads the horses and here begins the land journey in search of the Headdress of the Elements. After they leave the coastline they quickly reach The Plate. The Plate is a large plateau

that raises about 200 feet above the surrounding territory, all the way around.

- As the group begins the steep climb up The Plate (a slope of about 45 degrees), they must lead their horses up the single file footpath. After the group has gained about 60' in altitude they will begin to hear a buzzing sound that will steadily increase in volume for about one minute, and then 15 Giant Wasps appear flying close to the cliffs. These wasps are out looking for food. There are three wasps each with HP 16-20. The group will retreat when 12 of the wasps have been killed or disabled. The wasps nest is two miles east on a cliff face. The nest is the home of 40 other wasps and a queen.
- At the end of the first day of the land journey, after the watches have been chosen, first watch has begun, and the rest of the characters have gone off to sleep, they will be spotted by an unusual group of monsters. There is a mated pair of chimera (HP 39, 48) and four manticores (HP 26, 28, 31, 34). Give each guard member two rolls to hear something, 1 or 2 on d6, and a chance to react. When the action begins give each "sleeping" character a 20% chance that he is still awake and react normally. The monsters will stay out of the fire light and throw spikes at long range. The two chimera, with their superior melee abilities will flank the group and attack from the rear two rounds later.

The second day has no encounters. The Headdress is located in the lair of a group of Jagdpurr, located on the northern cliff face in the shaded region on the players map. The group should find the Jagdpurr's home early on day three.

3.1 Jagdpurr's Home

3.1.1 Exterior

1. **Pigpen:** This very large pen holds several hundred large pigs that sleep, play, and live in the mud.
2. **Lower Guardpost:** This structure is made out of stone blocks of up to 1.5' in diameter that are cemented together. The interior not only is a storehouse for wood, weapons, and tools, but has a forge and other necessary equipment to construct metal
3. & 4. **Home:** These two regions are large oak trees that have wooden platforms built into them

at the twenty foot level. Each tree has two rope ladders that lead to the top. This is the normal warm weather home of the band. In general 50-60% of the Jagdpurr will be snoozing at any one time, day or night, however they can awaken and be fully ready for combat in a round.

5. **Garden:** This rather large area grows the vegetables to feed the pigs. At the present, cabbage, corn, and potatoes are growing.
6. **Platform:** This platform protrudes from the rocks about 200 feet above the level of the base of the trees. This leads to the interior of the lair and the home of the leaders.
7. **Upper Guard Area:** This area is shaped like a small stone fort, with very thick walls. The guards stationed here stand in the center, protected by the walls and look around using infravision.

3.1.2 Interior

1. **Grand Hall:** This large grand hall is supported by six pillars that are carved to appear as oak trees supporting the ceiling. The walls are covered with writings both in pictographs and their language discussing philosophy and history. When is to cold to be outside this is where the band lives.
2. **Storeroom:** This room is used to store things such as weapons, food and clothing.
3. **Mekyon's Pad:** This is the "home" and resting place of the band's leader, Mekyon. He spends most of his days thinking about the universe and working on puzzles and riddles. When not so inclined, he sleeps. The room is dominated by Mekyon's raised bed, which is covered by fine white sheets and covers. Along the easternmost wall, there is a small collection of books (28) on various topics covering the physical and magical universe (i.e. Astronomy, Oceanography, Topography, Divination, and Metaphysics) as well as 3 books on puzzles and riddles written by Mekyon himself. Each of the books are worth 400-700gp to a sage of the appropriate discipline.

Mekyon's room is designed to allow sound to carry from the Grand Hall into his room and there are little peep holes that allow Mekyon to see the goings-on. When the party first sees Mekyon, he will use project image and ventriloquism to make himself appear to walk out of his statue. If the group is fighting its way in,

then they will have a tough time defeating him. If they are being led by Sanpurn, after the situation is explained to Mekyon, Mekyon will appear and ask first the riddle given the players in Section 7 (the DM may wish to give the riddle & the puzzle to the players at the opening of the adventure along with the players map). The answer to that riddle is "A shield". If they answered that riddle correctly, then he asks how to make the number 20 using only 3 7's and simple mathematics. The answer is $\frac{7+7}{7}$. If the group can answer both of the riddles, Mekyon will ask the group to swear by their respective deities, one by one, that they will use the crown only in the way they had requested, and return it thereafter. Mekyon will have, by this time, used his know alignment spell on each party member, and while the group swears their oath, he will use his detect lie spell. If the group is honest, then the crown is given to them. If not, they must leave, and Mekyon will tell them why. If they fail to answer even one of the puzzles, their only recourse is to challenge Mekyon with a riddle even he cannot answer, they will receive the crown as above. Mekyon will not suggest this alternative. It is up to the players to think of it, without hints from Mekyon.

4. & 5. Water Supply:

6. **Lieutenants' Room:** This is the bedroom of the four lieutenants. Jagdpurr do not generally have wall decorations in their sleeping quarters. True to form, this room is empty with the exception of four heaps of bedding, strewn randomly on the floor.
7. **Captain's Room:** Yag and Phaun share this room. The room is empty except for two heaps of bedding.
8. **Saupurn's Room:** This room doubles as Saupurn's room and the band's treasure room. There are four heaps of bedding in this room, and the following treasures:

- 12 +1 red-fletched flight arrows
- 1 scroll of Shield at 8th level
- Medium Oak Chest:
 - 3 large sacks, containing 903gp total
 - 1 Potion of Healing
 - 1 Potion of Polymorph Self
- Small Oak chest:

- Fine wine glass set with Amethyst (350gp value) (Using this glass, the drinker can drink twice as much wine as normal before becoming drunk. However, on the full moon, the drinker becomes drunk twice as fast.)
- Red Cloak (Magically fits anyone whose height is within 3-8' and keeps them clean, dry, and warm)
- Small Iron Chest:
 - 3 pieces of Amber, each worth 100gp.
 - 1 Wand of Wonder (Command word: Silfer, 40 charges) It is in a leather case, and the command word is written in studs on it.
 - 1 Potion of Extra-Healing
- Headdress of the Elements

4 Monster Stats

1-36: Male Jagdpurr: HP: [29, 23, 23, 33, 24, 25], [29, 20, 30, 34, 23, 25, 24, 22, 24, 22, 31, 21, 29, 23, 23, 33, 24, 25, 29], [20, 30, 34, 23, 25, 24, 22, 24, 31, 21, 39].

Weaponry	
1-6	Long Bow, 12 arrows, Longsword
7-24	Spear and Longsword
25-36	2 Spears

37-50: Female Jagdpurr: HP:

24,24,22,27,20,28,30,25,23,21,24,24,22,25.

Weaponry: 2 Spears each.

51-55: Young Jagdpurr: (Int Avg, Str 16, HD 3)

HP: 14,16,17,15,16. Weaponry: 1 Spear each.

56: Ulcher (Lieutenant, HP 36) Weaponry: 2-Handed Sword.

57: Smillther (Lieutenant, HP 35) Weaponry: Longsword, 2 Spears.

58: Bachpas (Lieutenant, HP 37) Weaponry: +1 Bardiche.

59: Gruff (Lieutenant, HP 35) Weaponry: 2-Handed Sword, Long Bow, 12 flight arrows.

60 & 61: Yag and Phaun (Captains, HP 50 each). These twin captains both have the abilities of (1st edition) 9th level monks. The greatest weakness of the pair is that, when together, each tries to outdo the other. Weaponry: A spear each, but they prefer to fight open-hand style.

62: Sanpurn (Knight, HP 53, Mage 7) Sanpurn is the true day-to-day leader of this band, as Mekyon spends all his time thinking. He wears midnight-blue robes and a non-magical head-dress colored the same. Weaponry: 2-Handed Sword.

Spells (Memorized)	
1st level	2nd level
<i>Feather Fall</i>	<i>Invisibility</i>
<i>Magic Missile</i> (x 2)	<i>Mirror Image</i>
<i>Shield</i>	<i>Stinking Cloud</i>
3rd level	4th level
<i>Fly</i>	<i>Wizard Eye</i>
<i>Lightning Bolt</i>	

5 The Evil Dudes

Stats: STR,INT,WIS,DEX,CON,CHR,COM

Eloven:

6th level Thief (14,9,8,17,15,12,13, HP 30, AC 5, Leather Armor, Short Bow, 12 flight arrows (6 blue fletched +2), +1 short sword, +2 dagger, Backpack, 2 weeks' iron rations, tinderbox, 2 torches, heavy crossbow, 2 bolts, Bow string, Wire, 13gp, 9ep) (Half-elf male, PP70%, OL52%, F/RT45%, MS52%, HS47%, HN20%, CW92%, RL30%, quiet and sneaky archer)

Melainus:

5/5 Fighter/Cleric (17,10,16,15,17,11,16, HP 41, AC 1, Plate Mail, Small Round Shield, Heavy Crossbow, 10 bolts, Battle Axe +1, Mourning Star, Backpack, 3 weeks' iron rations, tinderbox, hooded, lantern, 3 oil flasks, torch, 19gp, 5pp) (Gnome, male, CLW (x3), Sanctuary, Light, Hold Person (x2), Silence 15' Radius, Slow Poison, Aid, Dispel Magic, right hand man with an opinion)

Marcrushna:

7th level Fighter (18/19,10,15,12,15,13,6, HP 50, AC 4, Banded Mail, Medium Kite shield (on back), Long Bow, 12 flight arrows, Potion of Healing, Potion of Flying, 3 weeks' iron rations, +1 Two-Handed Sword (Glow only when 'Trepan' is said), Backpack, tinderbox, 2 torches, 10gp, 7sp) (Human, male, rude but wise leader)

Durnoq:

6th level Fighter (16,9,12,14,16,13,11, HP 59, AC 4, Splint Mail, Bardiche, Scroll of Protection from Non-Magical missile weapons, 2 weeks' iron rations, backpack, flail, light crossbow, 10 bolts, tinderbox, 50' rope, 6 spikes, small hammer, 5 torches, 51gp, 16pp) (Dwarf, male, foil to Lithala)

Lithala:

6th level Magic User (8,14,9,17,16,12,16, HP 29, AC 7, Staff, Scroll of Magic Missile, Melf's Acid Arrow at 9th level, Backpack, 3 weeks' iron rations, 2 oil flasks, hooded lantern, tinderbox, measuring scale, 200gp of diamond dust in brown pouch, 2 cigars (poison type C), prism, 2 high quality convex lens, 80gp of silver wire, 12gp) (Elf, female, Traveling Spellbook: Jump, Shield, Magic Missile, Shocking Grasp, Invisibility, Detect Evil, Ray of Enfeeblement, Flame Arrow, Dispel Magic, Lighting Bolt, the physically weak and never appreciated mage) (If ambushing the party, she will bury book before combat)

Cruvish:

5th level Cleric (13,11,15,12,12,12,12, HP 31, AC 4, Chain Mail, Small Shield, Horseman's Mace +1, Scroll of Prayer, Dispel Magic at 12th level, Backpack, 2 weeks iron rations, 2 oil flasks, tinderbox, 50' rope, 8 spikes, small hammer, 4 torches, 16gp, 100gp tourmaline) (Halfling, male, CLW (x3), Command, Sanctuary, Hold Person, Withdraw, Aid (x2), Dispel Magic, The quiet type)

Steppenwolf:

5th level Fighter (15,7,8,17,15,9,10, HP 40, AC 5, Leather Armor, Long Composite Bow, 20 arrow (8 blue fletched +2), long sword, dagger, Potion of Invulnerability, Backpack, 2 weeks iron rations, 2 oil flasks, tinderbox, 2 torches, 82gp, 10gp tiger's eye) (Human, male, Spends lots of time changing targets and positions)

Other characters:

create as needed to balance to your individual party. Suggested additional members include a 3rd level Thief, and/or 2/2 Fighter/Thief.

6 New Monsters

Mekyon — *Master of Puzzles*

Frequency:	Unique
No. Appearing:	1
AC:	-4
Move:	15
HD:	14
HP:	84
% in lair:	100%
# of Attacks:	2
Dmg/Attack:	1-6/1-6 or by weapon type + 8
SA:	Spells, smell invisible 75% of the time out to 40', STR:20
SD:	Can only be hit by a +2 weapon, immune to confusion, forget, and divination spells
MR:	55%
Int:	Genius
Alignment:	LN
Size:	L (9' tall)
XP:	25000

Mekyon appears as a large white Jagdpurr. he spends most of his time living in his *tomb*, just thinking about the mystery of the universe and making puzzles. Mekyon, if forced to fight, will use his extensive spell-like spell-like abilities, one at a time, once per round, at 14th level of ability.

Powers

<i>Cloudkill</i> (1/day)	<i>Delayed Blast Fireball</i> (1/day)
<i>Detect Charm</i>	<i>Nondetection</i> (10 day dur.)
<i>Detect Magic</i>	<i>Detect Lie</i>
<i>Dispel Magic</i>	<i>Feeblemind</i>
<i>Fly</i>	<i>Heal</i> (1/day)
<i>Know Alignment</i>	<i>Legend Lore</i> (1/week)
<i>Lightning Bolt</i>	<i>Magic Missile</i>
<i>Magic Mouth</i>	<i>Misdirection</i>
<i>Detect Evil</i>	<i>Project Image</i>
<i>Teleport</i>	<i>Tongues</i>
<i>Ventriloquism</i>	<i>Detect Good</i>

	Jagdpurr			
	Standard	Lieutenant	Captain	Knight
Frequency:	Rare	V. Rare	V. Rare	V. Rare
No. appearing:	10-40	1-8	1-2	1
AC:	4	3	1	-2
Move:	15	15	15	15
HD:	5	7	9	11
% in lair:	85%	85%	85%	85%
# of attacks:	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,1
Dmg/Attack:	1-4 (x2)	1-4 (x2)	1-4 (x2)	1-4 (x2)
	<i>or by weapon type plus strength bonus</i>			
SA:	STR:18	STR:18/51	STR:18/76	STR:18/91
SD:	None	None	None	None
MR:	30%	30%	30%	40%
Int:	Avg	Avg	Good	High+
Alignment:	LN	LN	LN	LN
Size: M	6'6"	6'6"	6'6"	6'6"

The Jagdpurr are a sub-race of the Mekpurr, (q.v. Guildsman #3) with a head similar to a jaguar's. While they look similar to the Mekpurr, their outlook on life differs vastly from their cousins'. The Jagdpurr spend their lives keeping to a simple existence far from human civilization. Their bands typically have two driving purposes. First, they spend their lives trying to understand the universe whilst under the council and guidance of a great leader. Knights commonly have extensive libraries, covering topics such as philosophy and the universe, which they allow the rest of the band to use. Second, they must guard powerful artifacts that are able to tip the balance of the universe towards chaos. In the spirit of their communal outlook, the Knight keeps all the band's treasure, which is mostly not in the form of coins.

In closing, it should be noted that the Jagdpurr are a very honorable race which does not wish to kill without reason. When a group of outsiders enter their homelands, the Jagdpurr will send a small group, led by a Captain, to meet with them and discover their intent and purpose. In order for an outsider to meet a Captain's superior, the group champion must best the Captain in unarmed combat. After the battle, if the group has lost, they must leave or deal only with the Captain, and if they win, they have earned the right to speak with the Knight. If the party cheats (the Jagdpurr certainly won't) the 'deal' is off, and mass combat may occur.

The abilities and ranks of the Jagdpurr are as follows:

- A Jagdpurr has no special resistance to cold, nor extra damage from fire.
- *Class*, color of fur, and type of Jagdpurr are all tied together:

Color	Class	Type	Max Lvl	Attack As
White	Wizard	Knight	11	Fighter
Black	Monk	Captain	9	Monster
Orange	Monster	Lieut.	—	Monster
Orange	Monster	Standard	—	Monster

- A Jagdpurr can leap 20' forward.
- A Jagdpurr can smell invisible creatures 20% of the time.
- With their isolationist tendencies, few Jagdpurr know languages other than their own.
- A Jagdpurr has infravision out to 90'.

Spirit Jaguar	
Frequency:	Very Rare
No. Appearing:	1 (1-4)
AC:	3
Move:	15
HD:	7
% in lair:	100%
# of Attacks:	3
Dmg/Attack:	1-4/1-4/6-13(d8+5)
SA:	Poison Claws
SD:	Immune to Mind Spells. Can only be hit by Mag- ical or Silver weapons
MR:	30%
Int:	Very
Alignment:	LE
Size:	L (5' at shoulder)
Exp value:	800 +8/hp

This creature appears as a very large jaguar, on fire with a yellow flame. The flame causes no damage, but is the equivalent of a light spell in intensity. Its claws are more horrible than meets the eye. If both claws hit in a single round, it is assumed that the Spirit Jaguar has grabbed the victim for a round, and injected him with poison, which does 6d6 damage, save for half.

7 A Riddle & A Puzzle

7.1 The Riddle

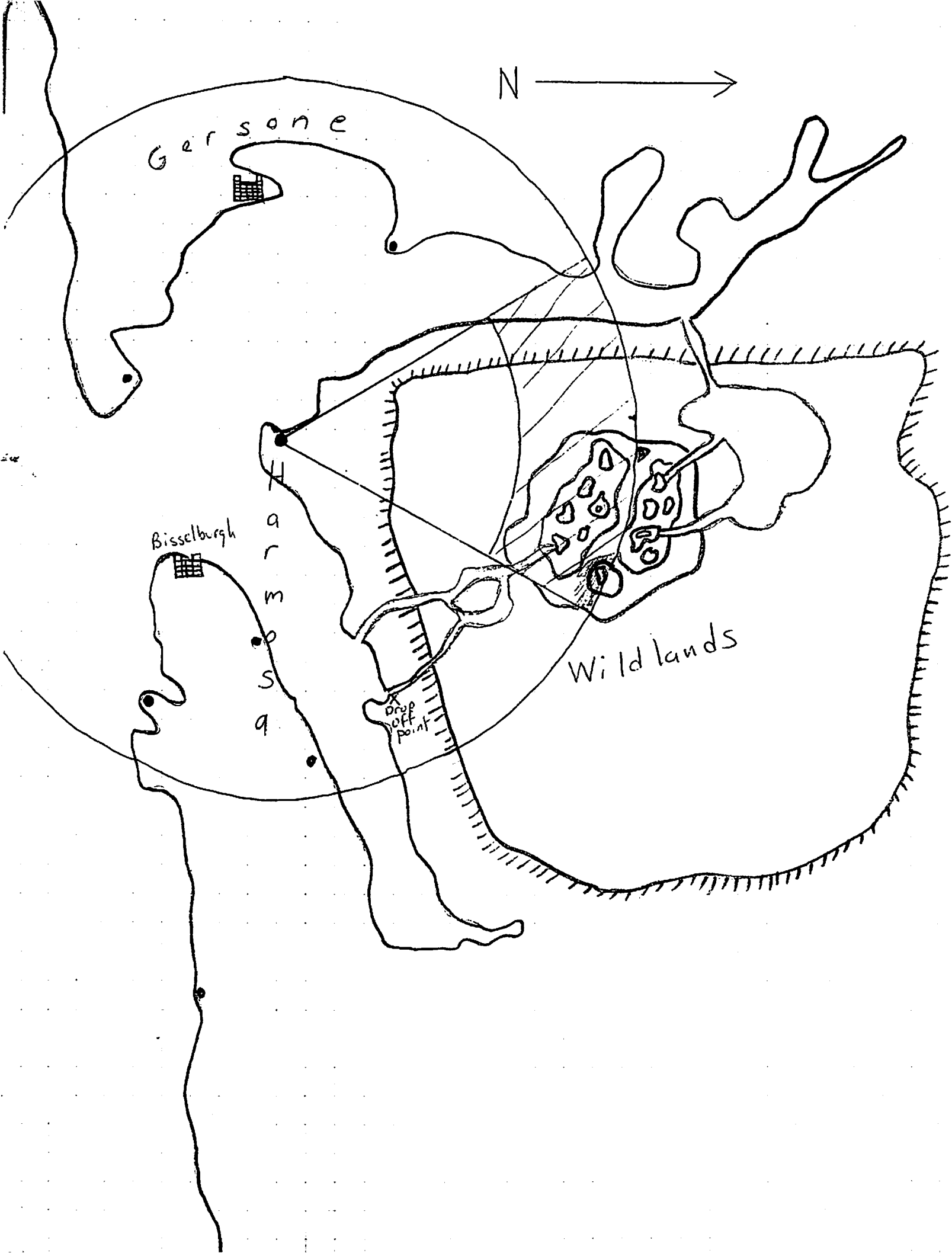
Wounded I say and weary with combat
 Bashing by the iron, gored by the point of it,
 Tired of battle, battered and scarred.
 Many a fearful fight I have seen, when
 Hope there was none, or help in the thick of it,
 Ere I was down and fordone in the fray.
 Doomed to bear the brunt and the shock of it,
 Fierce encounter of clashing foes.
 Leech cannot heal my hurts with his simples,
 Potions and salves for my sores have I sought in vain.
 Blade cuts are deep in the side of me,
 Daily and nightly I redouble from my wounds.

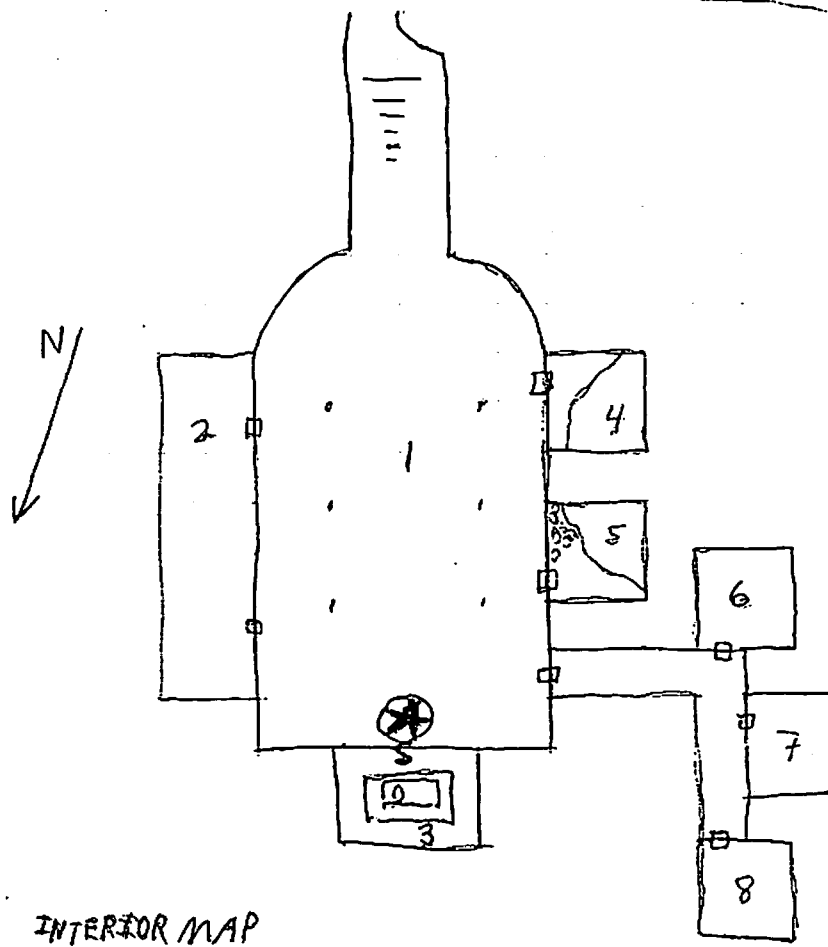
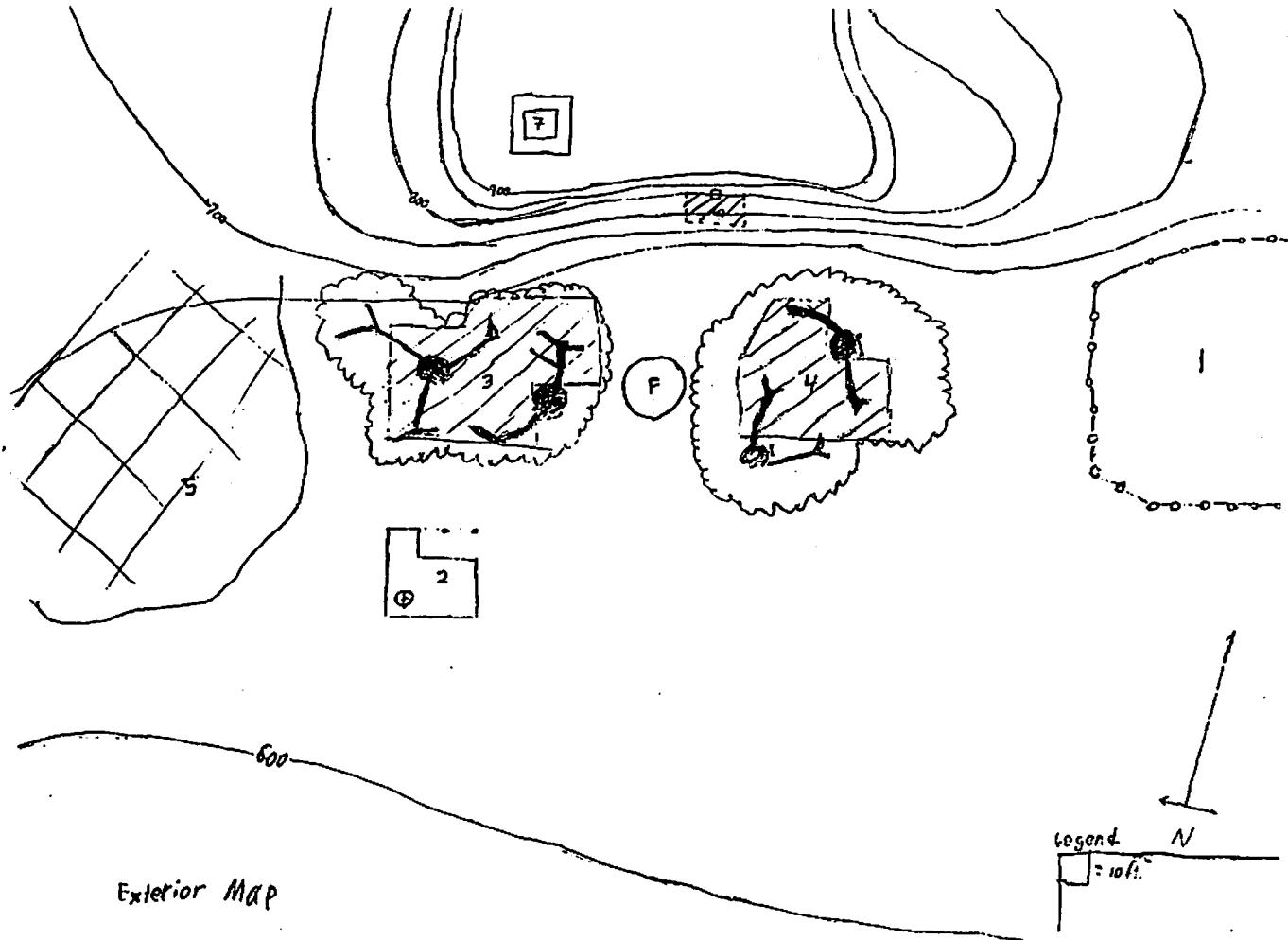
7.2 The Puzzle

Using only simple mathematics and three 9's, write the number 20 (note: simple mathematics is limited to addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals).

"I wish TV had a knob so you could turn up the intelligence. The one marked Brightness doesn't work."

— Gallagher





Cruel DM Torture Table

Neuromancer

Silver

Whizzard

Scourge

Sandman

Okay! So you're a chaotic-evil DM, and you've gotten tired thinking up new ways to make life miserable for your players. Now they're beginning to think you're a pansy, a pushover, and you're beginning to feel like one. If this is beginning to sound like "Your Career as a Gamester" then this table is your sickest, most demented, perverse, twisted, yucky-foo dream cum true. Forget logic, screw the plot...just break out your trusty percentile and prepare to chow down some PC-fodder! And as you wreck carnage, remember, the point of the game is just to have fun...heh heh heh.

1. Character is granted a small keep, which appears 20 feet above him and falls crushing him. The keep is destroyed in the fall. PC takes 20d100 damage from falling keep.
2. Character finds a ring of eternal orgasm.
3. Character is forced to convert to Rune Quest rules.
4. Character is transformed into Bobby Brady, PC's stats are now: STR: 5, INT: 5; WIS: 5; DEX: 5; CON: 5; CHR: 5; CMS: 5. The character is now looks like a goofy kid from the 70's in 70's brat clothing.
5. Character is buried in cement up to his head. The character can still eat and breath, but is stuck in a block of cement. (Note to DM: This may not seem so bad, but just think of how the other characters will try and get him out.)
6. A suit of +5 platemail appears around the character, but it's unremovable. Also it's full of itching powder. Nothing will remove it except a wish. But, underneath that suit of armor is another suit of armor that is exactly like the first suit (if this is wished off another one is under that one). Because of constant itching that character gets -8 to DEX rolls and attacks.
7. A large stone block falls on the character and does 7d8 damage. This is followed by a fine spray of acid which dissolves the block and possibly

the character too, another 11d12 damage. If the character is still alive he is sucked up towards the ceiling (if there is no ceiling, one appears. DM: laugh at player) where 18 bastard swords (+8) await him which hit him automatically! If the character is still alive, let him live...he deserves it. Or you could do it again. Or run him through Grimtooth's Traps.

8. PC is polymorphed into a pizza and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (the cute cartoon ones) eat him alive. Pizza! Cowabunga!
9. DM appears and casts skin to air on the PC. Since the PC is now missing all his skin he bleeds to death in 1d4-5 rounds. If the character wants to counteract this he must have his PLAYER to pay the DM 10 bucks.
10. Head Explodes (you're dead, but you still take 2d100 damage)
11. Hand is CrAzY Glued to the nearest persons butt. Take 1d12 damage in removal.
12. Diminish Pigment (you look white as ghost -5 CMS)
13. Butt becomes five times larger. Armor and clothing no longer fit.
14. Gangrene. Roll d8 for location:

1	Head & Neck	5	Left Arm
2	Right Arm	6	Right Leg
3	Left Leg	7	Right Hand
4	Left hand	8	Lower Torso
15. Fungus grows in genital areas.
16. Character gain venereal disease. Roll d10 to determine type:
 - (a) Mutant Crabs (do 1d4/bite)
 - (b) Ork Rot
 - (c) Genital Wart
 - (d) Herpes

- (e) Dwarven Itch (only scratched by mining pick)
 - (f) Rot Grub
 - (g) Your *part* falls off.
 - (h) Crabs
 - (i) Green Slime
 - (j) 7 Day Itch
17. Female Phobia. Character must roll save as. poison or run in fear when any females are present.
 18. Character is attracted to the gender of other, not male or female.
 19. Gain a glossy reflective forehead.
 20. Attracted to no one except one's self.
 21. Large thick chunks of hair grow on palms.
 22. PC is polymorphed into a dung beetle. Even if polymorphed back character still has a fascination with rolling dung into balls.
 23. Character grows 3 foot long butt hair.
 24. Character's hand becomes melded between legs.
 25. Instant sex change
 26. Instant Vasectomy
 27. Asmodeus commands that PC must always wear pink armor and cloths upon threat of death. PC will constantly be made fun of.
 28. Character permanently smells like tuna fish.
 29. Diminish brain (-10 to INT).
 30. All gold in PC's possession, not necessarily with the PC, turns into small cans of worthless spam. If PC attempts to eat spam it will immediately jumps out of the can and try to eat character. See the Spam stat in the monster section of this magazine.
 31. Character becomes the world's worst Elvis impersonator. Character will lose 50Yep, Uh-Huu, Momma Baby, Uh Wubba Wubba Ahh-Hawww, Yup; in each sentence they say. Even worse they have to dress like Elvis in every adventure (snappy dresser!) or lose all EXP for that adventure! (I suggest the DM should have NPC's tell the character that he's "Nutt'n but ah hound dog")
 32. Character's leg hair grows at a visible rate. (-9 CMS).
 33. Character loses all body hair permanently, except for hands. Then the character also gains the effects of number 21. (see above).
 34. All garments worn (including armor) becomes permanently melded to body, forced removal will kill character.
 35. Character is condemned to Disco Hell, a plane that is a giant disco club that plays nothing but John Travolta music.
 36. Character gains the permanent smell of ogre dung.
 37. Character instantly grows 12 inch long arm pit hair. Every attempt the hair is shaved off it will instantly grow back twice in length in only a matter of seconds.
 38. Roll three times.
 39. Character is immediately assaulted by a large group of insurance salesmen. Save vs. Insanity or become a drooling moron and buy 3,000,000 GP worth of pinky insurance. *Salesman: Yah, pinkies are always being cut off by mad dragons and so forth.*
 40. Character is instantly charmed and then sends everything they own (this includes deeds to land and property) to Jim and Tammy Baker.
 41. A large Nazi Panzer tank appears out of nowhere and rolls over top of PC, PC take 5d100 damage. After the character has been turned into a pancake the panzer tank commander will pop his head out of the turret and says in a heavy German accent: "That'll teach you to fuck with the DM!"
 42. All rations carried by PC is instantly turned into Troll meat. Within 3d6 rounds the rations will have regenerated into full sized trolls. For every day of rations the PC has will turn into three trolls.
 43. d20 leeches appear in character's genital areas. They can only be removed by fire.
 44. Character farts, sneezes, hiccups, coughs, burps, shits, pisses, pukes, cries, nose runs, ear drums explode splattering earwax everywhere, at the same time, character explodes leaving a pile of assorted bodily excretions. *Audience:*

Ewwwwwwww!!!!!! DM: He never looked better!

45. 100,000 pamphlets for medicare fall out of the sky onto the character leaving a large number of paper cuts. Then a hill of salt falls onto the character. *DM: Oops! Someone spilt the Morton! Critic: The salt added a bit of FLAVOR to the torture, two thumbs up!*
46. Character gets a suit of Francium-coated platemail, then it rains. For all you idiots out there (munchkins), the element Francium reacts violently with water, in other words it goes **BOOM!** The DM can decide on the damage, but don't be nice.
47. Character is forced to drink a Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster. The utterly wonderful drink created by the former galactic president Zaphod Beeblebrox. This is the best alcoholic drink in the galaxy. The only problem is the effects of drinking one is like having your brain smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped around a large gold brick. The effects of drinking a Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster are:
 - -10 STR, this effect lasts for 2d6 years.
 - 3 INT, most of the brain cells were killed off.
 - PC looks really bad for four days.
 - PC has hangover for four YEARS. (DM: Laugh)
 - -8 DEX, PC can't stop shaking.
 - +1 CON, if he can come through this he's a tough dumbshit!
 - -1000000 gold for rehabilitation fees.
 - DM must constantly make fun of the character.
48. Your dick splits like a banana. For the females out there it implodes!! (DM: Gee, you feel a draft, OR, I guess no one is going to CUM to your rescue. Audience: Groan!)
49. A large flock of Rocs fly overhead and take a BIIIIIIIG shit! The character must use the drowning rules.
50. A tornado come by and transports PC to Oz where you meet MUNCHKINS who sing to you very cutely. Save vs. Insanity or die from extreme cuteness. If PC makes roll he becomes a munchkin. Stats: Who cares, your character is screwed anyways!
51. PC is forced to listen to rap music till he likes it. When he finally likes rap his INT has been reduced to 3. (Note: If you are insulted by this, well good!)
52. Neuromancer plays Dead Kennedys on his guitar. Take 10d1000 Damage. (If you heard him, you would understand. Neuromancer: hits Silver with guitar for that comment)
53. Character reads Torture Table and laughs their ass off. Character loses -5 CMS because he/she lacks an ass.
54. A one inch layer of vacuum forms around the PC. Give graphic description of the horrible death (See Total Recall).
55. A dimension door opens up and a steam roller rolls over the PC. The PC isn't dead just flat on their back (I mean real flat, like wow George! That is a really flat dude.)
56. PC appears on a seatless bicycle — naked (DM take it from here).
57. Attacked by a woman with an Epilady. Suffer immense pain and embarrassment. (You were killed by a what??!!)
58. PC walks through tomato patch. When they step on a tomato, 1d100 small killer tomatoes and 1d50 large killer tomatoes attack. In the background the theme from Attack of the Killer Tomatoes can be heard.
59. Character's rations are turned into dorm cafeteria food. When eaten character must roll Save vs. Poisons or take 2d6 damage.
60. PC is forever haunted by the ghosts of Sir Robin's minstrels. PC must make weekly rolls on Save vs. Insanity or go insane.
61. Character is instantly teleported into a torture chamber where he is tied with his back to the open side of a rat cage. A fire appears underneath the cage, the cage does not burn, but the rats go crazy trying to escape. They slowly eat through the PC's back to escape. They first claw through the outer layers of skin and then through the muscle before gnawing through the rib cage into the soft, tastey organs, before ripping out the lungs and devouring the heart. Finally they tear through the chest and escape. Normally the PC is dead at this point; however, there is a slim chance that he/she might survive, unable to do anything but writhe in pain till the conclusion of

- the game (unless, of course, he/she is devoured by wild animals or cannibals) (Special graphic description by guest writer Lee Finney)
62. Character looks exactly like James T. Kirk (William Shatner). He now will be followed constantly by Trekkies (in costume) who ask him questions like: What was your locker combination in episode 324? What was the name of the security officer who was killed from the alien virus in episode 431?
 63. Character gains a Ring of Fly Paper Touch. (See *Magic Items*)
 64. Roll five times.
 65. Character is attack by a stampede of sex crazed rhinos. Their gender will be opposite of the character. DM: Don't hold back with your perversion.
 66. Character has a painful itch underneath toenails and fingernails. Character will take a -5 to DEX and +5 to AC until they cut the nails off (1d4 damage) and scratch the bloody remains. When remove they have a -3 CLM. (DM: Don't you hate an itch you can never scratch. PC: I'm gonna kill the writers!)
 67. Character must always talk backwards or lose 1000 EXP per game. If they do talk backward they get the nice bonus of an extra 10 EXP for good role-playing (Bwahahahahaha!).
 68. Character gives birth. If the PC is a male they have a butt baby.
 69. What does this number mean boys and girls? This means the DM can be as perverted as he/she wants...but more than us (which is impossible, so try your best.)
 70. Small black hole replaces PC's asshole. Everything in game world is sucked into it. (Put a boogy in your butt! Put a Tree in your butt! Put Tiamat up your butt! Put Zeus up your butt! Put the Abyss up your butt! etc...)
 71. Character's butt and face change places. This may not make much of a difference for Dwarves.
 72. Character becomes a masochist. PC must inflict 10 damage to them self a day or lose 1000 EXP per day.
 73. Character's genitals become razor sharp (male or female), the next person they have sex with will try and kill them for what they did.
 74. Every god, demi-god, demon, dragon, or living organism with an intelligence above one will want to kill him.
 75. When ever the room becomes silent the character will fart and fart like no other fart ever farted before. The smell will kill plants and curdle milk. Actually this fart casts stinking cloud ten times which lasts for two hours. This also leaves a large hole in the rear area of the PC's armor (even magic armor, AC +5).
 76. Character's genitals come to life and are able to speak. They will receive an ego of 20 and will be attracted to people with a CMS below 4, especially orcs and ogres. The genital area will constantly complain about how it doesn't get enough sex and often complain how dirty underwear is. (Gosh! Do you ever wash these things!?!)
 77. Character is attack by their own socks. See bestiary section of magazine for socks stats.
 78. Character melts with contact with water, PC does not know this. *Witch: Help! I'm melting!*
 79. When ever the character takes a shit, Limburger cheese comes out. The smell is so bad that they must roll Save vs. Death or drop dead.
 80. Character is instantly turned into a Kobold. No stats can be above eight.
 81. A large Venus Fly Trap appears and the PC perceives this as the most beautiful woman (or handsome man) they have ever seen. The PC will drop his/her pants and will, well...you know (cough cough...Bahahahahahahahahaa).
 82. Character's underwear becomes a full set of knives.
 83. Character's CHR plunges to a -10. He/she now has the personality of Morton Downy Jr. *Moron Downy Jr.: You candy ass liberal Democratic commie satanic role-player!*
 84. Roll 10 times.
 85. Character spontaneously combusts. Give a graphic description of the sight and smells the other characters experience. *DM: There is the smell of slowly roasted dog food and Bob seems to explode from within, showering you with small, flaming particles of Bob flesh. You gag and run away very quickly in the general direction of the bushes.*

86. Character is suddenly and irrevocably transformed into an ant. Character looks like an ant, smells like an ant, tastes like an ant, and of course... is an ant. FOREVER!!!!
87. Character's genitals shrink to 1/1000th their original size. This is a true ego buster and should not be used on the same character more than once. *DM: (holding up a grain of sand) This, folks, is actual scale. PC: WWWWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!*
88. Character becomes a member of the Hell's Angels and must endure the initiation. PC is pummeled by a pack of plump bikers (1d20 DMG). Then, character is force fed a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster. If he survives this ordeal, he is asked where he wants his tattoo. The cross eyed tattoo artist then puts tattoos all over his body, except that one spot. PC is then pummeled once again, dragged behind several choppers, mangled, mashed, beaten, bloodied, and just generally hurt badly. Finally, he/she must ride a chopper off of a ten foot cliff. Unfortunately, the PC, unable to steer the motorcycle, plunges it over a 2000 ft cliff.
89. Mickey mouse hat (with ears) sprouts from PC's head. This hat is unremovable by any means short of divine intervention *Zeus: BAHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!! Me help you? Bahahahahaha!*
90. Party finds a *Jockstrap of Constriction*. It inflicts 1d4 damage per round, until 4 rounds have passed. It then falls to the ground, along with the PC's balls. PC then sprouts a cucumber where it had been.
91. PC is inflicted with *Whizzard's Touch*. Anything he touches turns to spam, unless he wants it to. A truly sadistic DM could have hours of fun and enjoyment tormenting the poor sap. *DM: All right your +10000 sword is changed to a spam sword with dissolves on contact.*
92. If PC is a female, then she is challenged to a joust. The lance strikes home in a very tender spot. Do you know where? Take a wild guess folks, I'm sure you know this one. *DM: ouch.*
93. Reverse gravity is permanently cast upon the PC's private portions. Any natural function (pissing etc.) will fly into their face. The PC will begin to soil their pants anytime combat starts. *PC: CCHHHAAARRRR... glumph... urk... oh god!*
94. All other PCs perceive the victim as their greatest fear. They will, of course, attempt to disbelieve. Then the illusion changes, revealing the victim as an enemy illusionist, who is waving a glowing wand and wearing 10 glowing rings. The other PCs will probably jump and kill him in their greed. Then the illusion fades and those of good alignment will kill themselves out of remorse. Those of evil or neutral alignment, will have it changed to good and *then* kill themselves.
95. The party finds a black box with a note attached. It says "If you press this button, we will give you 1,000,000 platinum pieces. However, someone will die." The PC will probably eventually push it. When they do, a million platinum pieces will appear as promised... with another note. This one says "If you press the button again, we will immortalize you and give you powers beyond your imagination." If pressed again, the PC is transformed into an adamantium statue. I'll bet they never imagined that would happen.
96. PC is transported back in time to the big bang. The PC is the critical mass of matter that mixes with antimatter and sets off the creation of the universe. However, contrary to popular belief, the PC does not become God. He does in fact, become very, very dead.
97. PC falls off the universe into the great void of ideas. He must then fill the void with ideas, which will take approximately 99,999,999,999,999,999,999,999,999,999 millennia.
98. Character is forced to spend an hour with the writers of this table. Save *vs.* Death Magic at -32 or go insane!
99. All of the above.
100. The PC is teleported to a lower dimension of Hell where 100 Ernests (Hey, Verne), and Pee Wee Hermans (I meant to do that) torture the character for eternity. This is the worst thing we could think of. *EVIL GRIN*
101. This entry was deleted because it was too twisted, sick and demented. The last two people who read it died from internal hemorrhaging (We were unaffected). The editor of this magazine barely survived by gnawing his own leg off. In fact, there was another author originally, but his own large intestine, in an attempt to save life and civilization, leapt up through his neck and throttled his brain.

Blipverts

& Other Explosive Promo

The Wailing Crier

Guild of Adventure Gaming

PO Box 8111
Kentwood, MI 49518
(616) 531-5460

The Guild of Adventure Gaming is a buyer's group made up of members who send their orders into us. We pool the orders and buy at wholesale, passing the savings on to members. By skipping the retail level, we can offer a wider range of products at discount prices while retaining access to a large selection of companies without the inventory costs of a retailer.

Most of the products we sell are at a 35% discount from list price, while magazines, paints, and dice are at 30% discount. Members pay their own shipping and a \$.75 handing charge, and most orders are delivered in 2-3 weeks. We also accept Visa and Mastercard.

Membership in the Guild is covered by a one-time fee of \$15. Our catalogs cost \$3 with any order or \$5 if mailed separately. With membership, you will have access to our newsletter and updates of new releases.

We think you'll find the Guild is a welcome alternative to high prices.

Another Good Mail-Order Store

For those of you out there who are looking for a good mail-order source for RPG's of all sorts, as well as wargames, miniatures, dice, and supplies of all kinds, I recommend "Wargames West." I have ordered from WGW in the past, and I can say that they are simply the best mail-order company I have ever dealt with. They are fast and friendly and their selection is unmatched by anyone.

Here is their address and phone number:

Wargames West
3422 Central SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106

PH#: 1-800-SAY-GAME

Their catalog is 120+ pages and makes you feel like a little kid in a toy store. The catalog is free (but only inside the U.S., I think).

Credit card and Money Orders get the fastest service. They ship U.P.S., U.S. Mail, C.O.D. (U.P.S. only), and, if you can afford it, next day air, so you have a variety of shipping options.

I believe there is a minimum order of \$15.

Just call them for the catalog. The catalog alone will convince you to do business with them.

— Andrew G Hummell
aghst1@uniz.cis.pitt.edu
University of Pittsburgh

Free RPG Info

Free role playing info for the cost of a stamp. Sure there are gonna be some ads. Don't worry, there'll be useful stuff too. Send an SASE to:

Free Info
P.O. Box 972
Amherst, NY 14226-0972

Just Do It

— Terry L Freeland
v097pz6d@ubvmsb.cc.buffalo.edu
University at Buffalo

InterText

InterText, like its predecessor, Athene, is devoted to publishing amateur writing in a genres of fiction. It will be published on a bi-monthly basis, hopefully alternating with Quanta (so subscribers to both will get one netzine every month). The magazine's editor is Jason Snell, and associate editors are Geoff Duncan and Phil Nolte, all of whom have been seen in the pages of Athene or Quanta.

InterText is published in both ASCII and PostScript formats. The first issue will appear

June 1991. For a subscription (specify ASCII or PostScript), information, or submissions of stories to be published in InterText, contact Jason Snell at jsnell@ucsd.edu.

DargonZine

DargonZine is an electronic magazine printing stories written for the Dargon Project, a shared-world anthology similar to (and inspired by) Robert Asprin's Thieves' World anthologies, created by David "Orny" Liscomb in his now retired magazine, FSFNet. The Dargon Project centers the medieval duchy of Dargon in the far reaches of the Kingdom of Baranur on the world of Makdiar and, as such, contains stories with a fantasy-fiction/sword&magic flavor.

DargonZine is currently available only in flat-file, text-only format. For a subscription, please send a request via MAIL to the editor, Dafydd, at the userid white@duvm.BITNET. This request should contain full userid as well as your full name. InterNet subscribers will receive issues in Mail format. BitNet users have the option of specifying the a preferred file transfer format (DiskDump, Punch/Mail, or Send-File/NetData).

Classifieds

Lonely female halfling seeks male halfling in her life, preferably an adventurer. If you have a reasonably established halfling (AD&D, Rolemaster, whatever) who is caring, considerate likes children and not over-frivolous, please mail me their description. I'd like to clone him. Strict confidence: Graham Wills, Dept. of Maths, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, gwills@maths.tcd.ie

Trying to Find Us?

To contact the Guildsman, write to:

*The Gamers' Guild
Commons, Main Desk
University of California
Riverside, CA 92521*

Discounts for UCR Gamers

Alpha-Omega Games
15965 Piuma Ave
Cerritos, CA 90701
(213) 809-6849

Mon	7pm - 10pm
Tues - Thurs	Noon - 9pm
Fri - Sat	Noon - 10pm
Sun	Noon - 5pm

Check out our new location in Cerritos. From Riverside, take the 91 to the 605N, take a left off the Alondra exit and a left on Piuma. UCR Gamers command a 25% discount*.

Comics +
8151 Arlington
Riverside, CA 92503
(714) 785-4818

Mon - Sat	9am - 10pm
Sun	10am - 8pm

Check out our all-new collection of games and gaming accessories at our new location on Arlington. UCR Gamers command a 20% discount*.

Daylight Hobbies
10220 Hole Avenue
Riverside, CA 92503
(714) 688-6013

Mon - Fri	10am - 8pm
Sat	9am - 7pm
Sun	10am - 5pm

Gaming is our specialty, and we have a complete stock of RPGs and accessories including the latest material. UCR Gamers command a 10% discount*.

* Discounts apply only to games and do not apply to items purchased on credit or to items already marked down. Discounts will only be honored to current members of the UCR Gamers' Guild.