

Gloranthan Mything Links

Assorted tales

Oliver D. Bernuetz, editor

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A collection of myths, jokes and stories set in the World of Glorantha.

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Foreword

This is the collection of full text stories, jokes and myths that appeared in the Mything Links blog. With the announced closure of the site on December 15, 2015 I decided to create a word document that included all the full text from the site rather than losing the collection. Most of these first appeared in one of the many old Glorantha related mailing lists such as Henk Langeveld's RuneQuest Daily, the Glorantha Digest, the HeroQuest Daily, the Open Glorantha list, or the World of Glorantha group. A few appeared from other sources such as PBEM¹ campaigns. The oldest piece here dates from June 15, 1994 while the most recent is from 2006. I had the author's permission to include their works on the blog but if anyone objects to having their work appear here let me know at bernuetz@mts.net and I will remove your work.

There's an index at the end of this that may help you find what you're looking for.

Is any of this canon? No idea but a whole lot of it is fun and may serve as a source of inspiration. Any typos and spelling mistakes are probably the authors and I apologize for any additional errors I may have introduced.

Enjoy!

Oliver D. Bernuetz

¹ Play By E-Mail

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The Adventures of Tinglet Dangersmile - Dartwar by Frank Giles

(Originally this story appeared in the Glorantha Digest November 26, 1995 - February 26, 1996. This text is a version sent to me by Frank to update what I had in Mything Links.)

Chapter 1

Dart War. A strange concept. Foreign. Complicated. Human. Humans were like a brain fever victim with thoughts growing more and more intricate and convoluted, until finally the shape of reality fades beneath a veil of strange details. And the Red Moon humans, with their cities, their empire. They were the worst. It was like Granny had said: sunlight had driven them mad.

It could be so simple. If clan mothers, assuming Moon humans listened to them, chose war, there should be war. If the conflict was not so great, then why not sponsor a game. Real people, like Uz, cleared up lots of clan conflicts this way. The clan with the greater friends and wealth was sure to field the better team. If the underdog should win, then doubtless the Great Mother willed it so. In extremity, She could be consulted directly. Such an appeal had averted bloody civil more than once. But hiring outsiders to kill an opposing clan by stealth, then encumbering them with a hundred nonsensical Rules of Conflict? Foolish! A faint smile tugged at the corners of Tinglet's eyes. Lunatic!

He turned back to the view through the barred window. The garden and cloister below lay bleaching under the pounding noon sun. One wall and the cloister arches were overgrown by a climbing vine. Many little plants were scattered around in beds and pots. Swaying leaves gave the unadorned yard a little pleasing activity and texture. Everything else was very smooth and plain. The plants, and the faint pattern on the cloister wall, probably had that quality called color, a strange subtlety of light so interesting to humans. In truth though, the yard was terribly drab. The quarry was rich and powerful, but the lair was tasteless.

Waiting...waiting...shifting minutely to ease a stiff thigh... after a few heartbeats he let speaking thoughts dissolve into his gut.

Watch for prey.

Strike.

Search for food.

Eat.

Sleep...

Some he-uz lived this way continually, minds waking only for holy days and markets. The home clan he-uz were mainly gut-led hunters. Tingleet choose a different way, disciplining his gut, living by thought and plan like the Uz did. He was one of the few he-uz of his clan that had the strength of mind to succeed here, to go unsupervised among the pale, weak humans. What would have become of Grylka or the others, had fate set them loose on the street of the human city? Even at dusk, the place crawled with small, flailing human young. They hopped, they wandered, they screamed like injured rodents. Tingleet knew his cousins well. They would have been stalking within minutes.

Still, following the gut could be useful. Here in the little garret overlooking a rich man's garden, it was two-fold convenient. On one hand, none of the estate's guardian spirits had singled him out of the many prowling vermin hunters. On the other, three rats, two pigeons, a spicy fungus and a nest of delicately flavored termites eased an otherwise long and hungry day.

The sun was finally headed for his grave. The message should appear soon. At last, there it is. In the twilight, a woman carrying a short spear approached the front of the manse. The Dart had arrived. With one rapid motion he jerked the bronze bars out of the window casing he'd gnawed away the night before and swung his legs through. In an instant he was climbing down the trellised inner wall of the tower into the courtyard. Silently, he crossed the yard to the cloister, and ran along it to the exit arch and the large oak door. He paused a heartbeat to transfer his mace from its sheath to his mouth. Then, using fingertips and the edges of his boots, he scaled backwards up the corner of the alcove and wedged himself in; back to the ceiling, one boot gripping the corner of an arch stones, the other braced against the beam set in the wall. All was as the silk people had described. No, wait. A sconce was fixed to the wall next to the door. A dilemma. He hadn't watched the household long enough to know when the lamp would be brought. Breaking the sconce would be too risky. He would have to rely on darkness he brought himself

He slipped the thong of his mace over his left arm. The mace was of unusual design, made entirely of metal. He had found the it in the waste pit of a walktapus' den many years before. He kept it partly because its slender design made it easy to carry. But more because it was enchanted to give the knowledge of a spell to strengthen its blows to anyone who held it. Its head could be disassembled into six pieces each with a notched hole in the center that fit over the handle shaft. Three of the pieces were squares a palm's breadth wide and two fingers thick. They were made of bronze, that reddish metal, the bones of dead ancient gods, that was found all across the land. Two others were dark gray discs the same thickness as the squares, but not so wide. They were of a strange metal or alloy, heavy like lead, but not so soft. The last piece, the cap, was set in place by turning it down over a coiling groove cut into the top finger's breadth of the shaft and then held by a metal pin. A human in a distant tavern had once opined that the mace was Mostali. The manner in which that observation was made had led to a brawl that nearly destroyed the bar, but Tingleet basically agreed. He was glad that it was not made of iron, the cursed dwarves' poison metal.

He pulled the mace's thong up his arm until it hung securely. Focusing on the subtle engraving on the wide rhinoceros hide brace on his left wrist, he prepared his mind to work the spells he needed. Darkwall to keep his hiding place secret and Holdpatch to secure the door. Spells learned from the spirits were difficult and unpredictable. Tinglet divided his thoughts. His speaking mind rehearsed incantations and visualized the shape the darkwall should take. His gut listened for approaching prey. Like one of the silk people, he waited...

A sound...A hurried step beyond the door. He completed the gesture, and in his throat whispered the short final incantation. Success! A curved sheet of darkness formed below him, following the outline of the archstones. The upper portion of the alcove became a featureless black. From his side the darkwall looked like an infinitesimally thin veil of smoke. From the other side he knew it was as opaque as the night sky.

A few heartbeats later the door opened. It was a servant, a lamp and the dart clenched in her white knuckled fist. Hasty, she set the lamp in the sconce then hurried on toward the master's suite. Tinglet stared at the flame. So hateful, the light. But, the quarry might be alarmed by anything unusual. He forced himself to let it burn. An angry shout barked across the courtyard, then the sound of a blow. The darkwall still held when the servant returned to scurry unsteadily through the door. Fortunately she was well trained. Even with blood trickling down her face, she remembered to close it behind her.

Tinglet commanded one of his bound magic spirits to prepare his mace while he concentrated on the door. Spirits were the messengers that carried spells from whatever distance source kept them. Through training and ritual one could learn to capture spell spirits, to overcome them, to take knowledge of the spell from them. As part of his training to serve the Great Mother and the mother of the silk people, Tinglet had learned to summon many types of spirits who were fellowservants. He knew that shamen could summon and learn the names of all kinds of spirits. But he had never felt the call to enter their strange path and awaken his fetch, his spirit self. Also, shamen labored under many demands, perhaps more even than were laid on priestesses. Tinglet chafed too easily under obligation. It was burden enough to be a servant, but worth it to gain the greater knowledge and spells granted by the mothers.

The quarry was deliberate, or occupied. Tinglet had sufficient time to recast the holdpatch after the first attempt failed. Now, mace in hand, he focused his mind, his body on the attack, the blow. He felt fate gather around him. Whether he caught his prey or not, a new strand would grow in this web tonight.

Firm steps approached. The heft of his mace changed as his bound spirit finished its spell. The mace was no heavier to swing, but for a short time it would be harder to block or deflect. Now the master of the house stood beneath him. Tinglet visualized the mace crashing through the crown of that bald head. The quarry paused with one hand on the door latch, puzzled that it didn't move at his pull. The instant of hesitation was Tinglet's time. Like a shadow he dropped to the floor behind the prey, swinging the mace as soon as his boots met the pavement.

Ai! Warned at the last second by luck or magic the human ducked. A glancing blow sent the quarry reeling, but didn't kill. Humans as wealthy as he could pay for armor-enchanted skin. No time for further spells. The quarry bellowed like a wounded Aurochs. Tinglet fainted, circled, dodged a clumsy Dart

thrust, aimed for the head and this time struck true. The quarry lay at his feet. He held his breath. No steps. No stirring. A few sounds from the streets and a distant gong calling for twilight worship were all he could hear. The garden was still.

Suppressing the urge to treat himself to a hunter's share, (Jaazelle had ordered: No tusk marks on this victim) he drew the strange old ax she had given him, the *Memento Mori*. It was shaped like the rune of Death, with a narrow, chisel like blade opposite a symmetrical counter weight, both set about a hand's breadth below the squared top of its handle. Ugly, but it would work. Orders were clear: make it permanent, leave the ax. Needing two hands, he transferred the mace to his mouth, shaft between his teeth, and reached to lift the quarry's head. Ai! No hair, no tusks, ears too small, how was he going to pick up the head? He stuck his fingers in the quarry's mouth and pulled on the jaw to extend the neck. With one blow he had the head off. With a second he plunged the ax into the twitching corpse. The job was half done. The head would make a good snack. He dropped it into his game bag and returned the mace to its sheath. Two silent strides got him out of the alcove and across the cloister. He pressed a moment against the pillar to scan the garden, then swung through the arch and clambered up the trellis to the floor above. For three heartbeats he clung to the vine-covered balustrade just below the railing of an elevated gallery. No sound from above. Carefully he crept over the rail and crouched against it from the inside.

From the silk people Tinglet knew that the young heirs lived in the rooms off this gallery. They were now away at the evening meal. By the warped rules of human non-war they were his quarry too. Tinglet squinted. Human young were deliciously tender, but without their alien taste, the taboo against harming children in the nest made it hard to keep his eyes open. He had planned for this, the silk people had no such compunctions. Tinglet drew a stiff leather tube from within his blouse and untied the end cap. A muffled shout from below, someone pounding on the sealed door. He didn't have much time. A few gentle taps and a high chirp coaxed them out. The elegant fangs. The eight clever legs. The many friendly eyes set on a shiny cephalothorax the size of Tinglet's thumb. Silk people possessed a rare beauty. They did not reason as he did, or even as humans, but even the smaller members of their kind could speak through gestures. Through long trust and the teachings of their mother, they could be persuaded to help, to share silk from their webs, to watch. Dark Eyes and Leaper had come with him from the distant mountains. They were the only members of their clan for many days travel. At home they helped him hunt small game, stalking to within two or three paces of their prey, then springing to bite. Their venom caused rapid death accompanied by tremendous tissue damage, and imparted an interesting sharpness to the meat. Waving his fingers in the pattern of their four forward legs Tinglet asked: "Hunt large prey in cave near? Leave dead, I feed you later?" They both spread their mandibles, extending the fangs, "Yes".

A crack, a thud, the door burst open below. Accompanied by cries of outrage and mourning, Tinglet scuttled to the barred window and lifted his friends to the sill. Much commotion in the garden below. He must leave at once. The gallery ended at the north wall of the garden, the wall to the master's apartment. A chimney running up the wall about an arm's length out from the railing offered some cover for the climb to the roof. Tinglet hoped to get up quickly enough to avoid missiles and spells, even if he was seen in the twilight. He moved. At the end of the gallery he stuck the tip of his snout through

the balustrade to scan the garden below. It was alive with humans. Many tasted like metal, weapons and armor. One, with a large cloth-flavored headdress was probably the family priestess.

A flicker of motion above him caught his eye. He scanned nothing. It was a light projected onto the awning through the vent left open between the roof beams and the top of the wall. A strange light, like evil firelight, coming from the room within. Tinglet guessed the room to be part of the Master's apartments, which he'd been told were just below the storage garret where he'd spent the day. The vent scanned as about three handbreaths high and two paces long, with no bars. It offered another way off the gallery, but one leading in, not out. Tinglet salivated. Fate called him to a new, dangerous path. The floor vibrated beneath him, warriors were searching the gallery. In a few heartbeats they would round the corner to his left. Tinglet smiled. He slipped across the gallery and leapt up, hooking his right arm through the vent. Then he walked his legs up the corner to the vent and kicked the right one through. Twisting until he was face down he pushed his leg back, feeling along a crossbeam. After a few heartbeats he could hook his foot over the crossbeam. Scanning and looking over his right shoulder as best he could, Tinglet slid backwards. Ai! The game bagThe opening narrowed at its inner edge, too tight! The human warriors were nearly beneath him. With one hand Tinglet untied his leather harness so his equipment, weapons, and the bag, would slide up over his head instead of blocking his way. Genitals were already retracted from his recent fight. Tinglet exhaled, sucked in his gut as hard as he could, and writhed through the vent.

Made it! Quickly, he dragged the the harness and bag through after him. He lay balanced atop a large beam spanning a gloomy half completed shrine. Fate led well. He scanned no motion, the room was unoccupied. The beam marked the division between the room of the flickering light and a space for worshippers, which was to his right. Tools and half-finished furnishings had been pushed into the corners. Sheets of heavy fabric had been mounted on the long walls. His eyes could discern faint patterns or pictures woven into them. The end wall to the right showed a real picture. A carving in the human style, with all the foreground surfaces finished to an identical smoothness. Tinglet scanned it intently. A large circular disk dominated the top of the work. Small figures and buildings in groups were arranged along the bottom border. Straight ridges raised a little from the background connected the disk to the scene below it. Could this be the evil sun punishing the wicked? No, far more likely it depicted the Red Moon. Directly before the picture lay an enormous altar, four paces long, and nearly as wide. Lazy flames, the source of the light, burnt in two braziers mounted at each end of a sacrificial platform at its head. A mosaic of irregular stone, metal and wooden shapes inlaid in gold sloped gently down from the platform to the foot of the altar directly beneath him. A handful of carving tools lay near the head of the altar. Engraving work had just begun. Tinglet could make out some human writing and a sun rune cut into the gold oblong at the far right corner.

A warm trickle ran down the side of his snout. By the Left Upper! Intent on catching his harness as he slipped through the wall vent, he'd torn his ear. Still plenty of time to heal it before the damage became real. A red drop fell from the tip of his snout. He scanned it as it fell. Ai! Two handbreadths above the altar the drop leaped from its straight path to land sizzling on a metal patch an arm's length away. The metal was lead, the metal of darkness, the metal of his people. The drop jumped and spat, disappearing within a few heartbeats.

Clearly, the altar was alive, and powerful. Perhaps this was why no household guardians had haunted his hiding place during the day. The garret was probably just above the chapel to the right, and strong spirits were sometimes very territorial. Tinglet studied the shrine, trying to comprehend its purpose. Who could know how the decadent Lunars worshipped? Their Mother, the Red Moon, certainly didn't seem to get anything close to the respect due her. Then here they'd spent enormous wealth and power on a space that could hold only a few hands of worshipers. What was its purpose? He dare not take time to investigate further. So far it didn't perceive him to be an enemy, or was powerless to reach him. Thoughtfully, he slid his harness back on. Better not get any closer. Spell casting might not be safe here either. He pinched his ear to stop the bleeding while he scanned for a way out. That smoke hole might do. He was sizing it and licking blood off his thumb when a door opened behind and below him. Two humans dressed in the manner of the city nobility entered the chapel. The shorter one pushed into the room first shouting, and gesticulating angrily.

"Void take Gracus! Always his little intrigues, his little feuds, his family honor. Now he gets himself cut down just when for once in this lifetime a truly significant contribution stands at the threshold. We must recover his bat-addled head and.."

"Hold Leonio," the taller one cut him off, "the altar is disturbed... something has happened."

The shorter human nearly exploded. "Something has happened! Our host and sponsor, the source of the money and approval that brought the altar into being, and the spirit's foremost initiate, lies shortened in the courtyard. That 'something' has happened!"

After a minuscule pause the taller continued. "No, some discordant spirit or charm has touched the altar. I fear this is more than a simple assassination. What wouldn't the storm barbarians risk to thwart our work? We must proceed carefully, We must investigate every unusual occurrence."

"Ha! Yes, of course. Look under every rock. Question each wandering, rain-soaked vagabond. Cast all the auguries. That is how the barbarians succeed. Not through knowledge and power, but by our indecision and delay. That's the Red Moon witch way, remember? That's the failure that forced us into working with this damn Gracus in the first place. That's what holds the glowline back. That's what delays our victory. It's time to act!"

Another man entered, interrupting: "Hail, my lords, the Satrap required your presence immediately." Seeing the expression on the short man's face he hastily bowed and withdrew.

The short man stood, fists balled, a few heartbeats, the altar flame's light playing malignantly across his face. Not looking away from the altar he spoke. "Pray, proceed me while I compose myself."

The tall one touched his forehead in a gesture of agreement, "But of course Leonio."

The short man took a few steps toward the altar as the other slipped out. Its face was contorted. The puny human mouth pressed closed, corners down, its brow creased above and between his eyes. Human facial expressions were usually alien, inscrutable. This specimen however, seemed to be lost in angry thought. A good time to bag it. Silently, Tinglet unhooked his mace and gathered himself silently

to spring. But wait. The rules of Dart contest included a strict prohibition: Registered victims only. Enlo! He had to smile. Damn human, saved by its own twisted rules. Tinglet returned his attention to the smoke hole as the quarry wheeled and strode out.

Chapter 2

Tinglet lay half awake, and a little sore. Somewhere the sun blazed, but the cell, probably an abandoned cistern, was pitch black. Drip. Drip. Drip. Water oozed from the dank walls to pool a few feet away. Where the water fell the stones were treacherously slimy. It was only safe to stand on the drier part of the floor and there the arched stone ceiling was too low to stand upright. The sleeping nest was coarse, but at least it was dry. Was the chain still there? His fingers groped at his neck. Yes. A fine silver chain. The jewel-inlaid human teeth strung on it made a great trophy. Tinglet's stomach growled, but the pool and walls didn't hide anything else big enough to be worth getting up for. His gut started to explore, to make sure it was safe to sleep. His thoughts wandered along: "Very thoughtful of Jaazelle to find such comfortable and homey quarters. Surprising that a human could be such a good hostess. Her own rooms were creepy. How could anyone rest with openings in the walls? Or behind such a flimsy door? Obviously she didn't care much. Maybe loss of kin had started the deathwish in her. Strange though, for all that she sleeps in the open, she seems so angry to see me." He woke a little. Thinking of Jaazelle aroused his gut.

Danger, fear.

"Why was that? She was too small to be a physical threat. She would never scold or slap than the Uz he'd served all his life. That was the problem. She was the boss lady, but..." His gut churned again.

Fear.

Priestess mother had said he had to follow the spirit. It would lead him to a human. The great mother said I had to serve her. Her! She was the boss lady. What else could she be? The priestess says to follow her orders. In my guts that makes her Boss Lady. She's Boss Lady, but she doesn't notice when I dawdle, when I test, and when she does get angry, it doesn't matter; in fact my gut wants to defy her." Churning, twisting, he chewed the thoughts over and over. At last sleep sneaked in before he could gag that mouthful down.

Chapter 3

The crying of an urchin in the street below impinged on her consciousness. Then in her left cheek the tic began again. Her concentration collapsed. Bright morning light filled the small whitewashed room. She sighed, repositioned herself slightly and began the meditations over for the third time.

Moon

Red Moon

Round Red Moon

Round Red Moon;

Like the gate to the Garden of Peace

Round Red Moon;

Like...The empty eyesocket of a damp, pinkish, fresh-picked, tusk scarred and caved-in skull staring at her across her pillow.

Jaazelle leapt to her feet and savagely kicked the green and yellow cushions from her pallet. Her grotesque new trophy clattered to the floor. That troll, damn him, must have brought it to her in the night. With an effort she caught herself in the act of throwing her meditation beads after it. The Round Red Moon, the Seven Mantras of Composure, nothing worked. Her cheek twitched again. It was because of the Dart Contest. She had participated in more contests than she could count, but always as the detached observer, the hired dart, the assassin. How different it was to be invested in the outcome, to direct the path of death....and to be a target yourself. She would not have believed the tension it brought.

Why did it have to be her? Why all of a sudden had the family dreams and nightmares of her childhood returned. What was the point of status and wealth, of heritage, if there wasn't really anyone alive to share it with? Her old life had seemed fine. Locate the victim. Get within striking distance. Finish the job by the appointed "deadline". The guild offered camaraderie, but no real support or closeness. How could you trust someone whose next employer might want you dead, whom you might have to kill to finish your next job? They could never be like family. Shelter was the best the guild could offer. The ones who had acted friendly had always turned out to be "mouthies" out recruiting. They made her soul shiver. So blind in obedience. So deceitful. There were three drools running when she left. None would acknowledge the other. The guild was no haven for someone who led the game. Its members were beholden to too many other players.

She sometimes wished she had stayed with her first awful choice. Gorgorma had been a fierce mistress, but gave strength for the task. The rage, the strength of the killing earth let her fight back the pain, the shame, the suffering. She had only been a child. Had her attacker in his lust, not overlooked her wounded but still armed nurse, she would've been dead as well as violated. Gorgorma had kept her secret, had made her pain into power. The cult leaders were grim, but would not betray her. They were dedicated, but they didn't hinder. Now, that old life didn't fit. Taking up the war directly robbed her of the inner violence that Gorgorma needed. The cult that could accept a cold stiletto rejected warm memories of a distant hearth. Its members had torn out that part of themselves. She chose instead to give up her rage. Now she prayed to the family spirits. Those ghosts, those memories, and a doddering old servant named Eicobon called her back to the life before her old life, to a home that stood no more, to lead the deadly game, to finish the family work.

Jaazelle sighed. The first tool fate gave her wasn't making the work any easier. She didn't even want to know what her grandfather had done to earn a debt of service from the Uz, the trolls. She had chosen to cash that debt in because it was the one of her few inherited resources that had any chance to be useful. The payment, Tinglet he called himself, had followed the spirit promise-messenger back to her room a few weeks later. That first meeting had been like a nightmare. She could have killed him.

Awakened early, a spirit of unease invading her sleep. Lying on her back in an attic room Eicoban had found for her. Looking up at a dark figure suspended near the ceiling. The room swarmed with enormous spiders. A mound of dead vermin. (A tribute gift, he'd called it) piled on her pallet. Fortunate for him, he had moved her dagger. In a rare moment of peaceful insight, she had decided to try speaking before unarmed combat. Haltingly he spoke. His mother had sent him. He was to serve her for five seasons. She managed to tell him to wait for her outside, and got the door bolted behind him. Well, at least the door shut and the bolt thrown. She hadn't yet asked how he managed to break the doorjamb so quietly. There, leaning with her back against the door is when the tic had first started.

Jaazelle's thought churned on while she dressed. It was not that Tinglet was especially large. On dark nights, a cowl pulled down to cover his tusks and snout, he roamed the streets without notice. He was stocky and physically stronger than any normal human, but still not really powerful or frightening. She had seen many more fearsome darts. Magical horrors, chaos monstrosities, and powerful warriors had been played beside and against her in high-caste contests. She was sure many of them were more formidable warriors. But Tinglet was somehow more unsettling. He was a monster, but he had a veneer of humanity. He had picked up a passable New Pelorian in just a few weeks by listening and in some strange way "reading" an engraved hide he had brought from home. He was keenly observant and very persuasive. His clothing, although dark and colorless, was of fine make and rich texture. In truth, if you looked away from his face, from the tusks the size of her little finger, the grey skin, the bestial snout, you could almost imagine you were dealing to a human barbarian. The shock returned when he interrupted a sentence to pounce on and devour a rodent. Or casually described the method he used to distract himself from stalking children. Or, for that matter, when he invaded her sleeping chambers. She couldn't keep him from being a troll, but by the second month, she could order him to stay out of her room! He seemed able to find her at will. She had already changed quarters twice since his arrival, but still, he found her whenever he wanted. How?

A delicate trace of web in the upper corner of the room caught her eye. With a snap of her wrist she hurled the meditation beads, crushing the web's builder. Spiders. She was going to kill all the spiders. Then maybe she wouldn't have to confront any more trophies unprepared. Or the beast himself. He could speak with the vile little creatures. Surely that was how he had found her rooms again. "Eicobon!" she shouted through the door. "I must speak with our Dart. Take him to him." The wizened chamberlain had found some hole for the beast to lurk in. High time to return the favor of his recent visit.

* * * *

"No good ma'am, I can't lift it."

"Together then. One...two...now!..unh.." The trapdoor didn't budge. "What is this made of?"

"It is...was a simple wooden door. It is today unaccountably too heavy to lift. Even for both of us together."

Hells, she had so looked forward to staring him awake in his own nest. "Well, call him out then. I need to know who this was."

Eicobon began pounding on the trapdoor. "Tinglet! The mistress requires your presence."

A growl, a thrashing sound from below, then a pause: "Please, a moment while I open the door."

The trap door shifted twice and then flopped loudly open. Tinglet vaulted up immediately. His lustrous silken tunic that did little to obscure an amazingly muscular upper body and bulging paunch. A shocking yawn ended with snick of tusks and teeth.

"And just who was this?" Jaazelle held the grinning toothless skull forward.

Tinglet yawned again, this time with a little more restraint. He looked her intently in the face. "It is your foe, the one called Gracus. Please forgive that your share is so small. I chose the head flesh as the hunter's portion. The marrow remains still. I could not bring back any more of the meat."

Tharbinj bel Gracus, nephew to the Satrap, leader of the contest that had ended her clan. Jaazelle was in shock. "I don't believe you. Gracus hasn't left his manse all season."

Tinglet stared unabashed. "If this isn't he, than what are these?" he asked, holding out six jewel inlaid human teeth that were strung on a fine chain around his neck. The gems were engraved with Gracus initials and class runes. It was true, they had been his. Her greatest foe, the one she was sure would never fall, it was his skull.

Euphoria! Triumph!...

Dread!, Terror! Her enemies were nothing if not vengeful.

"Did anyone see you? Were you followed?"

"No"

Something about Tinglet's face made Jaazelle hesitate. He seemed distressed, agitated. Still she had to know more. "How did you get him out of the manse?"

"I didn't, I bagged him in the garden."

"How did you get past the Terror?"

"The Terror?"

"You know, the Tharbinj family spirit. They warn off their enemies by letting it possess a slave each dark season. It makes them tear themselves to death. They stay awake and the screaming goes on for hours. Occasionally it gets someone who leans unknowing against their walls. How did you defeat it?"

Tinglet grimaced a little more, "The mothers provide ways", he said after a pause.

Jaazelle stared. Then turned to Eicobon. "I have to find out more. I've got to go back to the guild hall. Can you summon Auntie Witch? Would she protect me?"

"I could try." Eicobon replied gravely.

"Then go begin immediately. That's all for now Tinglet, I will need more answers from you later."

The troll grunted, but stayed in a crouch before her. His huge jaw muscles working at the sides of his head. Uneasy, Jaazelle continued, "You've done well, Tinglet. Go back to your rest." She then hurried to follow Eicobon out, not waiting for his response, but not quite daring to turn her back.

Rage! Fear! Tinglet's head darted, scanning, tasting everything. He didn't dare move. She was still too close. If he started into motion he might not be able to stop. Wood, the flavor of wood near his feet. Hunger! He ripped a board out of the trap door, stuffed the end in his mouth and began to chew. Oak, a little stale. It calmed the gut enough to let him think. The stone basement room was quiet and dusty, but a shaft of sunlight pierced a window near the ceiling. Quick! back into the dark.

Safe in the cistern his mind raced: Nothing!...Nothing!...no punishment, no reprimand... no slap!... Even little niece Mardot, she would have at least slapped him ...he'd eaten all the meat... showed all his teeth to the boss lady... and she did nothing. His gut churned. She was too weak. Too soft. Too alien. Living with humans was too hard. It was ok that she was too small, too impossibly slender. The gut could accept that. The brain knew she was human. Knew she couldn't know the way to act. But in his gut boss ladies were strong, were aware of every challenge, were always in control. In the gut, if she wasn't in charge....he took another bite out of the board...if she wasn't in charge she was food.

"If Jaazelle was boss she should know... If she wasn't boss ...I can't follow...I was ordered to follow...I can't leave...I can't stand to stay" His thoughts chased round and round, growing weaker, confused. His gut had the answer, the Uz answer:

Kill

Eat

"Mother wouldn't like it. She said i had to serve"

Kill

"I can't go back until i've served five seasons"

Eat

Fear. Tinglet feared to lose himself. He feared to move lest his gut should take him, should drive him to hunt down his problem, to pound it to a bloody pulp, to gobble it down. It was the Uz way.

Granny...Granny would know what to do. Granny was wise in the ways of Uz. Tinglet had always been one of her favorites. He had been honored to get a share at her funeral feast. Even though there hadn't really been enough of her to go around.

He dropped to his knees, the splintered board clenched in his teeth. He reached out into the dark.

Granny?...Granny?.....Enlo! Too far from home. A pang of regret: he had never learned the spell to call ancestors from far away. Tinglet sprawled on his belly on the dank floor. At home old ones always haunted the warren. Granny was always close enough to her children to speak with. But only strong voice, one borrowed from the Great Mother, could reach the clan's dead from this sunlit place.

What to do? He sucked on the board as he thought. Granny had talked to him sometimes. What had she told him before? What would she tell him if they could speak now? What should I do? His thoughts wandered as stress wrestled with sleep. Granny still didn't come, but his mind began to drift back over the leagues and through the years. Dreamily, he stood looking up at the boars-hide door hanging of her chamber. She had summoned.

He waited.

"Enter"

Granny had the largest hole in the warren. Trophies from many foes lay piled in alcoves and cubbyholes around her walls. Two hands of Enlo servants huddled under the table and shelves, hoping to anticipate her desires well enough to avoid her wrath. Tinglet advanced slowly, hands behind his back. He halted a respectful distance away, just out of arm's reach.

Twenty heartbeats passed in silence.

"Tinglet! I understand there was a fight this morning in the boys' creche.

His just-healed leg still ached a little. "Yes Ma'am."

"They tell me it was you against Grylka again."

"Yes Ma'am"

"Explain yourself."

"Grylka wanted to eat egg sacks. He said we should sneak into the web cave and steal some from the silk people. I said no."

"Egg sacks taste very good. Surely you like to eat egg sacks?"

"Yes ma'am." Silence. Thirty heartbeats passed liked water dripping from a damp ceiling. "A...A...Auntie Kardok told us last week that the silk people would be angry if we took more eggs than they gave us. She said they wouldn't make silk anymore. Taking more eggs would be bad for Uz." Granny nodded.

Approval? Tinglet couldn't tell.

"And Grylka didn't agree?"

"After I said no, he didn't say anything. We just fought."

"Grylka is the largest boy in the creche, is he not?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Then why did you not do as he said?"

Tinglet fidgeted a little, then shrugged. "In my gut I wanted to. But in my head I knew Auntie Kardok had told us that it was wrong." Granny smiled just a little. Maybe he had said the right thing!

"Tinglet, you are ready to hear something about he-uz, the gut and the head. Hold out your hand."

He brought his arm from behind his back. Tiny pale-grey baby fingers wiggled at the stump end of his right wrist.

Granny was suddenly stern. "What happened to your hand!"

His head dropped "Grylka ate it last season. It hasn't grown all back yet."

"This fighting has gone on too long...It is foolish to continue to be beaten."

He looked up just a little. "The healers had to help him first this morning. He still can't walk."

Granny just glared, but a little taste of amusement seeped through the darkness. "Hold out your other hand then. Good. Tinglet, he-uz can only taste a hand of speaking creatures in their gut. In your head you can recognize many beings, but your gut can only hold five different kinds. It is so in all things. The gut is quick and powerful, but never holds enough. The head can learn anything, but must take time to make decisions. You already taste for your self that head and gut live in the same body. As you grow up you will choose which will be stronger in your body. If you can learn this you will please me."

A warmth filled his middle. "Yes granny." He said excitedly.

Granny held up her thumb, motioning Tinglet to do likewise. "Now here are the five beings. First are Uz to be obeyed. I am Uz to be obeyed. All mothers and aunts are Uz to be obeyed."

"Yes, granny."

"Next," granny held up her first finger, "are Uz to be respected. Your creche sisters are Uz to be respected."

"Yes granny."

"Third are he-uz to follow. You follow he-uz that are stronger than you. Then are he-uz to lead. You lead he-uz who are weaker than you. Last," she gestured to the enlo in the corner, "are food that talks. Every speaking creature that is not one of the first four fingers is food that talks. Do you understand?"

He felt confused, but replied: "yes ma'am"

"Then tell me why Grylka attacked you this morning."

His head was spinning. Why? Why? He-uz didn't know why. Still, Granny said she would be pleased if he could learn, could understand. That was incentive neither his gut nor his brain could ignore. Five heartbeats passed, ten, fifty. Finally he whispered: "His gut says he's lead he-uz because he's the biggest. His gut attacks to prove he's right. But my head says no."

"Who then is truly strongest?"

"The one that thinks of the clan. The one that obeys Uz."

"That is right Tinglet." Granny smiled. She approved! Sweetness filled his senses. Happiness flooded his gut. Granny reached into her richly brocaded robes and brought out a wand gnawed from a tree branch. Without looking away from him, she held out her hand. Several enlo scrambled out from under the furniture. Each hoping to bring what she wanted. The first to reach her offered a mace. She swatted it away. The second flinched and held up a strip of cloth. Granny took it without a glance. She dragged the cloth through her tusks and over her tongue, then tied the damp strip around the end of the wand. Although it was hard to tell while she held it in her hand, he knew the cloth would carry Granny's flavor.

She held the wand out to him. "Tinglet, when he-uz make a mistake about who should lead it is up to Uz to decide." Tinglet could taste the weight of her words, like stone, heavy and immovable. "No matter how strange or weak they seem. When uz choose a leader she becomes the one to follow. He-uz should fight only when no Uz are near. Take this wand. Carry always when you are in the creche. It says I choose you as leader of the creche he-uz."

"Th-thank you, Granny." He took the wand and bowed low.

"Tinglet," a crisp, stern tang brushed the sweetness away, "One last reminder. Before you fight with a leader again, ask Uz."

"Yes ma'am."

With a nod and a curt gesture she bid him leave, and turned to a marked, important-tasting, ox-hide held overhead by a shivering enlo to the left of her throne.

He withdrew from the hole in a daze of euphoria, the wand clutched tightly to his chest. Nothing was more delicious than pleasing Granny. She was the mother of them all.

He came back to himself in the dank cistern, the stony taste lingering in his mouth. Even though she hadn't come herself, Granny knew the answer. He needed the token, the wand. The flavor of old oak mingled with the aftertaste of his dream. After a few heartbeat's reverence to thank the Great Mother, Tinglet picked up the rest of the board that lay beside his nest and began to gnaw in earnest.

Chapter 4

“A black and tragic day, Tharbinj bel Ailenus.”

The procession entered the main square. The morning sun warm behind them. The city temple, site of the ritual public mourning and eulogy stood just ahead. Conversation was only barely possible over the cries of pimps and beggars, the cacophony of daily business, the piercing wail of the hired mourners. Word in the street said that Ailenus would soon move to consolidate his position as Gracus’ successor. Leonio gazed intently at his prospective new patron as they strode through the bedlam, their way cleared by a platoon of Ailenus’ household guards.

The man barked a grim laugh in reply. Dark oiled ringlets, silken toga and jeweled teeth, the very image of foppery, mixed uneasily with the lines of long debauchery worn into his face, the ease with which he projected power and authority, and the eyes full of sharp blades and buried bodies. It struck Leonio that Ailenus obtained surprising little value for the money he invested in his appearance. “Indeed Leonio! My dear uncle struck down as if by a hand from the grave. Who could have anticipated it?”

“And the rest of the clan, how are they bearing up?”

“There has been some turmoil since Gracus’ demise. The deaths of his young heirs were a dreadful shock.”

“I hadn’t heard that Gracus’ children were involved”

“Yes. Pity no one thought to look in on them during the uproar. They were found dead this morning. Bitten by some venomous creature. The servants scour the manse for it now.”

Leonio knew such deaths were curable. He himself had been resurrected from a youthful experiment involving a viper. He raised an eyebrow. “Gracus must have made extraordinary efforts with the clan shamen for the children to have found the world of spirits so appealing that they chose not to return.”

“No, Leonio, the bites caused such wounds as could not be mended. The clan accepted my recommendation that it was better to let them return to us again in the future than to call them back into such damaged vessels now.”

They strode slowly on. Ahead the way was blocked by a city work crew repaving a section of the market. The guards pushed through the crowd to make a detour to the left. Leonio’s curiosity overcame his diplomatic training. “I find it remarkable that such a dangerous condition could exist at the clan manse without your knowledge.”

Ailenus laughed again. “You flatter me Leonio! Indeed, I consider myself intelligent, but far from omniscient. Presumably the same hand that stilled Gracus reached out for the heirs as well. Remarkable or not, I stand completely vindicated in this business. It was not I who broke the truce oath we all swore two years ago, after Fabio’s demise. The Satrap and council were witness. No demon rose from the flames for my blood, or for anyone else’s for that matter.”

“Who then struck Gracus down?”

“An ancient sign, a Memento Mori, was left with the body. The sages tell me it is a relic of an old feud. An issue we thought Gracus himself had laid to final rest twenty years ago.”

“Gracus slain by a ghost?”

“More likely his own carelessness. It appears one of his supposed victims survived. Recent findings indicate she lived, ignorant and incognito, making her way as a Dart, of all things, here in the Satrapy.”

“You seem little concerned for one who has so skilled a foe.”

“Already my agents stalk. Even if the moon shines from her eyes, she’ll live no longer than sunset.”

“But if she is a professional Dart, isn’t the Mouth a concern?”

Laughter again, Ailenus was remarkably jovial. “And what if she is? The clan has resources to deal with the those rabble.”

The procession was stopped by the press at the construction site. “A reckless and ignorant attitude.”, Leonio thought to himself, keeping his face studiously respectful and attentive. He decided a bit of flattery was in order. “I note you carry the orator’s staff for the eulogy. I take it the clan has recognized your superior position and acknowledged you leader.”

“Eventually. My beloved cousins became so unhinged in their grief as to let slip their sterling judgment and oppose my assention to leadership of the clan. This has now all been resolved in a permanent way. Official casualty counts were entered in the Dart registry this dawn. The public revels will be expensive, but the clan can afford to do right by our dear departed.”

Even by dartwar standards, the scope of the preceding night’s carnage left Leonio stunned. For years five serious contenders had struggled for Gracus’ position. It had taken a decree from the Sultan, backed by the threat of Imperial censure, to get them to acknowledge Gracus’ heirs. Ailenus implied that his competitors, the half-dozen leading clan members and their loyal henchmen, had all been killed. That would certainly explain Ailenus’ humor! The unknown assassin could not have worked a more delicious revenge. Had it been planned this way? Why hadn’t he already heard! Regrettably, Leonio would have to postpone savoring the artistry of it, and devote his attention to chastising his spies. This conversation was crucial to securing the clan’s continued patronage for his project. “You have consensus then?”

“All but Aleatia, the late Arctus’ wife. She continues to press. She seems to feel she has a special claim. One hears she spent considerable time at the clan manse. The servants gossip about it still... But her position is weak. I control all the remaining clan guard and have the Satrap’s ear.”

The fool! didn’t he follow anything that went on in the rarified circles? “Tread carefully Ailenus, regardless of who she may have dallied with in the past, cognoscenti whisper that your dear cousin’s wife now kisses the Waiting Mouth.”

Again laughter. “And what if she does. I could not care less. Fear not, Leonio, I’ll yet live to see if this metaphysical dice game you promote so feverishly is worthy of the clan’s attention. We’ve always been

stronger than those pathetic chaos-worshipping ants. They are fit only as mindless tools for simple and ugly work. That she runs to the Mouth only confirms her weakness.”

A momentary hesitation, a ripple of ill-will passed through the guards as Ailenus spoke. Leonio’s impatience turned to fear. Karsht, the Waiting Mouth, the secret chaos assassin cult, permeated every corrupt or corruptible aspect of the city’s life, including the staff of the noble houses. They of the Mouth were secretive, vengeful, violent. It was dangerous to insult the Mouth in public. Leonio edged as far away as he could without touching the guards now halted around them. “You should take care what you say Ailenus. The Mouth has many unobtrusive followers. Respect is often the..”

But Ailenus continued, cutting him off. “Ha..Don’t tell that you too, fear that collection of..Whaaaa!” His words became a shout as the ground collapsed beneath him. His scream wrenched to silence a second later amid flailing jointed legs and gnashing teeth barely visible in the darkness below. One of his guards, a knife hilt sticking out from between his ribs followed a moment later. No one else in the crowd around the pit uttered a sound. Leonio looked down in horror into what could only be a Karsht tunnel that had opened beneath his left foot. Strong hands from the crowd behind held his toga and robe, keeping him from joining Ailenus as a meal for the much-rumored tunneling chaos monstrosities below. Abruptly, workmen from the paving crew swarmed around Leonio. Silently, and at a speed he would not have thought possible for city workman, they laid large timbers, followed by paving stones and sand. It became clear that Ailenus’ death had been planned in excruciating detail and executed with precision. Ants indeed. The assassin cult could display the insect virtues when needed. Within minutes the hole was gone. The silent crowd dispersed and the clan guards moved on leaving Leonio standing with three of his own household soldiers who just “happened” to be out in the square. He looked at them carefully. Yes, they were the ones he had long suspected. One, the daywatch septurion, pressed a hard, three-finger wide triangle into Leonio’s hand. Two edges were razor-sharp and serrated. Without looking he knew it was a tooth. Presumably from a horror like he’d just glimpsed in the pit. It stood for a tie, a mutual obligation, with the Waiting Mouth. He had seen their work, one of their methods. He was an accomplice. The tooth would mark him as such to other cultists. The tooth also carried a message: If you talk, we will devour you.

He stood a moment head down as normal business began to swirl over the pavement again. He carefully smoothed and ordered his toga. Then, composure restored and all signs of shock or mistrust carefully removed, he looked up to the guardsmen. “Come, we must pay our respects to the Lady Aleatia on this her day of mourning.” The Septurian saluted and fell in behind him as he strode purposefully toward the city temple.

Chapter 5

“Unbelievable. Incredible.” Jaazelle allowed herself a small, secret smile as she left the Dart Registry. The mid morning sun beamed brightly through the dusty air. The beast had told the truth! Gracus was dead and declared unraisable. His heirs, his siblings, and most of his remaining cousins were listed victims as well. Clan [] was a mountain towering over [] politics, it created a dangerous temptation that sent many scrambling to be the one standing on the peak. Her little shake-up had started an avalanche

that swept the slopes clean. Fierce joy coursed through her veins as she walked through the crowded street. The hundred brilliant colors worn by passers-by celebrating with her. A dissonant sound broke her reverie. The wailing of an official mourning procession keened over the usually cacaphony from the main square down the street to her right. She hesitated. Could it be Gracus' paid mourners already? Wouldn't it be worth the risk to witness, to savor her victory?

An old woman in the crowd next to her gasped.

Alarm! Instinctively Jaazelle jumped back to the shelter of the registry wall. Shards and splinters bounced off her legs as a man-sized bundle of roofing tiles crashed to the ground where she stood an instant before. She scanned the roof line, while preparing to cast her battle spells.

"Look out below!" A belated warning echoed from the top of an Insula across the way. The street was narrow, but not narrow enough for the bundle to fall across naturally. This was an "accident", an rule-allowed attack in a public place. They'd found her. She swallowed, reached in for the last few drams of composure left her and came up with the emergency escape route she'd worked up for this location during training for one of last year's games. It started in the alley to her left. She pulled out the stiff laces that held the front panels of her skirt together as she edged along the wall toward the alley. The crowded street was congealing as would-be spectators pressed to gawk at the carnage. Time slowed to a crawl; Jaazelle's skin practically tingled with hyper-vigilance. There would be a follow-up team mingled in the crowd. She had to get out before they pinned her down. There wasn't supposed to be any weapon-play in the streets, but hidden daggers and poisoned needles could be used without inciting the public, or arousing the dart administration. The enemy was keeping the rules so far: there were no overt attackers, and a pair of healers were working on dead and wounded bystanders. Maybe she had a chance. She paused a moment to complete casting her protection spell and scan the crowd. There they were: two...three...maybe a fourth slowly working toward her against the press. She recognised their leader, a Jaw, a high placed mouthy only put into play for hard targets or six-legged contracts. Her mouth went dry. She had to get back to Eicobon and get them all out of town as soon as possible. She ordered the bound magic spirit Tingle had given her to cast spells to aid her escape and ducked around the corner. Fate smiled, the alley was empty. It was narrow and paved with rough cobbles with a flag stone gutter down the center. A pile of junk half blocked the way a few paces before it opened onto the next main avenue. That was a danger, anything could be waiting behind it. Fortunately, she was going up. She began her routine. Three running steps in. Jump up to the right. Right hand boost from the barred window sill so left fingertips can grab the bottom rim of the second floor balcony. Right foot up to the window, push up to grab the rail with both hands, muscle up and somersault over. A metallic clink off the wall just below her. A missile. They're fast! Jump to the next balcony, get a hand hold on the water downspout. Watch the skirt! Half vault, half climb to the balcony on the next floor up. Running feet below from both ends of the alley. Duck behind the railing on the third floor balcony. Open the latch she'd secretly modified from the outside, break off the added latchpiece. She smiled a little smile: The working people's fear of crime kept windows locked and alley smells meant no one opened and checked them. A crossbow bolt buried itself in the wooden moulding just above her head. Into the apartment, stilleto drawn. Relief: No one home. Lock the window. Out the main door, up two flights to the attic. Here under the roof was a long gallery which was open down the whole block of neighboring

insula. She'd made it. From here there were four good escape options, plus a safe hidey hole and two other stairways back to the street. Jaazelle started into the first mantra of composure as she made her choices and worked her way more carefully toward home.

Restless, he scanned the door again. The little sliver of sunlight had crawled two hands' span acrossed the basement floor since he'd taken his position in against the rough wall filling in the vault in the corner closest to the hinged side of the door into the dusty basement room. Still she had not returned. Maybe fate, or her foes, would intervene, make his life simple for a change. Maybe he'd never see her again. Hah! And maybe he'd dance with an elf on darkday next! With a quiet snort he turned his attention to inspecting his net for the third time. Each knot was tight, every barb in place, a few frayed strands noted for future repair. The net was an unusual weapon. It was as broad as he was tall and had seemed very unwieldy when he first picked it up. Made of the strongest silk, it could be used to parry blows, to snap at foes, or to entangle. Non-spinners, like himself, carried it in honor of the silk people. Also, it was grimly entertaining to see how inexperienced quarry reacted when ensnared. The token wand lay on the floor between himself and the door. A bright forboding had gnawed on him while he gnawed on it: What if she didn't take it? He chewed that over as he searched his belongings for the piece of cloth the tasted most strongly of the priestess mother. It was hard to articulate what the result would be. His mind and gut were like two Uz children eating a long piece of leather, two resolute little combatants locked together by the prize: his future. Each struggling to wrestle it away; neither willing to let it go. After the token was done he found himself donning armor and weapons. And then moving up to the corner of the basement room above his hole. That was it then. A truce: gut and mind staring at each other nose-to-nose with no leather left between them. He would wait for her, but not exactly where she expected. He wouldn't attack, but he would be armed and armored. It would be her decision. If she took the token his gut would fall in behind the leader chosen by Uz. His mind would interpret her instructions. If she refused his mind would have no arguments left. His gut would take over and eliminate the problem.

He had just slung the net and turned attention to his mace, when the door swung open. Jaazelle slipped into the room. Looking back over her shoulder, she didn't see his position. With a smooth and silent motion she swung the door nearly shut. Head down, she listened intently for a few heartbeats. Tinglet studied her, half nervous to speak, half looking for an opening to attack. Her long straight hair was put up in a loose turban. A necklace of large enameled beads matched the shoulder broaches that fastened a light weight Chiton, gathered into a wide leather belt and matching armbands of bleached leather. A pleated linen skirt that hung nearly to her ankles. She called this outlandish outfit 'city armor'. The turban covered a bronze skull cap. The jewelry was also bronze, the beads threaded on a chain as thick as a rat's tail. The armbands and belt had metal plates sewn in between the visible leather and a softer liner. The Chiton covered a matching reinforced leather tunic. He'd never seen this skirt before, but from the way it moved he could tell that some of the pleats were backed by heavier material. A walking stick hung from her wrist by a silk cord. He knew a slender thrusting blade was sheathed inside it. A sophisticated outfit, far better made than the rags most humans wore, but pathetic in a fight. Humans! They were slaves to fashion and rules. This was apparently the best protection she could carry in their outdoor warren without being too conspicuous, or risking punishment. Uz who expected combat in their

homes stomped around in as much armor as they could carry tasting resolute sour and angry, with mace, maul, and shield ready at hand.

Still he waited. Four heartbeats. Ten. She didn't seem to have seen him yet. Finally, she closed the door completely. He held his breath, his gut making one last push for a surprise attack.

No steps in the vaulted main basement room. No creaking from the stair. Only normal business noise from the street above. Good. She'd shaken off tails twice between the ceremonial district and the run-down warehouses she called home. Hopefully there hadn't been others. She let out a slow breath. Wait! Out of the corner of her eye she glimpsed a dark shape lurking in the corner to her right. Alarm! She was certain the room had been totally empty when she'd left it earlier. In one breath she pivoted back into combat stance, drawing the stiletto from her cane, ready to dodge, or strike.

Tinglet. It was Tinglet squatting in the corner. He was fully armed. His grey tusks gleaming next to the darkened bronze cheek hinges of his helmet. Slowly he reached down to pick up a object laying on the floor between them. He stood and held it out to her. "You must take this."

It was a damp, splintery stick with an old black rag tied around one end. She almost laughed. "What?"

"You must take this and carry it with you always."

She was incredulous. "Well thanks, but I think this nonsense can wait. I need to know more about what happened last night. Tell me..."

He cut her off with a bark. "No! You must take this now." His left hand came up to grip the net slung over his right shoulder and across his chest.

"What?...I..." Something about Tinglet's stare, and the way his massive jaw muscles worked, cut off further argument. She reached out and took the bizarre token.

"Good." He said, visibly relieved. Then after a long sigh continued, "What do you want to know?"

"What happened last night after you escaped from Gracus' house?"

"Nothing much. I got to one of the safe places, had a snack, made it back before light."

"Did you attempt any other targets?"

"No, but I left a friend. I need to go back as soon as I can to..."

A faint chiming from outside the door interrupted their conversation. Jaazalle raised her stiletto to defense. A large golden signet ring rolled and tumbled under the door and across the flag stones. The air was suddenly cold, and still. A ghostly figure coalesced chest-deep in the floor behind the ring, pushing it to her feet. It was Eicobon. He looked up at them disconsolate. His lips barely moved as his voice whispered from the air all around them.

"Forgive me lady. I have failed and am slain." He hesitated, his form fading a little. Fainter, he continued: "Your foes were waiting at your rooms. Long preparation against such disaster allowed me to bring you this one relic of our great house. Please, take it and fly! I fear they are not many steps away. I will attempt to stop any that followed, but they are powerful. Even now, when their blows can no longer hurt, I won't be able to hold them for long."

Jaazelle bent to scoop up the ring while Tinglet lept to the door. He threw the bolt before pressing his snout and ear to the wood.

"One for sure, maybe two, on the stairs across the room." he whispered. Eicobon faded toward the wall. His words were barely audible: "I'll make a stand at the first vault."

Her heart beat cold. What to do? Fight here? Try to wriggle through the window bars? The mouthies were out in full force. Eyes would be watching. Whoever led Clan Tharbinj had called in all the assassins they could. They'd never sneak away. She'd become apostate enough to sever the spiritual connection that gave a chance that Gorgorma would blast her oppressors. They'd either have to cut through or be cut down.

Tinglet backed away from the door, grabbed his pack, and headed for the trapdoor to the cistern. "Stop," she hissed, "I be damned if I'm going to die fighting in a black hole. We'll cut our way out from here."

"But boss," he whispered back, "I.."

"No buts," funny, he'd never called her boss before. What happened to ma'am? "You may be more comfortable in the dark, but I'd be useless. At least up here we can both fight."

"Whatever you say..." A shout from the main room interrupted him. Eichobon had found a foe. "Spells?"

"Yes, but make it quick, we're dead if they trap us. I'll open the door, you lead through." Tinglet grunted and nodded. Somehow he seemed relieved, at peace.

Motes of darkness swirled out of the corners and shadows to gather around the troll and his weapons as he cast his battle magic. The darkness absorbed into the enspelled object, or into his body, leaving no visible trace after the casting. Jaazelle's spells, learned mostly at the dart guild, could never be seen. She finished setting her magical defenses first. An unexpected calm, a sort of detachment, settled over her while she contemplated his casting. Unrelated thoughts drifted slowly through her consciousness. "Are his spells like mine? Did the magic come from the same source? Could he cast his magic on her like she could on other people?" She shook her head a little to clear it. Just like everything about her life now: there was just no way to know, and no time to find out.

Chapter 6

She was standing by the door when he finished.

He had one last spell ready, but had decided to hold it in reserve. Better warn her about it. "If it looks bad, I'll change my head. I won't be able to talk. You'll have to lead then." She closed her eyes for a heartbeat, but then nodded without saying anything and reached for the latch. He had the net bundled up in his left hand, the mace in his right. He nodded back. She swung the door open and he was through. The door was in the dark corner of the main basement, opposite the stair. As usual, the overconfident humans hadn't bothered to watch it. There were four standing near the center of the room, watching the fifth, face fixed in a spasm of concentration, buckler and shortsword waving feebly as it wrestled in spirit combat with Eichbon's ghost. One on the left noticed him just as the net flicked out to snap. Human arms flailed as that quarry stumbled back, a damp patch oozing blood through a leather shirt. The one on the right had time to drop its buckler into the path of a backhanded mace blow arcing in low. The little shield deflected some of the force of the blow before the mace crashed into its left knee, bending the lag backwards. He didn't take time to see it fall, as he lunged tusks first into the opponent directly in front of him. He got the human's neck squarely between his teeth, bit down until the bone crunched, then snapped the spine with a quick toss of his head. They prey spasmed a little and then went still. Eichbon's victim took a half step toward him, but had to stay focussed on fighting the ghost. The last human was scrambling toward the stairs. Screaming like enlo under the lash.

He let the limp human slump to the ground, as the first foe, bloody but very much in the fight, tried to circle behind him. They squared off, feinting, dodging. The human was wary of the net, but not alarmed, it dodged away from the entangling attack instead of parrying. Damn lunar, it'd seen one used before. The human had a blade in each hand, but they were small. It probably hadn't had time to cast, but some humans, Jaazelle for one, had weapons that stayed ensorcelled all the time. The human was large, and fast, and damn, good. He barely parried off a lunging attack. The glancing blow scored his armor like butter. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Jaazelle catch up with the one on the stairs. Sidestep, deflect another sword blow. Take a heartbeat to look for Jaazelle again. She got the last one, its body slumped off the stairway to the basement floor. He traded half a hand of attacks with the mouthie bravo. His opponent carried either enchanted weapons or magic armor, inspite of its frail blades and thin leather it had escaped unhurt from blows that would drop a bison. He didn't have time to dance any more. He ignored the human's blades, concentrating instead on following the mace attack with a kick. The human managed to deflect his mace again, using the longer blade this time. He felt a sharp pain in his left arm as the human lunged its off-hand blade through the rings of his armor. No time to heal now. The human recovered its stance just in time for his boot to bury itself in its leather covered belly. Enchanted weapons yes; enchanted armor no. The human slumped to the ground, blank eyes bulging like a gutted perch. Jaazelle had charged up the stair. The remaining human followed her, mouthing incoherently and waving its weapons. Looked like Eichobon had possessed it. The arm wound hurt, but didn't really slow him down. He ordered his bound magic spirit to cast the healing spell on it while he caught up with the boss.

Three steps, he was at the foot of the stair. Jaazelle came flying back down. Stilleto broken off, a small cut dripping blood down her right cheek. "Eichobon attempts to hold off the jaw, and another half-dozen bravos. We'll never get through that way." She glanced back up the stairs grimly, then leaped off as two more toughs hurtled down at them. A bright ringing sound at his feet drew Tingle's attention,

but he had no time to search for its source. Ducking low, he jumped back to keep the bravos in front of him, feinted right with the mace and launched the net at the foe to the left. Not as experienced, it parried. He enjoyed its alarm when it found it could not untangle its shield. He gave a little tug on the tether, but the human resisted well. Jaazelle had distracted the foe on the right by sticking a dagger from one of the down foes into its shoulder. Leaving him only this one to worry about. They circled, the human trying to pull him off balance through the net. He played along for a few heartbeats, not yet showing the full effect of the strength spell he'd cast before the fight. The human overextended just a little to try a stabbing attack. He parried easily with the mace, gave a little jerk to continue the human's inward momentum and sank his tusks into its unprotected shoulder. Too much resistance, he couldn't hold on: it managed to writhe away. Enlo, it had had time to cast protective magic. They circled again, the human staggering a little, bleeding, trying to cast a spell, while dodging his blows. Ambitious, but overloaded, the human managed to stop the bleeding from its neck, but wasn't able to get out of the way when his mace swung down on its left thigh, collapsing the leg and driving the human to the floor. He was winding up to finish it off when a brilliant pain exploded in his right knee. The leg went numb. He twisted as he fell, catching a scan of his attacker. It was the one with the reversed knee joint. Tough, this one. He'd seen few Uz, and no humans, heal themselves from an injury like that. He hit the ground on his right side, struggling to stay alert through the grey haze of pain and shock. He managed to keep the net raised to parry the follow-up attack. Three heartbeats, five. He scanned furiously, the metallic taste of blood on nearly every nearby surface and shape. His own life flowed from around a dagger imbedded in his leg. Two figures whirled and slashed in a furious short-blade duel two paces behind. One tasted like sweet plant juice - Jaazelle had drawn off the last attacker. He took a deep breath and pulled the dagger out. It hurt bad, but knowing that he could heal it, could stop the pain, kept him going. He focused on his own healing spell, stopping the bleeding, reknitting the severed muscle. A body fell heavily just behind him to lay gurgling. He rolled onto his back as he completed the spell. Who still stood? It was too dark to see, too much light to scan quickly. No incoming attackers.

"Let's go. Back to the cistern room."

Jaazelle was the survivor. He struggled to his feet, the bleeding stopped, but the leg still half lame. The last human lay face up on the floor at his feet, back arched from the point of the shortsword rammed through its chest, a trickle of blood from its gaping mouth. Faintly, he could hear shouts and footsteps from the corridor above. More foes. He felt drained, sore. His body still damaged and his magical energy low. He hopped and staggered back to the cistern room. It was a little brighter than the main basement. Too bad. The few old crates and barrels scattered along the far wall couldn't provide much shelter or defense. Jaazelle had dropped to her knees by the far wall. He turned to close the door, but left it open a crack to scan, while he finished healing his wounds. He was just finishing when a lone figure stalked slowly and silently down the stairs. It was a human male. Slender, not too tall. It tasted deadly. It carried a shortsword unsheathed. And surprise! a combat net slung over its shoulder. He scanned it intensely as it turned to survey the carnage in the silent basement. It glanced up the stairs. A hand more armed bravos appeared and followed it slowly down to the floor, being careful to stay an arm's length away. He closed and bolted the heavy door as quietly as he could. Jaazelle looked up as he sidled back toward her. A little salty water had built up in her eyes.

"What's the plan boss?" He whispered

"Know any good prayers?" She said flatly.

She was seeking help from the gods, unsuccessfully. He nodded. "But one mother never helps humans, the other never changes fate." Jaazelle slumped a little.

"So much for divine intervention."

"Their leader just came down the stairs. Thin, male, carries a net like mine. He tastes real bad. Want to ambush here or sorty out again?"

Jaazelle nodded distractedly, she was casting, a long cut on her face closed without a scar. "Does it make a difference?" She mouthed without a sound.

"I think we should ambush them in the room here, It'll be easier than attacking them out there. Besides, if we suck them in a little we can better make sure that we get them all."

She half smiled, grim. "Get them all? There's probably still a hundred of these guys in town. I'd be happy just to make it out alive."

The door creaked a little. The mouthies were testing it from the other side.

Confusion. "Then why are we staying here, why did you say not to head down for the back way out?"

Her head snapped up. "Back way out?"

"Yeah, the conduit to the cistern next door. I already took the bars off this end." She seemed shocked. Strange. How did she think anyone could rest in a place that didn't have a back way out?

She jumped to her feet, eyebrows creased together, teeth showing. About to say something, she glanced at the door. A thin streak of bad-tasting smoke trailed up from the door jam just behind the bolt. She narrowed her mouth to a slit. "Don't resist this." She hissed.

Her spell slipped into his mind. It was Another Ear, Another Voice. She smirked as her words rang angrily in his head.

{You big idiot! Show me this back way out.}

{Yes ma'am.}

The trap door was just a little ways into the room, at the boundary between the stone basement floor and the wooden cistern cover. There were stone handholds set into the cistern wall. He spoke through the spell. {My armor is better, you go first.}

The door bolt sizzled, it wasn't going to last long. He cast a sticky patch spell while she climbed down. It would hold the door a little longer.

She waited at the foot of the wall. He closed the trapdoor, but by eating part of it he'd made his sack-of-rocks lock pretty useless. He didn't bother trying to hang it. Still, even with the board missing the cistern was comfortably black.

{How the hell am I going to find anything down here?} She soured as he reached the floor.

{I'll take you.} He bent over a little, put one hand under her right arm, the other under her left thigh, and picked her up lightly.

"Wha...?"

Like hot peppers. {What do you think you're doing?}

{Taking you to the way out} He walked across the cistern, stepping carefully over the slippery stones and through the puddle. He lifted her over his head and shoved her head first into the conduit opening.

{Ugh! watch it! That was my head you just...} The weight on his right arm lessened as she crawled into the narrow passage. Helpfully, he pushed a little as he continued to hold her leg.

{I'm in. Get your hands off of me.}

Finally, she was starting to taste a little like Uz. {The far end is about three body lengths straight ahead.}

{Yeah, I can see a little light.}

{I'm not climbing in until you've got through.} In the room above, the door creaked as it swung open. {They're in upstairs, hurry!} She scooted away down the conduit.

Quiet footsteps on the floor above his head. There were less than a hand of them up there. If they just took a few minutes to search up there first.

{This grate is mortered in! It's going to take a while to get through.}

{Enlo! What am I supposed to do?}

{I don't know. Hold them off. I'm working as fast as I can.}

A muffled scraping emanated from the opening. As quietly as he could he moved across the cistern away from the conduit and climbed up the wall. He was out of line of scan from the trapdoor, but helpless, he needed to be able to move better, and to fight. With a silent prayer he called the Mother of the Silk People. He'd made a bargain with her, and she kept it. Eight shiny slender legs sprouted from his chest below his uz-arms. The little claws at their tips found better holds on the rough walls and ceiling than his gauntleted hands ever could. He took a position behind a ceiling beam, wedged up where the wooden roof met the stone wall. Fate continued to smile, his hiding place was within a long arms reach of the trap door and hand holds. More footsteps, but even with his ear pressed to the ceiling he couldn't hear voices. They must be using Another Voice too. All quiet for a couple of heartbeats.

Was that a faint splash? {I've got one of the bars off.}

Only one? Enlo! How many more to go? {OK.}

{You didn't tell me this place was full of water. Hope you can swim.} He couldn't. That problem would have to wait.

All at once the trap door was lifted out. With a flash, a ring, a small incandescent disk arced through the opening and bounced on the floor to lay shining below. It tasted like a silver coin. They must of cast a light spell on it. He itched to dispell the light, or cover it with a darkwall, but knew it was better to wait. Ten heartbeats past. They must be scanning. Then, a pair of leather-clad legs appeared at the opening. The human that walked on then was trying to slide down quickly, but lack of skill or familiarity slowed it down just enough. His mace crunched into its lower back just as the climber had got a toe hold and shifted its weight onto its feet. The human screamed, bounced forward into the stone wall and then fell backwards, crashing limp to the floor below. A little trickle of blood ran out from under the unnaturally bent body. A few heartbeats passed. A little motion above, maybe only two left. Humans were little used to foes moving on walls and ceilings, and his quarry's body had blocked the view from the room above. With luck they still wouldn't have figured out where he was. {I got one more of them, but the others won't wait forever. How much longer?}

{Don't know, this bar is set in deeper than the first one}

Great. He prepared a darkwall to cover the floor ankle high.

A figure dropped through the trapdoor into the cistern. It tasted awful: sour, biting, like the inside of a stomach. It was the human leader. It was scanning, but hadn't looked up yet.

{Jaazelle, their boss dropped in. He tastes awful. Know why?} A clear liquid rolled off his body in heavy drops. The drops didn't affect its clothes or weapons, but sizzled and smoked on the puddled floor.

{Tastes awful? You bit him? They let you eat him?}

{No, no, it's dripping something that sizzles and tastes bad}

The human stalked a few silent steps into the room. A gout of steam shot up when it stepped into the pool on the floor. It sprang back as if bitten.

{Mouthy magic. It'll burn you if you touch him. Has he got fangs too? Watch out if he tries to bite.}

Great. He could dispel enough magic to extinguish the light spell, but not something like that.

The human noticed the conduit opening. He had to act. He cast the darkwall. In an instant a sheet of blackness drew across the floor, covering the light. The human startled as he dropped to the floor behind it. It was quick, but he got a mace blow in before it could fully react. Things had happened so quickly that all his combat spells, extra strength, magical armor, the mace spell, were still active. The blow rung against the human's head, driving it to the floor. It was enough force to stop Grylka in his

chainmail, but the human slid away, a small cut leaving only the faintest taste of blood. Tendrils of the evil taste clung to his mace. The human backed toward the little shaft of light from the trap door. It dodged in the half light, avoiding his blows, but not able to make effective attacks. Within a few heartbeats the wound on the human's head had closed and disappeared without it paying any attention. A self-directing healing spirit? Chaotic healing ability? Either way it was a bad sign. He pressed in, mace in his right hand, extra legs wielding the net, left arm free to catch the human's net attack. Another lit coin flashed through the air to pass from view just above the floor. The human's net billowed out at his head. He parried and caught it easily. Enlo! The net stung where it brushed against his arm, but he held on. A quick jerk, another. The human hadn't counted on his extra strength and was off balance for half a heartbeat. Enough time to land another mace blow on its right arm. A solid hit. The arm should have broken. It should have dropped its sword and collapsed, overwhelmed by shock. Instead it twisted away, holding its bleeding arm up to its chest, and showing its unnaturally long teeth. The arm healed itself while they circled.

{Unng uh...I got the second bar out. The opening still isn't big enough. Do you need help?}

He parried a sword thrust with his net. The net already had holes eaten in it from the human's corrosive secretions.

{Just get it open!}

The net wouldn't work, the human's ichor would eat it up. He didn't dare bite. Regular tactics weren't going to stop this human. It seemed to be playing for time, studying, looking for openings. Holding its net seemed like a good tactic, and had allowed him several good hits, but the thing kept healing, and staying close to the evil secretion was taking its toll. He wasn't bleeding, but several places were starting to burn from the human's touch. His armor, his skin weren't going to protect him much longer. Probably reinforcements were on their way, probably the human thought time was on its side. Probably it was right. He needed out of this fight. Cut and run wasn't an option. This human would keep coming. He needed another way.

Another cloud of sour-tasting steam rose as the human stepped in the pool again. The water didn't seem to like it. The enemy of my enemy....

Again, this time using his full strength, he jerked the human's net, at the same time reaching his borrowed legs out with his own. A wary opponent, the human let go rather than be dragged in, but was off balance long enough for Tinglet to wrap the net around. The net hissed, the slender legs shrivelled. It hurt. He tossed the human's net aside, and lifted the human off the floor, turned and pushed it down into the pool. Steam, smoke, spatter. The pool began to get uncomfortably hot. Then stillness. The human writhed in the shallow water, working its sword free, but the vile taste was gone. His hands throbbed, the damaged legs hung uselessly at his sides, he needed to hold it down just a little longer. He called on the Silk People's Mother again. She answered. Over the next four heartbeats his head transformed. Eyes divided and rearranged, sound and dark sensing bristles sprouted, snout bifurcated into fanged palps. His second mother gave him the multi-eyed hairy visage of her children. The human gasped as he sunk his fangs through the net. Using all his strength he was just barely able to drive their

tips through the magical protection and into its chest. Spasmodic from the venom, the human twisted away. A weak sword blow blinded one eye, but he dove in again, sinking his fangs deeper this time. The human twitched, muttering anguished, and then fell still. His head hurt. His hands hurt. The borrowed legs hurt so much they were numb. He rolled over and lay back flat in the luke warm pool. Maybe if the other humans looked in they would think he was dead too and leave him alone. Ha! They couldn't even see down to where he was. He couldn't see or hear any more foes either. A little tremor began in the floor, he could taste the ripples in the pool. It made him nervous. No time to rest now. He stood slowly, got his mace. The still human thrashed spasmodically as he pounded its head into a pulp. Let's see if it can regenerate from that. Using the last little bits of his magical energy he started healing the hurts and wounds.

{There goes the last bar. You still alive out there? It's gotten kind of quiet}

In the middle of a spell, he didn't answer.

{Damn! Answer! Oooo...I'm coming out}

He recast the healing magic several times. The first casting quieted the ringing ache in his head and restored vision from his left secondary eye. With the second the stinging in his hands subsided. The tremors grew stronger. He was assessing his magic reserves before trying to heal the borrowed legs when he heard a sharp gasp behind him.

{There's a thing in the cistern that I'm gonna kill by blowgun if you don't answer right now.}

He dropped into a crouch. {What kind of thing? A spirit?}

{No, damn you! A big solid thing, like maybe a giant bug. How am I supposed to know, you're the one who can see in the dark. Damn! Now it's acting like it knows it's being watched.}

A pebble fell out of the wall opposite from the conduit opening.

He scanned. Blood. Human. Sour water. Old slime. There was nothing new in the cistern. A few tense heartbeats passed, then relief. He almost laughed when he realized what the problem was.

{That's me.}

He straightened up and turn around. He caught Jaazelle's flavor just inside the conduit opening. She tasted damp, and he picked up the faintest tingle of nervous tension on his tongue. Was he finally starting to figure out what she really tasted like?.

{What?}

{Like I said, I needed to borrow a head and legs from the Mother of the Silk People. They won't last too long. but...}

The tremors in the floor grew audible as a low thrum.

{ Tell me about it later, let's get out of here.}

He took a heartbeat to collect his tattered net before mounting the wall to the conduit.

With a chattering roar, a set of triangular teeth vibrated through the opposite wall and floor, biting out a circular opening about an arms length across. Sparks and stone chips stung his neck. Dust swirled. Within a heartbeat, the wall collapsed revealing a tunnel opening filled with a hideous drooling mouth and a tangle of jointed legs. Gouts of stony paste splattered out from its sides onto the remaining walls and ceiling. It took another bite, consuming most of the rubble and opening the tunnel to a full two paces wide.

A sweet-tasting blow-dart whistled past his head. Jaazelle had taken her shot. Whatever she poisoned her darts with had little effect. He grabbed for the conduit opening. A vile appendage, like a sour, glutinous rope, lashed out toward him from the pit. He managed to drop out of the way just before it stuck to the wall where he had been clinging. The creature dragged its tongue back as it flailed into the room. At least one other set of legs writhed in the hole behind.

He needed a distraction, time to get out. His spells were nearly spent. Magical protection and the mace spell were already fading.

The dead human lay painfully contorted at his feet.

His extra strength lasted just long enough to one-hand the body into the thing's path as he leaped to the opening. Thank the Mothers it wasn't heavy. He made it to the opening and writhed in. A mournful howl, of hunger? anger? keened down the conduit after him. He remembered to hang on to the opening at the other end and so avoided drowning when he flopped out into the full cistern at the other end.

Jaazelle scouted ahead. Her words returned tangy with confidence. {I've found a crest, I know this house. It has a Riverside door somewhere in the basement. Come quick!} His combat spells were now all spent. Another Voice would last a little while yet. Ripples began emanating from the conduit wall. He used fingerholds to drag himself around the wall to an open trapdoor that led up and out. The room above was cavernous, columned, and filled with stacks of wares. A few paces from the trap door, Jaazelle stood in the gloom behind a pile of greasy bales. Her finger tracing over a cluster of faint metallic-flavored patches. She turned at the sound of water dripping from his clothes.

"Don't bother to dry. We've got to find the river door and get out before the funeral ends. Eyes half closed she recited in sing-song "xxxxxxxxxx, yyyyyyyyyy, can only reach Dva Girgius high, ZZZZZZZZZZ, aaaaaaaa, bbbbbbbbbb, cccccccc, both Girgius and Volcan too, dddddddd, eeeeeeee Dva Volcan and dva Riverside." She tapped the patches. "This is the [warehouse] of house dddddddd. Guild lore says there's a Riverside door. It's got to be on this floor.

[get to river, fate smiles, get out of town]

Chapter 7

He lay there, still, on the black altar. His body pierced, bruised. His clothing soaked with blood. His face...

Lady Aleatia lowered her eyes to the hard black altar. A single stone, it had been brought up by the temple's inhuman excavators from an unimaginable depth. From a place so steeped in darkness that it would have nothing to do with light. The red torchlight that played across the floor just disappeared at its boundary, as if falling under a shadow. She looked up again. He lay there still, as if floating on a dark nothing.

Involuntarily, she sighed. He had been the last of her old drool, the last person in the city she could trust. He hadn't clan or family, she had never known his birthname. She'd always just called him Skip. Skip the Jaw. She looked down at the glistening ruby and [] beads, each a faceted gem, brocaded onto the heavy black cloth of her priestly vestments. To most their pattern seemed random, abstract, disturbing. She remembered that first time, during a long ago holy day ceremony, when their truth, the vision of the infinite web of emptiness, became clear to her. It was that night that the Mouth first whispered that she might aspire, might plot and strive, for the position she now held. She lifted her eyes to the stiff form on the altar. Unlike her, he had never been drawn to politics, to the struggle for cult or worldly power. He gave himself instead to cult arcana, and his craft. He embraced chaos. He knew and was known by the kids and tides. He had become the best assassin, the strongest Jaw in the city. It had been his downfall. The skills, the tools that made him so effective in secret murder weren't well suited for toe-to-toe combat with heavily armed foes. But, his confidence, his pride in his skills, and the wild violence chaos brings had led him to take one risk too many.

His ally had brought his body into the temple an hour ago. He had had an affinity for the Kids. Who knows how he got them to understand him, to follow him. It was a gift from the waiting mouth. He was the only one she'd ever known who they'd carried back wounded or dead through their web of tunnels. It had saved his life more than once. Too bad his blind fellow servant didn't have the senses, or the sense, to know that the body it carried this time was not complete enough to heal. She longed to stroke his soft dark hair one last time. Maybe the Mouth could whisper where it lay?

She looked up to watch the torchlight play on the ribbed walls and distant honeycomb ceiling of the great temple hall. It was quiet now in the sacrificial space near its center. No screams, no rattle of the altar's bronze shackles. This offering wouldn't struggle. The Kids, the burrowing builders of the hall, waited quietly, responding to her mood by staying out of sight. She turned back from her reverie to the cluster of worshippers behind her to utter the final lines of the cult funeral rite.

"So may we all end, returned to the Great Waiting Mouth after faithful service."

She turned again and took six backward paces away from the altar, the ceremonial torchbearers who stood in a semi-circle behind her matching her stride. Usually at this point, bearers would come forward to take the body for its worldly funeral, but he, a consecrated assassin, had withdrawn from the world years ago and had no double life, no appearances to keep up.

A solitary scratchy rustling rose to her right. She paused and turned toward it. In the dark distance a lone kid, a large one, dropped from a wall tunnel and approached the altar across the undulating floor. She recognized the pattern of scars across its disc-shaped body. It was his ally. The kid scuttled noisily toward her, mouth side down, its six legs drawing its drool into stringy hieroglyphs on the stone. The vastness of the hall made it look small, insect-like. It meandered a little as it approached, weaving between the huge fluted columns. Finally it passed between two of the torchbearers, reverently sidled around her, and approached the altar. It paused there, its body flexing up and down, nearly in time with her own breathing. She felt a rising discomfort. Something unusual was happening. Offerings were usually devoured messily by a slaving kid-swarm. Individuals rarely acted in a directed way. Painfully the kid arched its body disc, lifting the two legs nearest her off the ground. A kid's body is heavy and rigid, she wondered at its strength as it raised the two-meter wide, nearly meter thick disc up to vertical. One of its legs collapsed with the strain, but it none-the-less achieved its goal, falling away from her to land mouth side up on top of Skip's body. It pulled its legs in underneath itself, and after a few moments silence, opened its huge mouth to utter a bleating roar.

A great rustling clatter echoed down from the ceiling and out from the walls. She relaxed as things returned to their normal course. The few non-participant observers allowed to view the ceremony from the main floor scurried for cover as a horde of kids swarmed down the walls and dropped from the ceiling. The swarm rippled through the gloom toward the altar, toward her, like a flood of smooth gray stones and jointed legs. The flow parted around the ceremonial group, leaving an island of torchlit calm in a black sea of noise and ravening. It was the biggest swarm she'd ever seen. Skip had been important to them. Within seconds Skip, his ally, and the altar were buried in a writhing mass. Torchlight gleamed off of shiny legs and razor sharp teeth. The Mouth only knew how many of her kids joined Skip in physical oblivion inside that pile.

After a few minutes the frenzy began to dissipate. Kids at the periphery wandered off to drop into one of the many pits and tunnels along the walls. Most would work their way through side passages back up the the ceiling. Finally all the kids were gone. The tumult was past. The altar was empty. Farewell Skip.

Silently she turned to leave. A dismembered leg twitched feebly at the base of the altar. Clots of drool covered the floor, highlighting its troughs and crests. When full darkness and quiet returned, the kittens would emerge from their cracks and hidey-holes and clear everything away. She walked slowly to compensate for vision suddenly gone blurry.

The Ulerians claimed there was a thousand rungs to the ladder called love, from joyful trust and faithfulness at the top, to shared self-loathing near the bottom. She and Skip had had been together there part way up. Some trust, some affection. It was said that to climb onto any rung required some kind of sacrifice, whether of selfishness or self-esteem, and stronger sacrifice meant more relationship. She smiled a wry little smile. They had not really sacrificed much. Both of them put vocation first. She the search for cult power, and the worldly status that it inevitably brought. He the inner mysteries of his craft, and the strange whispers from the void beyond. What the Ulerians claimed was true: Not much sacrifice, not much relationship. Still, he had been the best friend she had had.

She entered the main access shaft and started up its long corkscrew spiral to the outer chambers. She had been this way so many many times, she could walk it in a trance, or with tears obscuring its details. For all their association with the physical aspects of human relations, the Ulerians freely admitted that they didn't really change a relationship, but only reinforced and clarified what was already there. She and Skip had also proved that true. Without real sharing, without the sacrifice, that drive had slowly dwindled away. Now he was gone. That wane of her life was past. And what lay ahead? The thing she had chosen. The relationship she had sacrificed for: Herself, the Waiting Mouth, and power.

The tunnel leveled as she reached the middle assembly hall. A collection of city dignitaries, lay members and lower Lips all, waited for her there. They hoped to please her, to gain her favor. She nodded as she strode through the room, her staff making apologies for her preoccupation. She was now the head of both the cult, the secret government of the city, and [], the foremost of the city's clans. If she could but win the favor of the Emperor, she would gain control of the outward city government as well. It was the next step, the next goal. But, there was more immediate business at hand. Lucretia, her aide, and Gnirl the Memory waited in the anteroom of her vestry. Lucretia carried a sheet of yellowed parchment.

"Did you find the contract in question?"

"Yes, holiness." She extended the parchment politely. "This is the original contract with clan Tharbinj. Gnirl heard a verbal amendment to it last night."

"The original, how many legs?"

"One, holiness."

"And the new?"

Lucretia gestured, Gnirl stepped forward. Aleatia had forgotten the details of Gnirl's offense. He must truly love life, or have little of his own to say, to have chosen his present role over execution. Or maybe it was another symptom of his vanity, as always a high collar covered his throat scars. He stood lips parted and eyes nervous while the spirits that possessed him recited:

Male voice: "...yes excellency, there is an existing contract."

Older male voice: "Then why does she yet live? I demand you keep your agreement!"

Ailenus always was a pushy old bastard, and cheap too.

Voice: "It was kept excellency. As it shows here clan [] required our services during deathweek, dark season, 1510. Here is a list of targets, one diligent attack specified on each. The initial report as made by your representative, Tharbinj bel Gracus, here appended, shows all obligations met. The contract was complete."

Older voice: "How can you pretend to claim due service while any of that clan yet live! I demand satisfaction."

Voice: "I'm sure the contract can be extended under customary terms."

Older voice, shouting: "An outrage!"

Older voice again: " By the mounds, crater and crevasse, you leave me no option. Do it."

Voice: "Shall we proceed under the same terms, or do you desire guaranteed outcome?"

Older voice: "At your usurious rates? Hah! This is your last chance. I'll arrange other means if you fail again."

Voice: "Thank you excellency, one diligent attempt then, to be completed within the next week."

Older voice: "No! Tomorrow!"

Voice: "One diligent attempt, to be completed tomorrow."

Female voice: "Did you call uncle?"

"Who was that" The spirits' recitation paused at her question.

"I understand the lady Orgo den Elyssa resides in Ailenus' house since Harmony week last. She was acknowledged as Lip in the Seventeenth City Drool on High Holy Day last." As usual Lucretia anticipated her questions well.

"Good. Continue."

Older voice, without a trace of anger: "No my dear, run along to my cubiculum. I'll meet you there shortly."

Voice: "Anything else excellency?"

Older voice: "No, no. I tire. Let us finish."

Voice: "Very well excellency. You have contracted. The Mouth will utter. Do you hold words or knowledge to inform that utterance?"

Older voice: "No...ah..Of course, the form. I, Tharbinj bel Ailenus, acknowledge my contract. I have heard no.... oh wait, there is something. For some reason Gracus' old housemaster is convinced that she has summoned a troll to help her. Besides that, I have heard no words nor kenned any knowledge."

A troll. An inhumanly strong, man-eating, chaos-hating...Skip had died at the hands of a true enemy, not just a mark who got lucky.

Voice: "We accept our contract, our obligation, and your words and knowledge. We go to fulfill your bidding, esteemed partner."

His part done, Gnirl retreated a step. Lucretia, a person of the stasis rune if ever there was one, answered the now redundant question. "The new contract has only one leg, your holiness."

In the vestry, she extended her arms and stood lips pursed as her priestess chambermaids removed the heavy vestments, muttering the dark lays that kept them consecrated. Her pensiveness returned as she watched the flickering lamplight play across the jeweled embroidery. Of course the cult had kept the contract. But it had cost far more than the fee was worth. It was sometimes appropriate to avenge fallen cult members, if practical. She wanted so badly to expiate her anger, her grief. But was it worth the risk to the cult to pursue this dangerous mark further? There had been many times in the past when they had left off after a badly failed attempt. In spite of his great confidence and his position as head assassin, Skip had often counseled restraint against marks whom fate seemed to protect.

Skip.

She pressed her lips together into a thin pale band as the heavy diadem of shiny white teeth was lifted from her brow. She was now leader of the clan as well as the cult, she was the client as well as the hireling. She could arrange to have both revenge and compensation. The disrobing ritual complete, she strode from the vestry and followed the torchbearer up her private stair to the outer temple chambers. The others trailed at a respectful distance. Beneath the heavy engraved ceiling of the anteroom to the main reception gallery she paused to complete the needed transaction.

"Lucretia, as leader of clan Tharbinj I wish to amend the contract again."

"Yes lady." She turned to Gnirl, but he had stepped forward already, anticipating her gesture. His lip reading had improved a great deal.

"I, Tharbinj den Aleatha, extend to six legs the contract on the life of all remaining members of the house of [] and include the lives of their servants in the contract."

Lucretia, who served her above, as well as here below. Let out a little gasp. "Lady, that will cost the clan over half a year's income."

She glared, her pain beginning to show as rage. "Yes, and?"

Lucretia startled for a second, but then bowed in apology before completing the contract on behalf of the cult. "You have contracted. The Mouth will utter. Do you hold words or knowledge to inform that utterance?"

With grim joy she responded. "I Tharbinj den Aleatha acknowledge my contract. I have heard no words nor kenned any knowledge."

"We accept our contract, our obligation, and your words and knowledge. We go to fulfill your bidding, esteemed partner."

She thrilled as the wild dark sensation of the Waiting Mouth's presence washed over her, sealing the bargain. In spite of the fact that the contract ritual was often shared with outsiders, it was one of the cult's most sacred rites. Through it all the world would be drawn into the Waiting Mouth.

"Lucretia, let word of the revised contract be given to the Jaws and to all Drools within a day's journey of the city. I will confirm the instruction and receive intelligence at the regular business meeting this evening."

"Yes, Holiness."

[In main reception gallery, set scene as she walks in. on motion side of room: servant with greeting wand from leonio, on stasis side, doddering regent of diviners, he takes precedence to warn of ill omen, she is angry, warning is too late, Skip is dead. He is sorry, but indications pointed to that as minor part of greater ill. She plays him down out of anger. Tells servant she will see Leonio later]

Chapter 8

The barge rocked slowly on the open river. The narrow, dark and well-lardered compartment should have felt safe and homey. It didn't. Nervously, Tinglet picked his teeth with the tail of a careless rat. He was exhausted and sore, but he couldn't rest. He rolled over, careful to keep the case of licorice unguents between himself and the ceiling hatch. The river slapped softly against the wooden outer wall only an arms reach away. He squirmed back a little tighter against the quiet inner partition. Jaazelle slept fitfully on a pile of furs a little further down from the hatch. Apparently the humans' Mother had never told them how anciently the water had tried to climb up and overwhelm the land, how it would still try to climb in and drive life giving elements out. The humans were ignorant; but his gut knew.

A soft scrape from the direction of the hatch interrupted his yyyyyyy

from didn't quite Told from point of view of observer, mute servant?, Lady Aleatha=Karscht high priestess, views body of jaw, gives orders to track our heros down, secret passage into mansion, receives leonio, he explains scheme, oracles warn against, leonio offers power, glory, agrees to consider]

* * * * *

More strange. He thought back to the Castle of Lead, to the Great Temple. While there he worked to learn the ways of the spirits. He was in the midst of summoning a magic spirit to observe when the Shamen Priestess entered the magic circle, breaking the spell.

"The Priestess Mother wants you to come to her now." The Shamen Priestess spoke, gestured for him to follow, then turned immediately toward the inner temple. He immediately complied. The Shamen Priestess led him through the outer temple training areas and into the sanctum. The temple was in well inside the castle, where no light ever penetrated. The walls tasted good. Full of well-aged memories of Uz glory. Safe from the distracting light darksense flowered, giving the flavor of passing objects, making instant memories of the locations and surface textures of every chamber, every alcove, every piece of furniture as he encountered it. The Temple was full of statues and pictures. Its walls were covered with

writing. When very young he'd been taught to build up conscious mental images of artwork, to appreciate their gnawed beauty by combining taste and memory perceived effortlessly with a consciously developed vision-form. He'd once seen Uz art in a human collection, but of course the light ruined it. As an adult serving in the temple he'd learned also to read, and so the temple walls also spoke to his memory. Stories of Wonderhome, of gods and heroes, coursed through his mind as he walked. The Shamen Priestess stopped at a doorway and gestured for him to go through. He tasted pleased. Tinglet smiled on return. There were so very few he-uz priestesses. It had been worth the long journey to have been able to learn from him.

Rain pelted the shutters and dripped through the worn out thatch. Puddles obscured the cuts and stains on a few of the coarse tables. The walls were dark, the air smoky from a bundle of sticks smoldering on the poorly designed hearth. The few people in the common room sat heads down, subdued. The place had been empty when they arrived that afternoon. Jaazelle had watched them all carefully as they entered. None had shown any interest in strangers. Could this place possibly be small and backward enough to be out of the mouth's immediate reach? The inn was called the New Moon, but it's sign, an empty night sky, made clear that the proprietor was not a lunar. Hopefully chaos cultists or sympathizers were unwelcome. Tinglet dozed restlessly to her left, in the very corner of the room. He'd gulped down the stew with obvious distaste, and sulked because she had forbidden him to eat the serving platter. Let him sulk. He'd wanted to spend the night out in the woods. She didn't care what he said about soft-skinned and finicky humans dying out from weakness and degeneracy, she couldn't face another cold, wet, hungry night.

A vagabond minstrel tuned a decrepit lyre in the corner to her right. He looked very large and well fed for an itinerant, but his gear was even more bedraggled than theirs. A long sleeping roll with a gray cloak draped over it stood in the corner behind his stool. He studied the crowd intently as he worked, seemingly oblivious to the painful discord his instrument produced.

"Damn Humans, first they burn good food and then they destroy good music." Tinglet muttered half-awake. Jaazelle glanced over to see that he was still careful to keep his snout down on his chest, obscured by his cloak. The minstrel, apparently discovering it beyond his ability to improve the sound of his instrument any further, began a ballad. It was a testament to the oppression and low cultural status of the locals that no one made a move toward the exit.

A low growl from the corner: "I'd rather be getting wet."

Jaazelle ignored the troll and the troubadour so she could focus on watching, listening. It was hard to stay alert. In spite of her dart experience, days of vigilance were wearing her down. The waiting mouth had stalked them continuously since they left [] the week before. They'd been attacked by small-time bravos in every village they'd entered seeking supplies. And in spite of Tinglet's impressive woodcraft they had been forced to fight a day-long running battle with a mouthie gang through open country. Hopefully this beaten-up crossroads tavern was obscure enough to provide a few hour's rest. The minstrel launched into a painful dance tune.

A whisper from her left: "He tastes like chainmail under that tunic."

A tired certainty solidified. "Damn. He must be one of them. Can we get out without crossing the room?"

Tinglet looked up at a shuttered window in the wall to his left. "I could lift you out of that window, if I can get it open. But as long as he's alone, I think we should wait until full dark."

The extra hour's rest was very tempting. "Alright, but make sure you can get that window open quickly if you have to." Without raising himself from bench, Tinglet reached out a long arm and began probing the window casing. She turned her attention back to the minstrel. How did he ever expect to pass for a real musician? The mouthies were usually much better at casting than this. A new group of peasants entered the tavern. Three men and a woman. Jaazelle didn't like their look. The clothes were coarse and simple, but the wearers were well groomed, trim, confident. Tinglet studied them intently for a few moments.

"They taste like they've washed their clothes." He turned back to the window, probing with increased vigor.

Here were the rest of them. No true peasants washed their outer wear. Jaazelle sank down, letting the table obscure her outline. The minstrel played on, staring at the newcomers, they had taken seats on the firelit side of the room, near the door. They sat there facing into the room, looking slowly around, but ignoring him completely. One of them went to speak to the host. The others huddled as the woman laid a long dark object on the table in front of them.

"It's the ax, the memento." Tinglet whispered, then continuing: "The window is nailed shut, I'd have to break the casing to open it."

Jaazelle shook her head. "Too much noise, we'll have to find a different way." Tinglet nodded once, whispered a few chanted words of his own, then dragged a handful of troll coins from his pouch and stuffed them into his mouth. Jaazelle bit her lip, he was right, it would be another fight. She'd underestimated the resources her foes were willing to invest. The ax was an ancient symbol of her house, but had no intrinsic use. That the mouthies had brought it likely meant that they'd had it enchanted to find her, a very expensive proposition. Her fear was confirmed a minute later when the mouthie woman began low gestures over the ax.

The host had been speaking somewhat heatedly with the head mouthy and now huffed over to the table, waving a tankard.

"Here! Stop that! By the gods, I'll have no foul sorcery in my house." Two of the men rose to intercept him while the woman continued her chant.

All eyes turned to the brewing fracas. Jaazelle took the opportunity of the distraction. "Down, under the tables, we'll try and crawl for the door." Maybe Tinglet could cast a darkwall to cover them as they got near the door. The tavern business was poor and most of the room empty. They'd made it about halfway to the door when the woman finally spoke:

"There! Behind the pillar."

Damn. Tinglet went into action. He spit the ball of lead into his hand and was casting a spell into it. Jaazelle drew her stiletto, and grabbed a tankard of the table beside her as she stood. Her own protective spells should go up I time. The few real peasants in the room were headed for the corners or the exit. Two of the mouthie men were nearly on top of them, the woman followed with a net. The fourth was pulling a dagger out of the prostrate host. Tinglet threw the lead ball into the chest of the first mouthie.

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Another Joke by Nick Brooke

(As originally appeared on the HeroQuest Digest June 27, 2003)

Okay, so a couple from the Heartlands go on a trip by moonboat to one of the newly liberated provinces: Sartar, or some place.

Mooring at the pylon, they see large crowds waving signs that say "Lunars Go Home!" "Death to Lunar Scum!" and so on. They just smile.

Their native Ibex Moon guide comes to escort them to their lodgings, and drives them through streets lined with people waving more "Lunars Go Home!", "Lunars Get Out!" signs. Again, they just smile.

Finally, upon arrival at the hostel, surprise! there are more "Lunars Go Home!" sign bearers. The guide decides that enough is enough, and she really should say something. She turns around to address her passengers.

"Oh dear! I am *so* sorry about these ignorant people in my country with their rude signs: I don't know how to apologise, or what to say."

To which the two Heartlanders reply, "Well, *we* think you should keep it up! We're from Dara Happa, and we don't like Lunars either!"

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Another Sartarite Joke by John Hughes

(As originally appeared on the HeroQuest Digest June 29, 2003)

Braggi Bentbow and the other male shepherds are up at the shielings, perving after pretty Nalda Mudshins. Its Sea Season of course, and, tired out after a long day chasing sheep, the young mens' fancy turns to the delights of young women, same as for the other four seasons. Spurred on by his kinsmen, Braggi finally summons up the courage to approach young Nalda.

"Pretty Nalda Mudshins, will you not come with me for a walk in the heather?"

Nalda blushes, smiles, and makes reply. "You're a fine strapping man Braggi Bentbow, but I cannot walk with you, for I can see the glisten in your eye."

"Bugger", thinks Braggi, and trods off back to his stone-walled hut. Of course he can't stop thinking about pretty Nalda, so next evening as Elmal fades into the west he tries again.

"Pretty Nalda Mudshins, will you not come with me for a walk in the heather?"

"You're a fine strapping man Braggi Bentbow, but I cannot walk with you, for I can see the glisten in your eye."

"Sod!" thinks Braggi, and retires to his hut, kicking out at the lambs who are unlucky enough to cross his path.

Next morning, Braggi has a brilliant idea. He borrows a raincape with a heavy hood, and come dusk, he approaches Nalda's fire with the hood drawn down over his eyes. "No excuses now", he thinks.

"Pretty Nalda Mudshins, will you not come with me for a walk in the heather?"

"You're a fine strapping man Braggi Bentbow, but I cannot walk with you, for I can see the tilt in your kilt!"

©2003 by John Hughes.

Argrath and the Godlearner by Guy Jobbins

(Author's Note: I submit this to your scrutiny. the story came first, so I'm not sure if actually makes Gloranthan sense.

Apologies to Borges, whose style I have attempted to copy (and failed) & some of whose' phrases are implugged in the story).

Lord,

I humbly beg to draw your attention to the following; a text discovered by the librarian Filk the Grey in the collections of the Great Sage Yrip Tholinsdottir after her death in 1673. Yrip's associated commentary says she purchased it from a Kethaelan seaman in 1635. The mariner claimed to have found it sealed in a bottle, stranded on an island beach in the Mourn Sea.

Yrip apparently paid the mariner well, for she valued the peculiar parchment it was composed upon. Indeed, I have never seen its equal, a soft and smooth vellum upon which the ink glinted like moonlight. (The script is a heavy and archaic Jrusteli, which I have undertaken to translate for you.) It was only in a later part of her commentary, tentatively dated 1650, that Yrip appears to become convinced that the character appearing in the document is in fact the Argrath, an idea she relates to his circumnavigation saga. Yrip herself entitled the document "Argrath and the Godlearner".

I hope our find excites your worthy interest,

Llandidnese

*

I'm not entirely sure, currently, whether the episode that follows truly occurred, or is, perhaps, merely the accumulation of a life-time's longing, given form and inserted into my memories to torment me still further. I walk the halls of my tower with detachment, not wholly integrated with my surroundings; the walls seem unreal, the books on their shelves illusionary. Distant sounds are not of this place, representing events that are forever disconnected from my life. I may dream of, but never know, them. Since the man left I have not spoken to nor seen another soul, although sometimes the echoes of their activities are brought to this craggy outpost by the unceasing winds, which drive these vague noises before them as random memories of a world that has forgotten me.

I need ask no pity from a world that has none to give. Perhaps as you read this I may be already dead, a thought that chills me. I will have no tomb, proud nor humble; my bones left to become dust on the books I love so well. Then, as those sounds driven here by the winds bring memories to me, they bring this parchment to your hands, that you may feel the faint echoes of my life. Yet I digress.

Before I conceived his approach I was content, I think. I knew no other way of living, the pattern was established and unbroken. Sleeping, waking, working, eating and defecating in a prescribed manner that I had never contemplated questioning or examining for meaning. My search was in my work, the study of the books that line the corridors and rooms of the tower, sifting the confused, jumbled mass of data for repeated patterns; in these I found the faint shadows of a world I could not perceive. This task I had assigned myself upon my first awakening here, so long ago its distance has no meaning to me, and I had faithfully followed the rhythms laid out before me; darkness and light, an urge to satiate hunger. When I had want of ought I had only to ask and look, and it would appear. In one tome I discovered, it was indicated that the tower was built by a magus of such power that he conversed, undaunted, with dragons. Here he wrought a great magick that brought him to an absolute knowledge that he stored in the books of this place. These books hold all things that have been, are, or will be; the movement and meaning of each mote of dust throughout time is recorded here; in one of these books there is this text, in another an account of your life, detailed to the moment. What became of him or why he then placed me in this library is beyond my knowledge, but I hazard that I will discover why, encapsulated in dark and heavy print, one day, somewhere.

Through reading I learnt of other people, their acts and their thoughts, the ways in which time would combine isolated happenings into a continuous, flowing chain of events that could be referred to and commented upon. The way in which people interacted with others was of particular interest. It occurred to me that through meeting and reacting to one another histories were formed. Like two balls colliding, angle and velocity would determine future paths. The blank text and its meaningless prose held no enlightenment for me, however. I was still innocent to the feeling and emotion of conversation, blind to the rhythms and currents of cerebral meetings; I could read but I could not know. This began to prey on

my mind, at first as a puzzled imagining, would it be like so, or so? Did people flow to the same rhythm, was adjustment necessary? Was the adjustment instinctive or analytical?

I began to practice meeting my first person, studying variations on social customs and graces, analysing the people in what I read, attempting to break them down into various groups, by personality type, interests and so on. I collected vast quantities of data and performed complicated and thorough correlations upon them. By these means I was confident of identifying my person when I encountered him and accurately determining the course and manner of our interaction. When this was done I realised that I still lacked the confidence to fulfil my role precisely and without error. Terrified of not establishing a rapport with my person, of remaining alone still further (yes, it would have been about now that I first became aware of the feeling of isolation) I began to examine my texts for the reason as to why a man would come to such a deserted place. By narrowing down the potential avenues of history I felt sure I could study my part still better. I found a number of reasons why a man might come to a tower on the edge of the world; he might be lost and requiring sustenance and shelter, or he might be on some desperate quest and in need of assistance, or may have heard of this fantastical place and sworn to determine for himself its existence or non-existence. I scoured my shelves for variations on the themes, studying each one with devotion to minor and pointless detail.

But my curse was that I knew not whether anyone would come.

Come daybreak I would run up the dusty and spiralling stairs to the roof, where, ecstatic, fearful with anticipation, and braving the spray driven up by the sea boiling on the rocks, I would squint and gaze off to the horizon, desperately hoping to see a sail. Here I would stay for an hour or more, until I panicked at the thought of a sail appearing, and my being unprepared to meet its master. By now I was hallucinating vividly with each passage I read, so adept was I at conjuring the scene completely that I could smell the salt on the other's clothes. Frantically I would delve yet further into the passages, searching out books not yet discovered that might contain useful material. I was becoming convinced that the encounter would take on a certain form, that of the man who has heard of the mage's tower at the outer edge of the ocean, a tower that contains everything that might be known, and has come to discover the answer to some great question. The cross-referencing of stories and compilation of data, as well as his form in my visions all lead me to this. He would be young, yet weathered and toughened by years of looking for this place. His sealskin cape would be cast back, now at last he was out of the salt air, exposing talismans and amulets of protection that would be fingered fearfully in this sombre and sorcerous place. His manner would be eager, but tempered by both a reluctance to end his quest and out of deference to me. Wisely and yet humbly I would show him his answer, and except his servitude and companionship as payment.

An hour before nightfall I would again climb to the roof, wearily this time, for the last vigil of the day.

One day I chanced upon a volume lurking between two others that were of much finer appearance. That I should even have noticed it is no small miracle, had it been passed by I would certainly have never seen it again. As it was I felt strangely compelled to reach out and take it from its place. In my hands it had the unusual property of being both very large and very small at the same time, neither shrinking nor

growing, but remaining both simultaneously. Intrigued I opened the book and began to read. On the frontispiece was my name and the dates of my birth and my death. None of these can I remember; they faded from my mind as they faded from my eyes when I turned the page. The next page declared the volume one of a series; I cannot recall the number of episodes but surely it was barely finite.

It was then approaching the hour of the sunset watch, but I broke with the habit of years and stayed at my podium, excitedly devouring the contents of the book. This volume commenced with my first longing for company, my first amazement at the actions of others, and my wish to join in that dance. It progressed in microscopic detail through my searches for information, the beginnings of my obsession, my first visions, the narrowing of future events, full-scale hallucinations and my frantic lookout from the battlements. In blank, unemotional prose it charted the course of my madness.

Darkness was falling. I skipped over sections, desperate to discover who would come and why. The book, I knew, would describe each and every detail of the event; I would have to search no longer. I would not need to fear the encounter, terrified but yearning for the unknown.

By the dying light I beheld the words, and as I read them they occurred.

A thunderous knocking startled me from my perusal, the double, ironbound doors of oak thrown back into the hall, sea spray cascading in, soaking those books that lay stacked on the floor. The figure, illuminated viciously by lightning, swaggered into the tower, as if to keep sorcery away by the sheer force of his bravado. At last out of the storm his sealskin cape was cast back, revealing talismans and amulets of protection. Above them were the strong features of a mighty warrior, and as he spoke I could read the words his lips made on the vellum pages of my book.

"Sir Wizard, it is my intention to ask you of the Gods..." The book described in microscopic detail every aspect of the scene, the gestures of command, my own reading of the book, the precise dynamics of each particle of sea spray projected into the room. I absorbed the knowledge at a fantastic pace, sponging the words and their meanings directly by sight, then by intuition, then without being aware of them. Pages turned at a furious rate, driven by the wind. The array of information cascaded across my mind, distinct rhythms being sensed and apprehended. The outer vision of the book and the man, the inner image of the scene, decoded from the lifeless prose, became one. Two driven mountains met, two balls collided with impossible and total force, the rhythms tightened as springs until a symphony became a note. I met his eyes, but can no longer recall my words. There is only a distant memory of instruction, no longer a need for books, but a feeling of omnipotence, an all extending memory that turns everything from darkness to eternal, blinding radiance.

When I awoke, laid out on the floor, he was long gone, the doors closed behind him. The book on my podium too, was gone. The vast, labyrinthed, book-shelved hallway starkly echoed my cries of despair and condemnation as I crawled the passages, frantically searching for that leather-bound guide to my delusions until, finally, exhaustion overcame me and I sank into numbing sleep. Occasionally I still search the shelves for it, but with out much anticipation of success. Perhaps it is better like this, to live one's life instead of reading it, but what is a life of ennui, with no events to form a history? Since he has gone my life has been empty, bereft of meaning but to chase that feeling of sagehood he brought me, the

memory of who I really am. I sit in my tower and hear the boiling sea, removed from it by this one, all-enclosing, circular wall, and sometimes I hear the echoes of other peoples' lives, carried here by the driving wind.

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Arkat's Gift by Sergio Mascarenhas

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest December 22, 1997)

You my friend, my master, you with whom I learned my weapon skills. You I had by my side when I fought the foes of Humakt. You which I take to confident of my fate, can you tell me why the charms of Uleria are forbidden to the carriers of the sword ? Why cannot the Lord of Death be also the Slave of Love ? So listen to my tale before we depart forever.

When I was resting from the hardships of battle and allowed my hand to lay empty from my sword, two girls approached me and the older asked from a distance: "Aye, grim warrior, are you as joyful and expansive in love as you are determined and sober in war ?", and they laughed and started to dance around me.

"Tell us, warrior (she started again) who is your Hero ? Which iron blade inspires your's ?". And to that I could only utter the name of Arkat, Master of Masters, Lord of Lords, Hero of Heroes.

"Ah (she said), and did your Arkat bleed in his earth, not from the spell of Death, but from the gentle touch of love ?". Once again they started to dance around me. " Bring me the gift your Hero gave the one he loved. Give it to me and I'll be yours forever." And they danced away, smiling and chanting while I was there speechless and motionless, because all I knew about Arkat my Hero was his thousand strokes, and how he traded death with his enemies.

So I started my quest to discover the secret of Arkat's love. I quested far and near, in body and in spirit. Eventually I found a path that ended in a small grove. There the trees told me how Arkat met his love, the most beautiful and fair lady of his time. The fields where they rested whispered how Arkat promised he would never try to see her naked body. The rocks echoed the thoughts of Arkat in search of the perfect gift to his love.

Finally the waters of the stream they crossed sang how Arkat lowered his eyes not to look at her when she raised her dress to keep it dry; how he saw reflected in the waters in front of him her perfect, beautiful, white goat's feet; how he discovered at last the perfect gift he searched for; and how love drove his hand when he took his sword and with a single blow kissed her with death.

(Inspired by a Portuguese folk tale called 'The Princess with goat's feet')

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Barley, Beans and Beer by Stephen Tempest

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest May 23, 2003)

"Esrola had many beautiful daughters, but the fairest and most fertile of all was Esra the Barley Mother. Her bounty fed the whole Storm Tribe; but Esra felt confined and restricted with this narrow life. She watched how her sisters Uralda, Entra and Nevala wandered at will about the tula, and felt envious. She became bored, and listless. Her crops became smaller, and soon the other gods grew worried. They tried to cheer her up, but nothing worked.

"Then Eurmäl said he had a plan. The rest of the tribe didn't trust him, of course, but they were running out of ideas. However, Eurmäl's suggestion seemed harmless enough: why not let Esra go on holiday for a while? When everyone looked at him blankly, Eurmäl had to explain: a "holiday" meant going on a journey to somewhere nice, and not doing any work for a time - just resting and having fun. Esra thought this sounded like a fine idea, but the other gods weren't so sure. Who would do her work while she was away? Who would feed the tribe? However, Eurmäl had an answer for this too. In his travels he had met a distant kinswoman of Esra - the Bean Goddess; and Eurmäl was sure he could persuade her to take Esra's place for a time, until she got back. Of course, he might need a few gifts and trinkets to give her to persuade her to help, but surely Queen Ernalda would be willing to open her treasure casket for such a worthy cause...?

"And so it was agreed. Ernalda sent Issaries with Eurmäl to find the Bean Goddess (and make sure he didn't run away with the gifts himself, much to his secret frustration). Esra set off on her holiday to foreign parts, and Elmal kindly agreed to escort her and protect her from harm (being once a foreigner himself, he knew the ways of those distant lands).

"Everything went well for a time. Some of the tribe missed Esra's barley bread, but they all agreed that the Bean Goddess's bounty made a tasty alternative. And so, the gods all ate beans every day. It was at this point that they realised the... disadvantage... of their new diet. At night, the thunder almost shook the roof of Karulinoran clean off - and that was while Orlanth was away on a raid... When he returned Ernalda had to beg him to summon his strongest breath to clear the air - but even the King of Storms was only able to shift the stink for a brief while before it came stealing back. At that point everybody realised that Eurmäl had tricked them once again, and set out to find him and thrash him. The Trickster, being a sensible fellow, had hidden himself away somewhere secret; but unfortunately for him he'd been eating the beans too, and gave himself away inadvertently as Orlanth passed his hiding place.

"One severe beating later, Eurmäl managed to save what was left of his skin by swearing an unbreakable oath to go and get Esra back straight away. The Bean Goddess, meanwhile, was thanked for her help and hastily bundled straight back to her own kinsfolk.

"Hopefully everything would be back to normal soon - except for one problem. Eurmäl couldn't find Esra. Everybody he asked said yes, she and Elmal had passed this way, but they'd only stayed for a while then moved on. They'd seemed happy, everybody agreed. In fact, their singing and laughter had made them welcome guests, but they hadn't stayed long. This puzzled Eurmäl ("Elmal? Singing and laughing?") but he had no option but to keep looking. Back in Storm Stead, things were getting bad. They'd eaten all

the beans. They'd eaten the last stocks of barley. They'd eaten all the carrots and peas from Esrola's gardens. They'd slaughtered and eaten as much of the livestock as they dared. The hunters were having to wander further and further from home in search of game. Things were getting worse than bad.

"At last, Eurmäl finally caught up with Esra and Elmal. One look at the baby in her arms told him part of what they'd been doing all this time (and why they'd been so happy) but the other part of the puzzle fell into place when they offered to let him taste the new drink they'd created between themselves. After a few mugs, Eurmäl forgot all about his worries of being late back, and was singing and laughing himself.

"When the four of them got back to Storm Stead, Orlanth and Ernalda were furious at first; but after a few helpings of Esra's new gift, all was forgiven. Esra promised not to leave the stead for so long in future. Ernalda suggested that if she got tired of her surroundings again, she could always go and stay in a different part of the tula for a year or two, to get a change of scenery. Esra agreed that that would be a good compromise, and maybe her cousin the Bean Goddess could visit them too, as long as she didn't overstay her welcome? Everyone looked a bit dubious at this, but Orlanth said that she could visit as long as Esra made plenty of her new brew to go around and dull the sensations... Esra laughed, and promised that she'd teach her son - whom she'd named Minlister - to make the brew himself as soon as he was old enough. Everybody agreed that this was a fine idea, and so the beer was passed round once more, and everybody was happy.

"Until they woke up the next morning, but that's another story..."

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The Beer Quest by Jamie Revell

Part I Gathering of Heroes

Far in the north, in the God Time, there was a mighty stead, a home for the gods. Mighty winds blew over its tula, of such bitter cold that they could freeze a man to death where he stood. Snow piled high against the halls, and icicles hung from every roof. Mammoths and woolly rhinoceroses stomped across the fields, tearing up the frozen plants to devour them. The thralls huddled in their huts, while the thanes wrestled and contested on the bare icy ground outside. And, in the greatest of the halls, the chieftain sat in his great chair at the high table.

"Where's my supper, woman?" roared Vadrus. "I'm getting bloody hungry!"

The dish-thane entered the hall, trembling, and bowing her head before the vengeful chieftain. "I... I fear, oh Lord of the North Wind, that we have no food to bring before you. For the crops and their goddesses are, um, weak and cowardly, and they do not wish to grow here in the land of perpetual snow and ice. Even the mammoths can find little to eat, and we used the last of the grain in the stores to make the beer that you drank last night."

"What? We're out of food?" said Vadrus angrily. "Oh bugger." Then he thought a little more on the

matter. “Oh well, we’ll have to do without any for a while, until we can raid some southern softies. And if the thralls starve to death, we’ll have to get more of them, too. It’s just as well we’re gods, really.”

However, it was at this point that the full import of the dish-thane’s words finally reached the storm lord’s brain. “Wait a moment...” he said, “we used the last of the grain to make last night’s beer? But that would mean... NO BEER! Bloody heck, this is serious!”

So Vadrus gathered together his sons and followers, and explained to them the terrible crisis that had befallen the stead. “So, right, you lot, we’ve got to find ourselves beer, and quickly. And it’s got to be beer that we can make more of here at the stead, right, so we don’t bloody well run out again! You got that? So each of you, off you go, and I’ll look, and all. And don’t bloody come back here until you’ve found something useful.”

And so they travelled across the world: Vadrus the Chieftain, Valind, Gagarth, Molanni, Iphara, and many others since forgotten. Each of them desperate to succeed in one the greatest challenges that had ever faced their kin; for this was the beginning of...

The Beer Quest!

Part II Valind's Tale

Valind was the eldest of Vadrus’ sons, and the one who took after his father the most. When he heard the call to take part in the BeerQuest, he immediately took up his weapons, and girded himself for the treacherous journey across the snowy wastes by putting on his string vest.

“Ah, bracing!”

With that, Valind walked out into the howling wind, and stomped his way across the wasteland. At first there were few plants to be seen, and certainly nothing that could be used to make beer, but eventually the land began to warm, until Valind came at last to the shores of a great sea. There he encountered a clan of blue-skinned folk, who cavorted amongst the waves.

“Oy, you lot, stop your prancing! Have you got any decent plants around here?”

“Oh yes,” they replied, “we have many kinds of seaweed, of green, red, and brown!”

“I can’t make beer out of that!” protested Valind, “and if you can, I don’t bloody want to know, right? Where can I find something more useful?”

“To the south,” replied the strangers, “our waters leap forth, and travel a great distance inland. Perhaps there they have the plants you seek.”

Valind decided that this was a good plan, so he followed the coast until he came to a place where the waters leapt up, and rushed across the land in a wide torrent. For, in those days, as you know, the rivers ran uphill, away from the sea.

Valind walked along the banks of the river, and saw many marvels as he did so. This was a land of strange people, who remained slaves of the Evil Emperor, even though he was dead. He passed a land where primitive folk tried to pelt him with stones, and past a giant dung-hill on top of which the ignorant slaves had built themselves a city. He passed a glowing city filled with the light of the vanquished sun, and through a land where the people worshipped goats.

At last, he came to a great swamp that stood outside a towering ring of stone. From within the ring sounded the screams of the damned and the beating of a thousand drums, for it contained a pit that plunged straight down to Hell, where insane demons howled with evil intent, and the dead walked openly among the living.

"Bloody southerners," muttered Valind to himself.

But then he saw, outside the ring, a group of goddesses working in the paddy fields, their skirts hitched up around their thighs to keep them out of the waters.

"This is more like it!" said Valind, and went to approach them.

The goddesses were aghast at his approach, and began to whisper and giggle among themselves.

"Look at that horrid barbarian!" said one, "he is barely dressed, and his speech is horribly uncouth!"

"He is hairy and unshaven!" said another, "all brawn and sweat, not like our righteous and noble gods!"

"Ooh, isn't he just?" said a third, "Err... I mean, yes, it's terrible!"

"Do you know where I can find grain that will grow in proper, manly, weather?" asked Valind of the goddesses.

"We most certainly do not!" they replied, "why, the very thought is disgusting!"

Before Valind could question them further, a godling stepped forth from the marsh, and accosted him.

"Stop this at once, barbarian! You are talking to the goddesses while they are un-chaperoned! Your behaviour is most unseemly, and I can see you looking at their naked knees! Such behaviour cannot be countenanced!"

At which point Valind smashed the godling in the face, and battered him to the ground.

"You will regret this," said the godling, lying bleeding in the marsh waters, "for now my master comes! He is Shargash, Lord of Hell, God of Destruction and Woe, Bringer of Disaster, Obliterator of the Darjiini Rebels!"

As he spoke these words, a great cloud of fiery smoke began to issue from within the ring of stone. And within it formed the mighty figure of a demonic man, vast and gigantic, towering over the tiny figure of Valind, who was still a young god in those days. The figure had brows of thunder, and eyes of burning flame, and clouds of red-hot ash billowed about him.

“Oh, dear,” said Valind. But nonetheless, he was a valiant god, not one who would bow down before mere bluster. So he whirled his cloak about him, summoning great flurries of snow that whipped across the marshland. And then he blew upon the waters, turning them to ice, and howled his battle-cry, that sent jagged hail hurtling towards his foe. Thus armed with the powers of winter, he stepped forth to battle the demonic god.

But Shargash reached through the winter storms, wrapped in his burning ash, and picked up Valind, dashing him to the ground, so that he was soon buried in his own snow and ice, entombed and helpless. The evil god laughed a cruel laugh that made the very ground shake with terror, and raised his foot to crush Valind’s body beneath his heel.

At that moment, a second thunder peel sounded across the land, accompanied by a gust of freezing rain, and the power of the winter hurricane. From the clouds that formed, a second figure strode forth, as powerful as the demon, yet cold where he was hot.

“Leave my son alone!” bellowed Vadrus, “pick on someone your own size, you big southern bully!”

Shargash turned to face the new threat, his face contorted with anger. “Oh, yeah?” he said, “oh yeah? You want some do you? You come round my Manor, chatting up my birds, you having a laugh, or something? Leave it out, you northern yob! You come and have a go, if you think you’re hard enough. I’ll give you a right going over, know what I mean?”

At once, the two gods came to blows, and storms blasted across the skies, lighting up the heavens with their fury. As the battle continued, the earth shook, cracking the ice that held Valind imprisoned. He crawled his way to the surface, where he found one of the goddesses, swathed in the thick snow that he had created. He swept aside the snow, and pulled her to the surface, where the raging storms of the contest above them whipped about them and tore at their bodies.

“You know,” said the goddess, holding together the tattered remnants of her dress, “that snow was surprisingly warm and sheltering, compared with this.”

“Aye, well I know another way to keep warm through the winter,” said Valind. “Those two look to be having fun, do you reckon we leave them to it?”

The grain goddess, looking around to see that none of her companions was near, eagerly nodded her agreement. And from that union came winter barley, which germinates after spending the winter under a blanket of snow.

But still, even this did not make beer in the dead of winter, and so the Vadrudi continued on their BeerQuest...

©Jamie Revell

The Belly of a Fish: a Jannisor Tale by Harald Smith

As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest September 19, 1995)

Author's Notes: It's been awhile since I last posted an Imtherian story. Here is a new one about Jannisor. It is a tale told in the Eastern Reaches of Imther, common to the Wilktar, Polan, and Apsul clans.

When Jannisor was young, he travelled widely through the woods of the eastern reaches even to the edge of the Sea of Elves itself from which the sun rises each day.

It chanced one day that Jannisor decided that he desired fish for his meal. But instead of a river fish, Jannisor wanted a taste of sea fish, which he never had tried before. He found a clansman from those parts and asked, "By the grace of Khelmal, how does one catch a sea fish?"

The clansman replied, "Though the sea be near, it is as far as the sun. The waters turn against all who seek passage. You'll not catch a sea fish."

Jannisor was undaunted by this reply and sought for another who could tell him how to catch a sea fish. He found a hunter from those parts and asked, "By the stealth of Gordaval, how does one catch a sea fish?"

The hunter replied, "Though Gordaval can catch all on land, he can catch nothing from the sea. The waters turn against all who hunt there. You'll not catch a sea fish."

Jannisor was undaunted by this reply and sought for another who could tell him how to catch a sea fish. He found an old fisherman and asked, "By the wisdom of Arahar, how does one catch a sea fish?"

The old fisherman replied, "Though Arahar can see all upon the land, he can only see himself in the sea. A sea fish would as soon eat you as be eaten. You'll not catch a sea fish."

Jannisor was undaunted by this reply. Deciding he could find no aid, he set out to catch a sea fish alone. He cut down five trees and tied them together with Everhold Knots. He cut down a sapling to use as a fishing pole. He took the gutstring of a swift deer to use as a fishing line. He took a nail from his pack and bent it into a fishing hook. He dug up a Longworm to use as a bait. With these five things and a prayer to Khelmal, Jannisor set out upon the Sea of Elves.

For five days and four nights Jannisor journeyed east upon the sea. He journeyed under the light of Yelem and under the watch of Arahar. He journeyed through calm and through the blusters of Orlantio. But through those four days he saw nothing upon the sea and felt nothing pull upon his line. But when the sun set upon that fifth day, the wind rose and the sky darkened as heavy clouds rose behind him. Lightning rent the sky and gales drove him onward across the waters. Rain fell then until his clothes lay like weights upon him and his hair and beard were plastered to his skin. The rain turned to sleet as sharp as daggers. His skin felt the lash of the storm and his face and hands bled. The knots tore beneath this force and the waves tossed the spars apart like kindling. Jannisor was tossed into the sea and though he clung to a spar, darkness closed upon him. As vision faded he saw the great jaws of a fish opened above him and then darkness took that vision too.

Jannisor still clung to the spar and woke to find the world of darkness calm and cool. The scent of fish and the sea was all about, though no light was there to tell him where he was. Jannisor spoke then in the darkness, "By the grace of Khelmal, let me find the light."

Slowly, sitting atop the spar, Jannisor turned the log into the current and slowly paddled forward. He knew not how long he paddled, but continued on his endless journey. His arms ached. His legs were numb. His face was raw and burning with pain. He continued on.

He came to recognize a sound before him. It was faint at first, then louder. It was a sound of churning, he thought, or maybe distant thunder, though constant. He paddled on, moving closer to the sound. The sound grew louder and louder. Soon it was like thunder, a great roar. Then it was that Jannisor felt the water rushing forward and realization came that a great waterfall lay ahead. He could not stop his progress, but felt the log tip up. Headfirst he plunged down the falls though he could see nothing ahead.

He woke and noticed first the dark blue of the sky, not the utter blackness of before. There was still a sound of a waterfall, though he was some distance from it. There were other sounds, too, and other sights. He could make out the shadowy forms of trees and perhaps deer moving amongst the branches. The sounds he came to place as voices.

With effort, he sat up to look around. He sat upon a dark beach beside a slow running river. Across upon the other bank were bathers, dark human forms, both men and women. He saw others farther back. Some wore long gowns of white, shimmering from an inner glow though all else was dark. Others wore helmets and carried spears and daggers.

With effort, Jannisor stood. He approached the river bank and called a greeting. The bathers slowly glanced up and waved, though they never spoke a word back, but continued with their murmuring and bathing. Jannisor asked "Is there a way across that I might join you?"

Again the bathers glanced up and waved, and again they spoke not a word in return. Jannisor walked then into the slow moving river, though it burned his face and his arms hurt with every motion and he labored for each breath. Stroke after stroke he made his way across to emerge beside the bathers. Yet when he rose from the water his face seemed cool and his arms were rested and he breathed easy now.

"Welcome" said a bather, "welcome to the Land of the White Flower."

"Thank you," said Jannisor. "I would offer cheese to you so that we might share a meal, but I have none. Indeed I have nothing but myself to offer."

"Then," said a white robed figure now approaching, "we shall accept yourself as your offer."

"And I do so freely," answered Jannisor in turn. The white robed figure turned and beckoned Jannisor to follow. Jannisor did so.

"There is a white tree in our land," said the white robed man, "upon which grow black flowers. These flowers are an offense to us for they are not white. Yet we cannot pick the black flowers nor uproot the

tree for the tree is too bright for us to approach. But since you are not of us, we hope that you might approach the white tree and pick the black flowers or uproot it altogether so that it no longer offends us."

"Since I have offered myself," Jannisor said, "I can do no less than attempt this task for you. Show me where I may find this white tree."

Then the white robed man pointed and Jannisor could see the white tree as bright as day itself, clearly visible in this twilight land. Jannisor, naked and without weapons, set out for the white tree so that he might pick its black flowers or uproot it.

When Jannisor reached the tree, he walked around it and observed it, noting its two white branches and the black flowers at the ends of each branch. He also noted that there was one bright knot upon the tree at chest height. Jannisor decided he would try to climb the tree to reach the flowers. But when he touched the tree, he found the tree was so bright that he had to shield his eyes from the sight as the radiance penetrated even through his eyelids. Jannisor decided he would try to pull up the tree. But when he touched the tree, he again found the tree was so bright that he had to shield his eyes from the sight. So he abandoned that tact as well and sat to ponder his task.

He approached the white robed man and said, "I would offer myself again to try this task, but I would ask of you two things."

The white robed man agreed.

"I would ask that you lend me your white robe and I would ask that one of your warriors lend me a dagger."

The white robed man agreed.

When he had these two things in hand, Jannisor approached the white tree until he stood but one pace away. Then Jannisor turned away from the white tree. He wrapped the white robe around his eyes. Then he placed the dagger in his left hand. So positioned, he took one step backward. He reached his arms around behind his back so that they encircled the tree. He felt the radiance upon his arms and upon his neck and back and all around him, but he could not see it. And so, he took the knife in his left hand and plunged it into the knot in the tree.

Immediately the radiance fled. Jannisor took the robe from off his eyes and turned. The tree was now black like all the other trees and the flowers on its two branches were white like all the other flowers. When Jannisor removed the dagger, though, he heard a voice cry out "Release me great warrior and I shall reward you."

"Where are you and how shall I do so?" Jannisor answered.

"I am in the tree here," replied the voice "and you must cut the trunk from around me."

So with the dagger, Jannisor began to cut the trunk from the tree. He cut and hacked and sawed at the tree until sweat poured from his skin and his arms ached and his hands were raw. Then when he could continue no longer, he saw a small white radiance within the tree. Putting the knife aside, he reached in and pulled the radiance out. It was a glorious eye, as bright as day itself, though Jannisor found he could still look upon it.

He carried it from the tree to return the white robe and talk to the man. But when he approached the man, the man turned his eyes and spoke angrily "You carry that which should not be. Destroy it know or suffer our wrath!"

"I will not do such. I have freed you of the abomination of the black flowers, but I will not destroy this eye."

"Then you must die!" shouted the man in rage.

He waved at the spearmen to attack. But Jannisor was too swift for them. He took the eye and plunged into the river, swimming to the far bank even as spears fell beside him. One spear even grazed his calf, but he reached the far bank and crawled up its slope, still carrying the eye in hand. He ran to the waterfall and looked up. But there was no end in sight and no way to climb to its top. "By the grace of Khelmal, allow me to save the beauty of this eye!" he shouted. Then the eye, silent since its freedom, spoke. "I am called Brighteye and for your loyalty I will aid you. Close your eyes now and allow me to guide you for I can see what you cannot."

Jannisor did as the eye bid. And following the guidance of the eye, he placed his hands or feet where the eye told him too. He climbed for a long time, so long he could not count. His arms and legs ached. His hands were raw. His face and head were scraped by rock and drenched with sweat. At last though he felt a level ground. The eye said "Look now, for your task is done."

Jannisor looked then and he saw Yelem break the surface of the sea, rising once again into the sky. Brighteye in his hand reflected back the radiance of the mighty judge. Turning he saw a beach and then a woods and the mountains he knew and loved. Beside him was his fishing rod and on the rod was his fishing line and on the line was a great fish. He then made a place for Brighteye on his shield and a place for the fish in his belly.

"I guess I can catch a sea fish after all."

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The Birth of the Goddess (an alternate view) by Stephen Tempest

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest RPG Mailing List April 04, 2003)

(Author's note: Inspired by reading ILH-1, I've written this as an alternative view of the Seven Mothers' quest. Partly because I feel sorry for Teelo Norri and want to give her a better role ;-)

Incidentally, any perceived resemblance to the Lightbringers' Quest is purely coincidental. Honest.

So, child, you seek to learn the true story of the birth of the Goddess? You believe that the lessons you learned during your initiation were but a mask for the Truth? Perhaps you begin to learn wisdom. Or perhaps you will merely learn that behind each mask is only another mask? Still, every journey to the Truth must begin somewhere.

The journey of our blessed Living Goddess in this age began, as you were taught, with the Four Mothers. They sought to revive Sedenya, and each of them brought their own knowledge and Power to the quest. Queen Deezola, the Earth Priestess, was an intimate of the Gods and familiar with their homes and ways. Jakaleel knew the paths of the spirits, and had often travelled the Underworld and returned safely. Duke Yanafal was initiated into the magical secrets of his Carmanian forebears, and Irippi Ontor had studied many esoteric religious practices of distant lands. Together and separately they quested through many realms for the pieces of Sedenya's soul; for She had been dismembered and torn apart at the darkest moment of the Greatest Darkness, and the six parts of Her soul were scattered and hidden throughout the Worlds. One part lay chained and suffering in the Underworld; but Jakaleel discovered it. Another was driven mindlessly hither and yon about the Sky Realm; but Deezola found its path. A third wandered howling through the spirit world, but Jakaleel could follow it. A fourth was imprisoned in a strange Western Hell of shifting essences, but Yanafal remembered the entryway. A fifth was held in the Place That Is No Place, but Irippi solved the riddle. As for the sixth, that was both the easiest to reach and the hardest to find, for it was here with us in the Middle World, incarnated in the body of a mortal woman, just like you and me. She was 27 years old, and she lived in the city of Torang, and her name was Teelo Estara.

You seem surprised, child? You are thinking of the doctrines taught by the Empire, that the Goddess was born in 1220, and Teelo Norri, the Young Life, housed Her soul? Yet a moment's reflection will show you that this cannot be the full story, for are we not taught also that She lived among us as a mortal woman through all the Ages of the World, ever since the divinity was ripped away from Her Gerra-Mask during the Kazkurtum? Still, it is not surprising that Moonson does not encourage the full story to be told in the marketplaces, for it is... unseemly... to admit that your holy nation was founded on the bloody and brutal murder of your divine Mother. This Truth wears a mask, as always in the Empire.

So it was, in the first week of 1220, that the Four Mothers learned at last the location of Sedenya's current mortal incarnation, and set off for Torang. Rinliddi was a wild and lawless land in those days, and the Heroes were ambushed on their journey by the bandit chieftain Danfive Xaron. He was strong, but no match for four Heroquesters at the peak of their power. Soon he was grovelling at their feet for mercy and forgiveness - which was offered, but only if he paid a price. So it was Five Mothers who now arrived in Torang, and rented a secluded room behind a caravanserai to conduct their ritual.

First, they offered up a prayer to Luck and Fate, and cast the dice, letting blind chance lead them to the sixth participant they needed for their ritual. When they learned that her given name was Teelo, the same as that of Sedenya's mortal shell, they took it as an excellent omen for success. And perhaps that is

all it was. With all prepared, Yanafal Tarnils then kidnapped the woman Teelo Estara and brought her to the room where the rest of the Six Mothers waited. And there Estara was killed.

That death was not easy, nor was it fast, for the ritual demanded that it follow in exact form the death of Gerra during the Great Darkness. Teelo Norri was made to hold a single darklight candle in a trembling hand, while Danfive Xaron wielded the bloody knife according to the directions of Irippi Ontor. Queen Deezola and Jakaleel the Witch tended the body and soul of Estara, to ensure that they would not part company too soon. As for Yanafal Tarnils, his face and sword were turned outwards in defence. For the power of the ritual brought back Kazkurtum within the world of Time, and outside the walls of that small backroom were not the bustling streets of Torang, but the howling Chaos demons of the Age of Terror.

At last the final cut was made, and Teelo Estara's soul was finally released, to flee naked and quivering from her tormentors. But the Six Mothers were quickly in pursuit. Jakaleel opened the gate, drawing on Danfive's strength to keep it open until all had passed through, even the reluctant, bewildered and scared Teelo Norri. Following Estara's soul was easy, for a trail of scarlet blood marked her route; and yet the questers faced many barriers. One in particular seemed impassible, until they finally encountered She Who Waits beside the endless Ocean, and learned from Her the method of crossing. And so at last they reached their full number, and there were Seven Mothers who approached the Gates of Dusk and passed within.

Their path through the Underworld was clearly marked, for Estara's blood glowed crimson to show their route; yet still the Seven Mothers would suffer, wander and become lost before they found their path again. Estara fled before them, but ever they drove her onwards. And at last she came to the deepest pit of Hell, from which nobody living had ever returned. There in the cold and darkness Estara's soul found the soul of Gerra, chained and despairing, for they were drawn together by the bond between them. And the two women looked into each other's eyes, and Estara saw there the strength to withstand pain, and Gerra saw the hope that life goes on. And so they kissed, and their souls merged, and a Being that was twice what She was before cast off Her chains and rose on newly-whole legs, and turned to face the Seven Mothers who at that moment arrived and fell to their knees in awe. But the divine Teelo Estara offered them no welcome.

Danfive, ever bold, spoke on behalf of the others and offered greetings to Her, making a bid for friendship. Estara demanded atonement. The Seven Mothers, in turn, demanded recognition of their role in Her rebirth. Estara demanded proof. The testing that each of the Mothers then underwent was harsh, and each was changed by the experience; but each one survived. Teelo Estara then gave Her recognition of Her Seven Mothers, and they made obeisance to Her and offered their atonement, which the merciful Goddess was pleased to accept. Then they embraced as friends, and Teelo Estara made her Promise of the Future.

The ritual was not yet complete, for four more parts of Her soul were still to be gathered. You already know the tale of how blessed Sedenya travelled to the Sky Realm, child, and how She met the Sky Bear there. As for the other three soul-parts, their gathering is a Mystery which I cannot yet reveal to you.

Even so, it is acknowledged that the parts of the Goddess were changed by Her long imprisonment in these strange realms, and this explains the mastery of mysterious powers which She now grants to those who follow Her teachings. At last, though, the Net which the Seven Mothers had cast out into the Cosmos was full, and each taking a strand they pulled it in and gathered the pieces of the Goddess back together. In triumph, then, they made their way back to the Middle World, and all the guardians of Hell fled in terror before the radiance of blessed Sedenya. At the Gates of Dawn they paused, for the Goddess was not yet ready to assume Her full divinity, and She would need a mortal body to dwell in for a time; but the shell of Teelo Estara was broken and lost. It was then that Teelo Norri, driven by pure selflessness and love, offered her own body to the living Goddess. Sedenya accepted gladly, and if She noticed the cold smiles which the other Mothers exchanged at that moment, She made no sign. And yet She cradled Teelo Norri's essence within Her heart all the years of Her mortal life, and the innocent girl's spirit absorbed Her wisdom and compassion. They were together when Sedenya journeyed once more into Hell, this time willingly, and when She learned how to open Her Seventh Soul and returned in fear and glory riding the Crimson Bat.

And finally, when blessed Sedenya attained apotheosis in 1247, Norri's soul was released, and flowered, and the ordinary human girl became a Goddess herself.

As for the other Mothers, Sedenya kept Her promise, and they too are now Gods. And yet none of them lived the long, wealthy and powerful mortal lives they had dreamed of when they began their quest. And once they attained godhood, they were not privileged to sit in splendour and comfort at Rufelza's feet. Instead they were sent out to the farthest corners of the world, where Her light is dim, there to labour in barbarian squalour to bring the ignorant and benighted into Her embrace - without ever knowing it again themselves. Such was their fate.

For Sedenya is a Great Goddess, kind and merciful to those She loves; but She was also once a human, with all that this implies. And you would do well never to forget that, child...

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The Boys Who Wanted to be Weavers by Stephen Tempest

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest March 05, 2001)

(Author's notes: As you might gather, this story is inspired by the lines in "Thunder Rebels" listing the first requirement to become an initiate/devotee of Orlanth or Ernalda, respectively. I thought it would be a more interesting way to show my interpretation of how this would work in practice, and I'd be glad to hear comments on whether I've got it right.

There's also material here for designing a heroquest for Orane the Weaver, although a somewhat unusual one since it involves cattle-raiding and talking to foreigners...)

Erissa Finehair was married to a warrior of the Two Trees clan, and bore him three fine sons: Asborn, Borncor and Corwin. But her husband and all their close male kin fell at the battle of Runegate, and she

was forced to flee to distant relatives and earn her place at their hearth with her weaving. Her sons grew up watching her work late into the night, her fingers arranging the threads on the loom and working the shuttle by the light of a flickering tallow candle. As they grew older, the three boys begged her to let them help her, and so she taught them the secrets of weaving. They proved to have a natural talent, and loved the feeling of watching a fine cloak or kilt appear from nothing beneath their hands.

Of course, the other children in the stead laughed at them for playing at girls' games; but as the eldest boy, Asborn, grew into a fine strapping lad he proved more than willing to fight anyone who mocked him or his brothers, and so they were left in peace. Then came the time of the boys' initiation. Orlev, the old godi, assembled all the soon-to-be-men of the clan and explained to them what their rights and duties would be once they were accepted by Orlanth. Hearing this, Corwin stepped forward and asked if, once initiated, he would have to stop weaving.

"Of course you will, boy! Your mother may have indulged you while you were a child, but once you're a man you must act like a man!" "In that case, I don't want to be initiated at all!" "Don't be ridiculous! Do you want to be treated like a child all your life, as if you were no better than a thrall or a foreigner?" "No, I don't". And Corwin hung his head, and went off to stand with the other boys.

Then Borncor stepped forward, and said that if he had to be initiated, he wanted to become an initiate of Orane the Weaver, not Orlanth. At that, a whisper of mingled shock, embarrassment and laughter ran around all the listeners.

"Even more ridiculous! Orane is a part of Great Ernalda, the goddess of wives and mothers! Are you a woman too, that you have such a great desire to worship their Goddess? Do you have a female soul, reborn in a boy's body due to some prank of the gods?"

Borncor blushed brighter than a Lunar's cloak, and shook his head, and went off to stand with the other boys.

Then Asborn stepped forward, and Orlev prepared himself to denounce whatever ridiculous idea this child came up with. But Asborn lifted his head, and looked him squarely in the eye, and said,

"I will be initiated to Orlanth. And then I will continue to be a weaver, and so will my brothers if they choose; because nobody can make us *stop* doing anything!"

And with that he turned and marched proudly to stand with the other boys, leaving Orlev speechless for possibly the first time in the old god-talker's life.

And so it came to pass that the three brothers were initiated into Orlanth; and that was almost the last sight of Erissa's life, since the old widow fell ill and died soon after. Now, Asborn was determined to fulfil his boast that he would be a weaver, and his brothers were glad to follow his leadership; but there was a problem. None of them had looms of their own, and the clan's women refused to give them one to use - or even to let them sit in the Loom House, saying it was no place for a man.

Corwin, though, was clever with his hands, and he had a good memory of how his mother's loom had been put together. So Borncor persuaded the clan's carpenter to lend him some tools, and Asborn helped him fell a tree, and Corwin made a loom of his own.

As for Borncor, he found another way. Asborn introduced him to a friend of his named Janerra, a red-headed tomboy who much preferred weapons practice with the men to gossiping with the women. Despite - or perhaps because of - their differences, the two quickly fell in love and were soon married. On their wedding day, Borncor gave his wife a brand new bow and sheaf of arrows - made by his brother Corwin - - and she gave him her mother's loom that she never wanted to use.

As for Asborn, he chose a different option. With his brothers (and sister-in-law) at his side, he crept one night onto the tula of their clan's hated enemy, and stole away five prime cows as booty. One of those went to his chieftain, as tribute; Asborn disappeared down the valley leading the other four, and was not seen again for several weeks. When he reappeared, the cows were gone, and he was in the company of a group of strangely-dressed men driving a cart. On the cart was a brand new loom, covered in fancy carvings and with bronze weights, and the men unloaded this into his longhouse then went on their way with many cheery shouts of farewell.

By their actions, the three brothers proved their determination to be weavers; and the elders of the clan were forced to accept that they had received a genuine calling from the goddess of weaving. However, that still left them with a major problem, since Orane was a women's goddess and the three were definitely men. If they became her devotees, would that mean they would have to participate in the clan's rites as women? Learn the women's secrets? Sink into Ernalda's earth during the holy days, instead of flying away to Kero Fin with Orlanth? Even if the goddess herself allowed this, it was pretty certain that the women of the clan would disapprove. The arguments were long and bitter, and soon the entire clan knew what was going on. Opinions were sharply divided, and at one point Borncor even suggested that the three leave the clan, and go and see if the Lunars had a god of weaving in their pantheon who would accept male worshippers. That shocked everyone, even Asborn and Corwin, and so a compromise was agreed. The matter would be left to the gods. The brothers could attempt to become initiates of Orane if they dared; but if the goddess rejected them, they would have to either abandon the idea of being weavers, or else turn their back on home, gods and kin and go into exile.

None of the brothers backed down from the test.

The initiation rites were perhaps the strangest the clan had ever seen, with three hulking great men towering over the housewives and young mothers who were seeking a closer relationship with Orane the Steadwife. But the omens were all good, and the brothers completed every step of the ritual perfectly; and when they came face to face with Orane herself, sitting at her loom in the house of Durev in Storm Home, she smiled at them and gave them the same blessing as she gave the women - perhaps because what the goddess saw was a soul with abilities and desires, not a physical body. And so Asborn, Borncor and Corwin became initiates of the Weaver Goddess.

In the years that followed, the paths of the three brothers diverged.

Borncor continued to weave clothes for his growing family, but he also devoted himself to caring for his farm and herds. He became an initiate of Barntar as well as Orane, and never progressed very deeply in the mysteries of the women's cult. In time he became a valued elder of the clan, trusted for his ability to see both sides of a question and find a middle way.

Corwin proved to have a true talent for weaving, and became so renowned for the fine quality of his cloth that even merchants from other tribes would come to the stead to trade for his wares. He also progressed far in the cult of Orane, becoming her devotee and eventually her priest. However, the closer he became to her, the more closely he became identified with her. All Heortlings are used to this happening, of course; but Corwin still found it disturbing that when he called on Orane's power or went to the Other Side in a ritual, he would more and more often find himself appearing there in the shape of a woman. He resisted this at first; but the passion for weaving that filled him drove him on, until he surrendered and became one with his goddess, and so learned her every secret. When this magical identification started affecting his physical shape and behaviour back on the mortal plane, there was some adverse comment; but the wealth and fame Corwin brought to the clan more than made up for any of his (her) oddities.

Asborn had the same skill as Corwin - if he was slightly less technically proficient at first, his imagination, fire and creativity more than made up for it. The fine tapestries, robes and rugs he wove soon became famous all over Sartar and even beyond; the tales of the peculiar foreigners and even non-humans who would turn up on the clan tula asking for Asborn the Weaver would fill an entire winter's night of storytelling. Asborn also progressed far in the worship of Orane, even going on heroquests to the Storm Age to learn the deepest secrets of weaving from her own lips and fingers. But he never surrendered his individuality to her, and clung fiercely to his own sense of who he was. Eventually, other questors who visited Orlanth's Stead in the godtime would tell of the bright-eyed man who sat at Orane's feet watching her work and asking pertinent questions. A few young men listened to those stories, and wondered why weaving was a craft that only women could practise, and thought that they might follow Asborn's example. Others wondered if they could learn the craft from him directly, or ask him to intercede with Orane, instead of having to worship the women's goddess in person. And so in time Asborn the Weaver transcended his mortal limits, becoming a herocult of Orane: the Heortling god of male weavers.

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The Burden of Ralaska by Harald Smith and Peter Michaels

(As originally appeared in Henk Langeveld RuneQuest Daily September 20, 1994)

An Immtheran myth.

Ralaska is the daughter of Lahksar, the Celestial Servant and brother of Arahar, and Queliska, daughter of Uleria and poet of love. She is said to have been a favorite child of the heavens, wandering amidst the celestial hosts. Even the death of Yelem and the withdrawal of the heavens did little to affect her, though there were fewer to visit than before.

Eventually, Lagavar the Before Light came to court her. He sent her gifts of nectar and dewfire. She sent him gifts of jewelled words and chiming globes. He offered her a place within the Crystal Hall. She accepted and asked Lokarma to lend her a cart of glowing alabaster.

When she arrived at the Crystal Hall, she found Arahar there and not his son. Arahar told her that Lagavar was sent upon a mighty quest to find and restore Yelem to the world. But his love for her was strong and would endure the quest. He left a fiery circlet for her to wear upon her head, symbol of his mighty feelings.

Ralaska took the circlet and wore it proudly. She returned to her own hall to await her beloved. As she composed an epic poem from words of love eternal, Arahar came to her. Ralaska asked him if Lagavar had returned. Arahar told her sadly that he had not, announcing that Ratslaff had come to beg an audience with her. Ralaska refused, saying that she would attend to no business until Lagavar's return.

Ralaska continued to wait for Lagavar in her hall. As she sang a wondrous melody from tones of eternal love, Arahar came to her again. This time his spouse Teliska, Mother of Dance, accompanied him. Ralaska asked them if Lagavar had returned. They told her sadly that he had not, announcing that again Ratslaff had come to beg an audience with her. Ralaska refused, saying that she would still attend to no business until Lagavar's return.

Ralaska continued to wait for Lagavar in her hall. As she burned a brilliant brightness from flames of eternal love, Arahar and Teliska came to her a third time. For a third time Ralaska asked them if Lagavar had returned. For a third time they told her sadly that he had not. Ralaska was about to dismiss them again when she caught sight of a pitiful creature waiting outside her hall. Ralaska's heart was touched by the way the creature ached to be warmed by her presence. Ralaska asked Arahar and Teliska who was outside her hall, and was told that the sorry thing was Ratslaff.

At first, Ralaska could not believe what she was told. The pitiful creature was nothing like Yelem's Jester, whose jokes and antics could ignite the holy Light of Joy in the heart of gods and men alike! Shocked to her core, she agreed to hear the words of Arahar and Teliska.

They told her of the terrible violence which had befallen the world below since the Storm gods had come to power, which not even the Clown could use humor to prevent. They told her of the great despair which had befallen the world below since the Earth Mother's slumber, which not even the Clown could bring hope to. They told her of the numbing cold which gripped the hearts and minds of the world below since Enveria's death, to which not even the Clown could bring the warmth of laughter to. They told her of the horrifying nothingness which spread across the world below since the Children of the Void had ceased non-existing, which not even the Clown could make fun of. Lastly, Ratslaff himself told Ralaska of the darkness which covered the world below, which not even Khelmal could bring light to, and that he had been sent by Khelmal to beg audience with her.

Arahar and Teliska told her of the sleep of the Earth Mother and the death of the Hearth Mother. They told her that without the warmth of the hearth fire, the men below would surely fall to the powers of

the evil Storm gods or even the minions of the mighty Void. They asked that she descend to the earth below and make a hall there for herself and Lagavar when he returned.

As a child of the Celestial Servant, Ralaska understood. She agreed to descend to the earth below and become the Hearth Mother, filling the homes and hearths of the people. She agreed to this only with the understanding that Lagavar would join her on the earth when he returned from his quest.

Though she was unsure of this task, she acceded to it. Like a great streak, she plunged down from the heavens to the world below. Khelmal greeted her properly and she offered her aid to him and the people. She gave to them her fiery circlet, her very gift from Lagavar, asking only in return that her name be honored along with that of her love, Lagavar. The people agreed. Khelmal showed them how to take up the circlet then, and the people lived.

But Lagavar could not return to her. Instead, he was bound by the cycles of time to ever lead the way for Yelem and to guard the sun's path from its foes. Though they loved each other greatly, they could not meet. Grieving, the hearth fire dwindled into ash and part of Ralaska fled to find Lagavar, though she could not go entirely without abandoning all the people. Lagavar then sent the cats to her, a gift to keep that part of her still on earth company, so she would not be lonely and fall entirely to grief.

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A Carmanian Joke by James Frusetta

(As originally appeared on the HeroQuest Digest June 29, 2003)

A peasant in Carmania is walking along, when they stumble upon a magic lamp in a field. Figuring "why not," he gives it a rub -- and out pops a magic genie. "I am the genie of the lamp! Three wishes I will grant thee -- what doest thou desire?"

The peasant thinks it over, and says, "You know, I'd really like the Pentians to invade Carmania."

The genie looks askance, but grants the wish: and lo!, a million Pentian warriors burst into Carmania, pillaging and looting.

After a time, the genie says, "Enough!," and the Pentians vanish over the horizon. "Thy next wish, o master?"

"Hmm. I could really go for having those Pentians invade Carmania again."

The genie shrugs. "Very well." And lo!, a million Pentian warriors savage Carmania, burning down the cities.

After a time, the genie says, "Enough!," and the Pentians vanish over the horizon. "Thy final wish, o master? And may I suggest that you consider this strongly, for thee may have anything within my power!"

The peasant thinks for hours, and finally confesses, "I can't think of anything I want more than for the Pentians to invade Carmania one more time."

The genie shakes its head. "Very well." And lo!, a million Pentian warriors ride once more, destroying all that had survived.

After a time, the genie says, "Enough!," and the Pentians vanish over the horizon. The genie surveyed the ravaged land that had been Carmania, and sighed. "Oh foolish master, I take my lamp and depart. But why, stupid one, would thee wish for the Pentians to invade thy land three times?"

"Well," said the peasant, "they went through Dara Happa *six* times."

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Clarissa: Heorl's Story by Pam Carlson

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 04, 1995)

Umathkel Orlgandisson was the second son of Orlgandi Ivikson of the Jungardi clan. He was a large brawny man, strong of arm and so skilled at the sword that it seemed to his foes that they faced three blades at once. His strength of arm was not matched with an equal quickness of wit and his fierce temper and impetuous words often landed him in trouble that only his strong arm could get him out of. He had no time for the intricacies of leading men, preferring the joys of the hunt and the quickening of blood in the heat of a raid. So when Kjalten-stone became family leader was content to bind his sword arm to his brother's service where proud Jarang left to seek his own honor.

When it came time for Umathkel to take a wife everyone was surprised when he sought the hand of Hindala Betisdottir, a beautiful woman but well known for her sharp tongue and quick mind. Despite the misgivings of his kinsmen the marriage proved a good and fruitful one. Hindala proved as adept at calming down her husband's rages as she was at provoking them and Umathkel soon came to depend on her sage advice. In the course of time Hindala bore her husband two sons and three daughters and another.² Ivar, the oldest, was a strapping lad who grew to be a fine warrior who kindled the light in his father's eye. Heorl, the younger son, took more after his mother and where Ivar thrilled to the stirring tales of battles and exploits of arms, Heorl enjoyed those where the subtle arts of the mind and of words were strongest.

Heorl participated gladly in the boy's life and the rites of Voriof and under his care none of his father's sheep were lost, but he was most contented when listening at the feet of the wise elders and subtle jurors. His quick mind soon learned to appreciate the beauty and intricacies of the sacred laws handed down by Orlanth and great king Heort. His maternal uncle, Enderos who was rich in years and

² Umathkel and Hindala had another son. But he was born strange and contrary. He was troublesome and uncontrollable and left to follow the path of Eurmal. He is a source of great disappointment in the family and is not talked about. An outlaw, he has not been seen for many years and no-one knows (or cares) if he is still alive.

experience, for love of his granddaughter, humored the young boy and showed him many things such as the arcane art of writing and how the Law lets men live together in harmony and honor.

In his seventeenth summer Heorl cast aside his boyhood and joined the household of Orlanth with the others of his age. He served in his father's house and supported all their endeavors.

It came to pass that the Jungardi were beset by enemies in the form of a greedy and vicious Hendriki thane called Ortossi. From the first Ortossi sought to pervert the sacred laws so that he might take that which was not rightfully his. His instigated false and malicious lawsuits demanding compensation for imaginary crimes. To aid in his schemes he employed a devious sage, Ermanrig Deep-thought. Ermanrig was a master of rhetoric and the art of turning a man's words so that they no longer said what he meant them to say. In this manner he was able to turn many dubious suits in Ortossi's favor until Rostakos, the Jungardi clan chief, called on Enderos the old. The wise man's straight speech and the light of truth for Lhankor Mhy exposed Ermanrig's weasel's words and Ortossi's grasping ways were stripped of their cloak of legality. It was not known how Ermanrig was able to escape the anger of Orlanth or pervert the Truth of Lhankor Mhy with impunity.

Heorl was deeply impressed with his uncle's skills and achievements in defeating the ambitions of Ortossi and asked his father whether he might study the arts of the Law under the sage. Umathkel was initially unwilling but, under Hindala's prompting, granted his blessing. Heorl proved to be a quick study and it was in his twenty fifth year that he dedicated himself to the service of Orlanth's wise lawspeaker, Lhankor Mhy.

Heorl took for a year-wife, Liena, a woman of the Oakridge clan. While they were happy together their union was not blessed by Uleria and Ernalda with any sons or daughters.

During this time Ortossi, unable to gain what he desired through legal means, resorted to the age-old Law of Violence just as Harand Sow husband had in ages past. He used all the methods that the strong have used to oppress others throughout history, murder, intimidation and violent theft. In a vicious and unprovoked, attack Heorl's uncle, Jarang was sorely wounded and his wife murdered. When Ortossi laughed at the just demands for wergild and sent the messengers back with salted wounds many grew impatient with the legal process that appeared to offer no protection or recompense. Despite the protests of Heorl his father joined Rostakos in combating Ortossi with force of arms. He knew that if both sides ignored the law then both would forfeit the protection of Orlanth Justice-bringer and would lead only to further bloodshed. This was proved true when, in the next year, Rostakos and many of his thanes were brutally ambushed and murdered. Among the victims was Kjalten-stone as Umathkel was not there to protect his kinsman.

In a rage Umathkel swore blood-vengeance on his brother's murderers. He was joined in this by his older son, Ivar. Despite his great age he was still a formidable warrior and many other hotheaded men joined him in his quest. Heorl, despite his hatred of Ortossi's deeds, did not join his father and brother in the hills. He felt that all that would be accomplished was more bloodshed and the destruction of everything that had been built.

The clan realized that the blood feud that would come of this would lead to a descending spiral of violence and bloodshed which the smaller Jungardi clan would be sure to lose. They thus turned to the King of the Hendriki to curb his rapacious thane.

The king proved as contemptuous of the Law as the other sons of Hendrik and offered them an ignoble submission to one of his favorites, Harstagar Ironsword who was another greedy and rapacious man.

Heorl joined with his uncle Jarang and many others to argue that this offer dishonored the clan and, if accepted, would strip away the protection of Law from the clan. When the mothers on the clan ring cravenly capitulated to the kinds demands Heorl joined Jarang and his family and many other like-minded kin in deciding to leave Heortland to seek new lands and freedom in the north. His wife, disappointed that they had as yet no children and not willing to face the rigors of the pioneer's life did not accompany him, a fact that weighed heavily on Heorl's heart.

Thus, at the age of 30, Heorl Umathkelson left his father's stead to travel to new lands to the north where the sacred Law of Orlanth and Heort could govern mens life in honor and peace.

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Clarissa: How Theya Two Mothers Avenged Leikashearth by Pam Carlson

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 04, 1995)

Theya Two Mothers was the daughter of Innana Ernaldnessdotir, Leika SpiritTalker, and Jarang Orlgandison, a hard-working and prosperous carl of the Jungardi. Her father had sworn his line to bloodfeud with a warrior from Hendrikiland. This warrior wanted to be chief of the Jungardi, to have lands and folk forced to carry his name - as the Southerners do. This warrior covered himself in fine metal. He rode giant horses and he led many warriors, but he had no hall or lands of his own. This metal-clad Stranger talked the Laws of Orlanth, but he scoffed at old magics. He preferred the foreign Invisible Magic of Arkat.

This Stranger made war on the Jungardi because they would not be his bondi. He killed most of the thanes. He killed Theya s uncle, Kjarten-Stone. He even killed the old chief. But worst of all, he killed Theya s mother, Leika Spirit-Talker, when he raided her hearth. The clan called to the Hendreiki king for justice, but he merely sent another stranger to be chief instead. Jarang refused to live without Orlanth's justice, so he decided to take his family into the wilds of the north.

After they had packed what they could fit of Leikashearth into their wagon, Jarang and his children invited all the folk of Backford to Jarangstead to give away all the gear they could not carry with them. Jarang made a great show of inviting the metal-clad Stranger. He said: "I cannot afford to carry a bloodfeud into the wilds - I would end it now. Let the Stanger come or be known as a coward."

But at the Giveaway, Jarang wasn t there. The metal-clad Stranger was. Folk stood about uncomfortably, quietly wondering where the feast food was. Even children know Giveaways are always followed by feasts! Then Urtag jumped up on the wagon and began to announce his father s gifts. As he gave away

each thing, he named a kindness the recipient had done for his family. "Piers Akreson - you helped my parents clear the land for our fields. For this we give you our smallplow. "Ronna Ilfresdotir - you gave us three hens the year when ours all died. For this we give you twelve in return. "Mathi Safarasdotir - you fed my brother Illig after our mother Inanna died. For this we give you two fine heifers." And so on, until the stead was empty except for one large, grey bull.

Finally the Stranger, from high atop his great horse, bellowed: "Where is Jarang? Is he afraid to face me? I suppose he has great plans to plow me to death!" The folk laughed nervously.

It was Theya who answered him. "My father lies where I left him - sleeping in the forest. The children of Jarang only want the killing to stop. I, as the firstborn of Jarang's bloodline, will end the feud by giving the lands and buildings of Jarangstead to you. With this act we would end the feud."

The Stranger considered the offer. As much as he wanted the land, he thought the offer was a bit suspicious. Jarang was a proud man, and the warrior had expected violence. He roared, "I thought Jarang wanted to fight! Perhaps I should just slaughter all the Jarangsons? That would surely end this feud!" People began to back away from the warrior and his horse.

Illig leapt up on the wagon beside Urtag. "We are but honest carls," he said, "not mighty thanes like you. The children of Jarang wish only to start anew and live in peace. We would offer you the land of our mothers in return for the lives of their children." Now, Illig was known far and wide as a clever speaker. Folk said he could convince an apple tree to grow pears. Greed finally overcame cruelty in the metal-clad Stranger, and he agreed to accept the stead and end the feud.

"Now this bloodfeud will be peacefully settled, and witnessed by all here," announced the Heorl, the Lawspeaker who planned to follow Jarang to the new lands.

Theya looked at the Stranger. "You cannot see the land sitting on a horse," she pointed out. He climbed down. "Now I will show you the stead," she said.

"This is the well. The CleanWater spirit lives here. As long as you keep a brightly polished copper coin on the ledge, the water will always remain pure."

"This is the root cellar. The CoolEarth spirit lives here. As long as you keep it very dark and make an offering of onions every season, it will drive off the rot spirits."

"This is the barley field. The GoldenHead spirit lives here. As long as you plant in early SeaSeason and pour a mug of beer in each corner, the harvests will be heavy."

And so on. Theya continued to call forth the spirits that Inanna and Leika had befriended. She told them that the Stranger was their new guardian. "These spirits are the playthings of women, and unimportant to a warrior!", sneered the Stranger. But Theya saw he was secretly pleased at the thought of more things obeying him.

Then Theya brought forth her father's last bull. The animal's soft, dappled hide rippled over a healthy layer of fat. "A new steadmaster needs his own bloodline. With this bull I will help you found your own."

"But I don't have a wife!", wailed the Stranger.

"I can't imagine why no woman would want you," said Theya. "What, with all that metal, you look so.... grey. No matter - I will arrange the ritual so that the next woman you lie with shall be your wife. Then you can found your bloodline." She smiled coyly at the Stranger, and swung her hips a bit. Now Theya Two-Mothers was a lovely woman, and the Stranger Who Knew Only War did not fancy having to run a stead all by himself. He grinned eagerly and quickly consented.

Theya beautifully intoned Orlanth's bloodline ritual, while Illig helpfully told the Stranger what lines he must say. The whole of Backford watched as the ritual was chanted. Now, this metal-clad warrior had devoted so much of his life to war that he had little idea of how a foundation ritual should work. Theya gave the Stranger a knife. "For extra fertility, you must first castrate the bull and bury his fruits in the Earth under yonder yew tree. That way the fertility will spread throughout the entire stead."

The Stranger cut the bull. (Theya had drugged the animal with tarma-root so he felt little pain.) Then he buried the parts under the yew tree. As the Stranger filled the hole, he disturbed a small bone already in the Earth. "Never mind that," said Theya "It's just left from an earlier sacrifice."³

After Theya sang a while longer, she instructed the Stranger to open the bull's throat, to pour his blood upon the ground. The warrior did so easily, for he was quite skilled at killing. As the blood spurted from the bull, that fine animal slowly fell to his knees, never to rise again. Illig told the Stranger to chant one last line in Earthtongue. It was one of the few phrases in Earthtongue men may chant, but the Stranger was so ignorant of Earth he didn't even know the words to "As with this bull, so with me."

The folk of Backford cheered. The Stranger beamed, for he had finally had forced folk to accept him as a thane, with land and bloodline. Theya told him that to provide a community for his bloodline, he must now share the meat of the bull with the village. But as the folk approached, young Svarr stepped forward to remind each one of some favor his mother had done for them:

"Bardast - don't you remember when my mother, slain by that Stranger, cured your daughter from the Spotted Sickness?"

"Umala - don't you remember when my mother, slain by that Stranger, brought forth your son?"

"Hroddar - don't you remember when my mother, slain by that Stranger, helped the brook by your stead run clear again?"

And so on. One by one, the folk of Backford turned their backs on the metal-clad Stranger. The warrior's sacrifice was left to rot in the sun. The Stranger was furious, but even the southerners cannot force

³ It was the custom of the Jungardi to bury their mothers under yew trees. Yew tree bark is an ingredient in many healing remedies, and the bark from grave-trees is especially potent.

hospitality on anyone. The warrior had no choice but to accept the insult. He sneered at Theya, "At least now I have your father's magnificent farm. He has nothing but a few pitiful possessions in a wagon."

"True," said Theya, sweetly, "and the next woman you lie with shall found your bloodline!"

The earthly folk of Backford made their farewells to Theya and her brothers, giving them small gifts of food and things they would need on their journey. Then they left the Stranger's hospitality, still hungry.

⁴After that day, the little stead beyond Backford, blessed by the bones mothers and the blood of bulls, produced rich harvests every year. But the metal-clad Stranger never produced a thing.

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Clarissa: Svarrsaga by Pam Carlson

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Svarr was born quietly. The midwife assisting the birth had to prod the infant to take a breath and cry. The moment he did, the earth shook and spirits rolled boulders down the Stormwalk Mountains to show that they were watching. His mother, Leika Spirit Talker, recovered quickly from the birth and was soon able to journey to the mountains with the little Svarr to thank the spirits for their attention. In the past, Leika had spent many hours in the high country with the spirits and many believed quietly that she took the infant to show him to his true father.

The youngest son of Jarang the Proud, the young Svarr worked hard to make a place for himself at the family's stead. Svarr had many difficult years as a child competing with his older brothers Otag and Illig. Whether with farming or crafts, they always seemed to learn quicker than he. Svarr brooded when his brothers became men five years before him. Illig, Svarr's elder by only one-year, was the worst. Their older sister Theya smoothed many arguments and prevented many scars.

As Jarang's stead grew and became more profitable, Svarr was pressed into service watching the family's herds while still young. He was pleased to find himself a quick learner when left alone in the fields. Using shadowcats, a horn, and a bow, Svarr kept good care of the animals. He learned the best ways to forage them through the winter and how to care for the sick. Although Svarr was not yet a man, Jarang made it known that he was proud to have such a gifted herder for a son.

When not herding, the dark haired youth took to wandering the fields and forests surrounding the stead. Here he watched the wilder animals and began to learn their ways too. Once when he was alone in the woods, Orlanth showed his might, lest men forget to honor him. Wind blew, the sky darkened, lightning seared the sky, a driving rain fell, and thunder spoke. Svarr, caught many hours away from shelter, became frightened. He called to Orlanth but couldn't speak the tongue of storm. He called out the spirit names he had learned from his mother, but still the Storm God beat him. Cold and shivering, Svarr called out one last name, a name he had heard his uncle Harmast Gray Wolf speak. The name of Odayla must have held power for suddenly lightning revealed a proud buck standing before him. Svarr

⁴ Leaving a Heortland social event without having eaten traditionally confers terrible luck on the host.

watched in awe as the deer stared at him, water dripping from the velvet on its antlers. When the buck bounded away, Svarr followed. It led him to a path and then to a pond where a rock outcrop provided shelter. There Svarr slept and dreamed of the deer. When he returned the next morning, again people spoke of spirits; this time saying Svarr awoke a spirit in the woods that watched over him.

When Svarr related this story to his uncle, Harvast thought for a longtime before he spoke. "Svarr" he began, "you were gifted that night, for Odayla is a powerful god. It is he who sent the deer to you. It is he who guided you to shelter. You shall thank him for this blessing." Then Harvast instructed Svarr how to properly thank the god. Afterwards, Svarr and Harvast spent many days hunting together. This made Jarang nervous, lest the herds be neglected. But Leika spoke with her husband and the uncle and nephew were not separated. Still, Svarr made it a point never to disobey his father's wishes and hunted only when he not needed in the fields.

One day Harvast came to the stead with several other men. Harvast spoke to the boy, "Today you and I will hunt with these proud men. What we bring down today will be offered to Odayla." To the boy's surprise the hunt took them to the same pond and rock outcrop where he had taken shelter years ago. The men stood in a circle around the boy while Harvast made a strange sound. Again Svarr was surprised, and more than a little frightened, when the same buck that had saved him came bounding through the brush to stand near the pond. Harvast instructed the boy to slay the deer. Shaking and near tears, Svarr did as he was told. Harvast then began to instruct the boy in the secret ways of hunters. Over the years Svarr learned much from Harvast. He taught how to release an animal's spirit and pay homage to Odayla. He learned how to use the winds and the god's sight to guide a shaft. He also learned the secret language of wild game to call beasts to him.

Svarr did not become a man in the eyes of Orlanth until he was 18; when he learned to honor Voriof and the god of storm. But it was on that day in the forest that Svarr became a man. He was 15.

Svarr refuses to speak of his mother's murder at the hands of the Stranger except to say that that night the dream of the buck returned to him. When it was proposed that the family journey north, Svarr quickly agreed. Perhaps once more he hopes to find shelter in the midst of a storm.

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Clarissa: Utagsaga by Pam Carlson

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Jarang was the proud son of Orlgandi Ivrikson. So proud was he that instead of following the wyrd of his brother, Kjarten, sometimes called The Stone, he followed his own wyrd and become his own man. Jarang took a wife, Janna Ernasdottir, and he built a stead near Backford. It was hard work, but Jarang was looked upon favorably by Barntar and Orlanth because he followed his own path in life.

Two years after the birth of his first child, a daughter, Jarang finally received the gift he had been waiting for. On that day, the sky was so dark that it seemed as if night had fallen. The wind howled, and it rained

so hard that one could barely see. At that moment, Utag arrived. Utag was large and healthy, and he announced his arrival into the world by summoning all of the winds he could from his tiny lungs.

Utag grew tall and strong, and he made Jarang very proud. Jarang had two more sons, Illig and Svarr, but Utag was always his favorite. Jarang spent much time teaching Utag the secrets men need to know. He taught Utag how to plow the fields and reap a bountiful harvest. Jarang taught him how to herd cattle and how to best pasture the cattle. Jarang also showed Utag how to build fences, dig granaries, and he even told Utag the secrets of building a stead. Utag proved to be very adept at learning these secrets, and he enjoyed much favor with his father for this.

Early one morning, when Utag was seventeen years old, he and his brother Illig were unexpectedly awakened by their two uncles, Kjarten and Umathkel. Outside the storms raged, and it was dark as it had been on the day Utag entered the world. It was the season of Storm. Illig asked why they had come, but silence was the only answer he received. Utag noticed that Jarang and Leika were not in the stead.

Utag and Illig were taken to the clan's Orlanth temple, long a place of awe and mystery. The temple was a magnificent building, built of oak, strong and sturdy, with many ornate carvings that the children did not understand. At the temple, Jarfor, the clan's godi, and a few other men of the clan waited, (Utag later learned that some of the men were avatars of Orlanth himself, while others were holy men who served Jarfor).

Upon their arrival into the temple, Utag and Illig were told to sit down. When it had been announced that all of the children had arrived, Jarfor passed around a wooden bowl full of odd-smelling liquid and instructed each of those present to drink exactly one swallow, and then sit down and remain silent.

Although it smelled terrible, Utag took a large swallow of the drink when it came his turn, and he sat down with the other children. When it came Illig's turn to drink, Illig asked what the liquid was. Jarfor told him that it was soma, a fact that meant little to Illig. Not wanting to appear ignorant, Illig took his swallow and sat down.

After several minutes of waiting, Utag's head began to swirl. A strange energy entered his body, and it began to seem as if everything around him was alive and moving. Finally, Jarfor began to speak. "You have been brought here because it is time to find out if you are ready to become men. If you are to become men, it is necessary for you to learn the mysteries of Orlanth, the god of all good men and King of all the Gods."

For the next six days, Utag, Illig, and the other older male children of the clan drank soma and listened to Jarfor tell stories about Orlanth. On that first day, Jarfor told of the creation of the world and explained the lineage of Orlanth and his kin. For the next two days, Jarfor told many of the tales involving the great deeds of Orlanth and his kin.

On the fourth day, Jarfor told a very long story of Orlanth's contests with Yelm, the stale ruler of the Universe. Time after time Orlanth lost contests to the stale god. Finally, however, Orlanth proved his

right to be ruler of all the gods in a test of arms. Orlanth, using the sword Death, killed Yelm and sent him screaming into Hell. That night, all of the children went to sleep happy.

The next day, the children were in for a rude surprise. After reminding the children of Orlanth's glorious success against Yelm, Jardfor told how Orlanth's action had allowed chaos into the world. He told fearsome stories of armies of chaos blighting the world and killing many of Orlanth's kin. That night, the children found it difficult to sleep, many of them seeing dark brood lurking in the shadows.

On the sixth day, Jardfor told how Orlanth recognized his mistake and set about to make everything right. This he called the Lightbringers Quest, and the story lasted all day and through most of the night. At the end of the story, Jardfor gave his final words of wisdom, "Orlanth is the god of all free men. He is just and honorable, and he takes action when it is needed. That alone does not explain his greatness among all other gods. Orlanth became the King of the Gods because he acted, and when he made mistakes he recognized those mistakes and fixed them."

On the morning of the seventh day, the children were awakened very early in the morning by their uncles. Before they were taken away, Jardfor spoke. "Now it is time for you to be tested as Orlanth once was, he said. "If you pass these tests, you will become men and be granted the blessings of Orlanth. Once you have finished your test, you are to return to the temple."

Utag, Illig, and the other children were then taken into a forest several miles from the Jungardi clan lands, to a place where it had been whispered by all children that it was deadly to enter. As they neared a large clearing in which stood a grassy knoll, Umathkel took Illig and wandered off. Kjarten-Stone took Utag away where he witnessed great and terrible mysteries, but these are never to be revealed to outsiders and I've already told you too much.

As the children returned to the temple of Orlanth, Utag noticed that all of the men of the clan were assembled within the temple. Yelm began his descent into Hell as the godi began his ceremony. All of the children were asked to stand in a ring in the center of the temple. Great magics were summoned, and the temple filled with clouds and howling winds. Utag noticed great creatures of air flying all about, and he could see many spirits he had not noticed before.

Beginning with the older children, the godi asked each of the children for proof of their manhood. Each responded by telling the tale of their tests. After all were finished, the godi called upon Orlanth to recognize each of those present as men. At that, the winds howled and a great gout of lightning came down from the sky. Thunderous booms could be heard all around, and then, everything fell quiet.

The godi then walked up to each child and asked, "Do you recognize Orlanth as King of the Gods and bind yourself to his service?" Each of the children answered yes, and after each there was again a chorus of thunderous booms. When it came time for Utag to answer, he gave his yes. At that moment, Utag felt a presence he had not felt before, a presence that was both strong and powerful. So strong was this presence that Utag did not even notice the booming noises arising from all around him.

The godi then took each child to the center of the ring to make their sacrifices to Orlanth. Gunnar, the son of the clan chieftain, had the most noteworthy sacrifice, his father having donated a large bull for the ceremony. When it was Utag's turn, an old ram was brought out to the center of the circle. Jardfor handed Utag a dagger, and instructed him to kill the ram. Utag took the dagger, grabbed the ram by the head, and slit the animal's throat. A small silver bowl with intricate carvings was placed under the animal's head to collect the blood, and after the bowl had been filled, Jardfor told Utag to drink the blood. The sight of the blood made Utag feel sick, but he desperately wanted to prove that he was a man, and he drank the entire bowl.

After each of the children had made their sacrifice, the godi announced that all those now present in the temple were men of Orlanth. Again a great thundering arose within the temple, but this time it came from the men of the clan who were banging their weapons against their shields in a mighty wapantake.

After leaving the ceremony, Utag, Illig, and the others were then welcomed by the entire clan and hailed as men. A great clan feast was just beginning. During the feast, Kjarten stood up and announced that he was proud to welcome Utag, the eldest son of his proud brother Jarang, into the clan. As the whole clan watched, he presented Utag his first sword, which Utag named Hearthguard.

The season after Utag and Illig had been initiated into the ways of Orlanth, problems began to arise in the lands of the Jungardi. A stranger arrived with several men, and he began harassing many of the clan members, claiming that they were plowing lands that belonged to the "Sons of Hendrik"¶ At first this stranger, called Ortossi, and his men used the clan law moot to demand compensation for these imagined wrongs and to steal lands away from the good men of the clan. After winning some initial victories, Ortossi became furious when he began losing decisions because of the wise advice of a grey bearded sage who had been taken into the clan's Inner Ring.

One season, Ortossi travelled with some of his men to Jarangstead to try and intimidate Jarang into voting for him at the upcoming clan law moot. Everyone knew that Jarang had been a fair and honest juror at the law moots for many years, and Ortossi saw that he would pose a serious threat to his ignoble ambitions. After delivering his threats, Jarang spat on Ortossi and told him to leave his stead before he and his sons killed them all.

While working the fields one day with his father and his brother Svar, Utag heard the whistling sound of a warning arrow streaking across the sky. All of those present knew that this could mean only one thing, and they all rushed to arm themselves with the weapons they now kept at the ready because of the trouble Ortossi had been causing. Jarang ordered Svar to run as fast as he could to neighboring Gunnarstead and gather the assistance of several of the good men there. After arming themselves, Jarang, Utag and Illig ran as fast as they could towards Jarangstead.

As they neared the stead, it became immediately clear that it was under attack. Utag could see that Ortossi and several of his men were fighting from horse with Nim Sarnagson and several of his sons. The barn was smoking, and it looked as if much of the stead had been wrecked. As Jarang and his sons approached, all could see Leika as she grabbed an axe and charged Ortossi.

Ortossi shamefully struck her down as she came at him. Seeing this, Jarang went into a fury and went straight for Ortossi. As Ortossi charged him from his horse, Jarang waited for just the right moment and gave such a blow to Ortossi's shield arm that he knocked him from his mount. A great combat ensued, the two of them trading mighty blow for mighty blow.

Utag and Illig saw that Nim Sarnagson and his sons were in trouble, and they charged towards the rest of the fray confident that Jarang could hold his own against Ortossi. One of Nim's sons had already fallen, and Utag could see that the others were fighting desperately for their lives. As he approached, Utag was charged by a very large man wearing metal armor and wielding a sword so mighty that took him both hands to use. It was all that Utag could do to hold this man back, for he knew how to wield his sword very well. All of his energies had to be put into holding this man back, and for many minutes the two of them fought with neither side landing a significant blow. At his side, Illig fought a valiant battle against another of the armor-clad warriors.

Jarang, in his rage, struck blow after blow after blow at Ortossi, barely remembering to avoid the blows coming at him. For several minutes the battle continued in this manner. Jarang's rage proved to be his undoing, though, as it caused him to finally miss one of those blows. Ortossi landed a terrible blow that cut Jarang from his chest down to his abdomen, and Jarang fell to the ground with a terrible groan. Figuring that the blow he dealt Jarang would be fatal, Ortossi turned to join his men in combat.

Seeing Jarang fall, Utag struck a desperate blow at his opponent that completely severed his right arm. As his opponent fell to the ground, Utag ran screaming towards Ortossi. At that moment, Ortossi saw Svar and several men from Gunnarstead approaching to lend their strong arms to the battle. Seeing that they were now outnumbered, Ortossi called for a retreat, and those of his men who still survived remounted and rode away from the battle. Utag reached Jarang, and, finding him still alive, healed him as best he could, but Jarang's strength never fully returned after that blow.

The following year, Ortossi and his men killed Utag's uncle Kjarten-Stone, Rostakos (the clan chieftain), and several clan thanes. The clan turned to King Venharl of the Hendrieki for help against Ortossi, but his only offer of protection came under the condition that the clan allow another Hendrieki to become clan leader. At the clan moot called to discuss these issues, Jarang and Utag spoke out strongly, saying that it was intolerable, but the clan voted to accept the offer of the Hendreiki king.

That season, Jarang, Utag, Illig, Svar, and Theya all decided to leave Jarangstead to the criminals who would take it by force. They would now venture forth in the footsteps of Colymar to seek new fortune in the lands of Dragon Pass.

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Cleaver Csar Saga by Gian Gero

This is an account of an unusual character and his escapades in Corflu.

Chapter 1: The disembarking

Sunset was a little less than two hours away. In the sky, the seagulls were beginning to give out alarmed cries: if they had kept flying above the ships and the wharves for a little more, the huge insects of twilight would not have appreciated the rivalry. It was time, for the feathered ones, to surrender the airfield to the bugs.

Lentulus lowered his gaze over the small trading ship which was mooring to the precarious wooden pier. The sailors were swearing a little more than usual, since a mooring-mast of the ship's had broken straight away when the cable had braced. Someone, from aboard, magically repaired the broken mast and this fact, combined with an intervention on the crew, quenched the qualms. Lentulus half-closed his eyes: the vessel had been wrought in the Wenelian shipyards, as most part of the trading ships which cruised in the Rozgali Sea and which more often than not never bothered to land at the Seaport of Corflu. Nevertheless, the devices and the accent of the sailors sounded unusual. Lentulus was reminded of the speech that had been used by the crewmembers of a captured ship, sailing from the occupied port of Karse, which had arrived at Corflu just a season before, with his load of Heortland prisoners. Their curses were much similar to those this ship's sailors uttered.

Every unusual thing was very appreciated by Lentulus, since it meant that he would have had something to fill his reports with and to obtain rewards for: it was easy, for him, to let someone who received the reports five hundred miles afar, believe that the gathering of information was a much more tiresome task than it was.

Displaying his most shiny smile, he strode at tempoed pace, almost marching, on the unsteady pier. In the same time the gang-board was lowered and a man got off the ship with slow, measured steps.

Lentulus could not hide an expression of genuine wonder: the man was tall, the gray hairs resting orderly on his shoulders, his silver beard was precisely trimmed and parted in two, according to an unknown fashion. Only his head, uncovered, was visible, while a wide robe or a cloak, unnaturally white, covered his body up to the toes. A healer,, Lentulus thought, or a nobleman or both. Most probably a high-ranking priest of some barbarian cult.. He looked for the bodyguards that had to escort such a personage, but no-one followed the passenger on the pier. The sailors were busy at unloading two big chests that might be his baggage.

Closing-in, Lentulus restored his smile. He spotted neither runes nor devices of any kind, but the stranger wore at his right ear an ornament that...

-Welcome to the seaport of Corflu, protected and ruled by the Empire,- Lentulus greeted in tradetalk, performing a bow that would have roused jeering by any true Dara Happan, but that could impress almost any barbarian.

The white-dressed man turned his face toward his one after a long moment. He looked very interested in the evening sight of the town beyond the port. Lentulus was on the verge of repeating his greetings in another language, when the man asked to him, in excellent tradetalk: -Which empire?-

At first, Lentulus thought that the stranger was provoking him, but those grey eyes expressed merely a cold patience and the man, provided he was feigning ignorance, had to be an extra actor.

-Which Empire?- Lentulus repeated, -The Eternal Red Goddess= Empire, the Lunar Empire, ruled by the Divine Red Emperor...- he listed these titles, searching for an acknowledgement act, a hostile reaction, presumably, on that impassive visage. He was disappointed at finding none.

-Very well,- the stranger commented as at himself. Then, at a louder voice, added: -I'm looking for the Governor. Take me to him and you will be rewarded-.

This man is no actor, Lentulus thought, and no priest, either: he is the king of the clowns, he is incarnated Eurmal. Now I'm going to teach him, using tact...

-You are a buffoon,- Lentulus stated with an apologetical tone,- you can't simply come in this sewer-like port today and meet right now His Shortness Sor-eel-.

The stranger's face didn't change, but Lentulus= paled more than the other man's robe: the words that had been articulated by his mouth were not at all those he had been going to say.

-Well, actually,- Lentulus babbled, focusing his mind on the things he wanted to express, -you are a damned barbarian and, if you won't be able to persuade me otherwise, you will hardly walk a few steps in any alley of this port, before a blade will be stuck in your back-. *Damn,+ he thought straight-away, *it has happened again+. The Corfluite began to feel a bit anxious.

This time the stranger frowned. Lentulus perceived something as deadly as a sword in the other's eye, a threat more serious than a real weapon.

-Who are you?- the stranger commanded him.

Lentulus tried to answer in the way he had already used hundreds of times, to those who had met him, disembarking from a ship: "Name's Lentulus of Corflu; we have no Guest Commitee, in this land, but I always strive to be hospitable". The statement appeared in his mind, as convincing and customary as ever. To his regret, his lips spoke different words: -I am Lentulus of Weis. I am a spy, paid by the Pavic Spoken Word. My work consists in discovering as much as possible from whoever arrives from the sea in this land-. Sorcery, Lentulus thought, with anger surging in his heart: this bastard has not yet set his foot on solid ground and already he has dared to cheat me with wizardry. His hand crawled to the hilt of the poisoned dagger he kept in the hidden pocket of his jacket.

He stopped, keeping his hand: he doubted that attacking the authoritative stranger was a clever act.

The other man stared at him with his frightening eyes: -Know this, then, Lentulus of the Spoken Word - he made a step near the Corfluite and straightened his back, towering over him, the whole head taller: -

I am Cleaver Csar, the Truth Dealer. I come from the Blessed City to meet someone who is believed to be a man but that man is not. I come to reveal him. No mask can cheat me. No worm can lie to me. Ever-. He shut, as if waiting an answer.

Spending a big deal of effort, Lentulus averted his eyes from the man's and re-gained a fraction of self-control. He realized he was trembling out of anger and fear, and out of another emotion that he had not felt in a long time: the agent of the empire's most feared secret police, was overcome by shame. That was unbearable!

He focused his gaze on their surroundings: they were still both standing on the slippery and rotted pier.

Let's see if this enchanter likes liquid Magasta's domain. Lentulus thought and then moved quickly to push him in the muddy and stinking waters which surrounded the wharves.

Quicker than a shadow-cat, the stranger dodged to a side and raised the left arm to protect his side from the treacherous dagger of the Corfluite.

Lentulus was shocked for the penultimate time when his weapon slipped harmlessly against the white robe the stranger wore. While he was trying to keep his balance and not to fall into the sea, his right arm was grabbed, twisted and broken with a single fluid movement by the white-dressed man.

-You are no... healer-, the agent wheezed.

A tiny smile appeared on the self-calling Cleaver Csar's face: -You are wrong, but you are in good faith. Not all the healers heal the bodies-.

Only then, Lentulus recognized the ornament which Csar dressed at his ear, a silver pendant shaped as a Y: the Truth Rune. The pain of the broken arm overcame him after an instant and he plunged in unconsciousness. Csar left him and Lentulus slipped on the pier's boards, fell into the water and the sea swallowed him as trash dispersing in the ocean.

Before the sprinkle raised by the body had fallen, the white-dressed man had forgotten Lentulus and, looking with an engrossed face the outlines of the houses of Corflu in the dying light, he scoured the pier and set foot on the Praxian ground.

Chapter 2: Corflu by twilight

Almost nobody noticed that the unfortunate Lentulus had incurred in a mishap. The sailors of the Wenelian ship had watched without interest: according to them, a passenger was like a fish-crate; when you had disembarked it, its smell mattered only to that who bought it, not to the fisherman who had caught it. Further, during the long travel from Nochet to Corflu, they had been given much a reason to prefer not to meddle in the deeds of Cleaver Csar.

Their captain contacted the Etyries merchants, who dwelled in a wide hall close to the port; he did not even look where the white-dressed man was going.

Csar neared a bad-smelling tavern. He chose the two individuals who looked the least drunk and offered them half a silver each to bring his baggage on their backs. Then he strode on the main street, without bothering to check if the two men were following him. The two looked at each other, raised their shoulders and heaved the chests to get behind Csar.

A small shadow followed the three men, keeping a cautious distance.

The main street of Corflu was called The Mouth of Zola Fel, because it sided the great river in the point where its waters mixed with those of the Rozgali Sea. On the left side, the ground one, it was inhabited by humans; taverns, brothels and warehouses went on endlessly. On the right side, the watery one, the river-dwellings and barges of the riverpeople were a much more attractive show; newtlings, rivermaids, talking fishes and sentient amphibians chattered, argued, called the humans and prayed to their wet deities without any interruption.

The stench of seaweed and of rotten wood was the same on both sides of the Mouth of Zola Fel.

Cleaver Csar advanced resolutely in the middle of the street and his head turned neither at the obscene provocations of the women, to his left, nor at the exotic bargains, to his right.

A small brawl was being fought, a little forward, between some boatmen and some bored sailors. Half a dozen men, clad in leather armor, spears in their hands, charged the combatants and knocked all of them off, without distinction. While the two groups mended the cuts and bruises, the chief of the watch, a decurion who mounted a black antelope and wore an helm with a grand tip, spotted the white-clad stranger. The decurion trotted until he confronted Csar.

-Are you a Bevaran?-, asked the officer in a polite but firm tone, in New Pelorian.

Csar did not raise his head and did not speak.

The officer asked the same question in Pavic, then in Praxian and finally in Tradetalk-

-I am not-, Csar answered in the end and fixed his eyes in the decurion's.

Something in the visage of the stranger moved the officer so that he performed an effort of politeness: -I ask you pardon, sir, but your white clothes cheated me-.

-I never cheat anyone!- a flash of wrath lightened the face of Csar.

The soldier raised an eyebrow, Sweet goddess,+ he thought, *this is a crazy fanatic+. He resolved that it was worth to dirt his boots in the mud of the street and he quickly dismounted; then he endowed the antelope to his gregarious. He removed the shining helm, revealing a sun-tanned ordinary face, lacking of any northern traits. He performed a stiff hail with his head, without averting his eyes from the white-clad stranger and then he declared: -I am Tabad Brushelm, decurion of the auxiliary garrison of Corflu, associated to the Marble Phalanx. I ask you pardon again, but I must know your name and your errand in this country-.

Adopting the same formal tone, Csar answered: -I am Cleaver Csar from Nochet, the Blessed City. Religious affairs lead me in Prax and I am not willing to cause any trouble to you-.

-I'll bet you won't,- Brushhelm retorted, -Nobody is ever willing to cause troubles to me, except for that unreliable Gorukha and his pigs.- he asked to himself, just for an instant, why he had pronounced the name of the chief of the other auxiliary troop resident in Corflu: the Tusk Raider squadron. He was weary, he guessed, and his tongue became too loose when he was not well-rested. -But I wonder to which kind of cult do you belong-.

-This is not a matter for your ears, decurion-.

Brushhelm was able to behave in a tolerant way, when he wanted to: -You are pushing my patience so far, stranger. I don't know exactly where Nochet is, fool, he scolded himself in his mind, never to profess weakness or ignorance in front of a citizen. -Neither it concerns me. Anyway, let me teach you a thing: there are cults which are not tolerated, not even in this frontier seaport of the empire. The Bull is one of these but even the Orlanthi and the Zorak Zorani are not welcome. And as for the healers, we like them to dress pink better than white-.

-My cult is none of these. Tell me, decurion, where may I accommodate myself, being assured that no Malia spirit is going to visit me?-

-To the Pinned Juggler, where any guest I introduce is worth a silver to me... But what am I saying, in the name of Gagarth?- Brushhelm got angry with himself for his awkwardness. He had to be much more weary than he thought, in order to speak that way. -I am saying: the Tired Traveller is better, it's quieter and cheaper too-. Only when he noticed the comical expression of the sergeant who was fixing him wide at eyes, being at his side to keep the bridle, Brushhelm realized that he had told one more time the opposite of what he was going to say.

-I thank you. I will choose the Traveller, then, - Csar said, -a pity for your tip-. Then he passed on, striding beyond the bewildered officer.

Brushhelm looked down with rage the two porters who followed Csar. He was ready to whip them if just one had dared to outline a smile. But the two men were wise enough to keep their gazes glued to the heels of their master and they soon got far.

Grabbing the bridle from the sergeant's hand, Brushhelm mounted on the antelope and spurred it right in the middle of a goat-herd, lead by an old man, creating a lot of confusion in the street.

Lunabar will know about this Csar before sunset. He will decide to squeeze all the information he likes from that aloof trouble-maker. I bet my pay that he is a damned Orlanthi and that he will spend the next day in the garrison jail+, so the soldier thought while his antelope galloped, followed by the frightened bleating of the goats.

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Conversation Overheard at a Drinking Establishment in Pavis by Nils Weinander

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest July 7, 1995)

This is a story based on a campaign set in Pavis.

'No I tell you, it was really some action down at Horngate...What?, yeah I know the oasis dwellers are meek fools who do whatever the nomads bully them into, but this was no oasis people involved.

No, at that pitiful excuse for a bar they have down there the usual lot was hanging out, but there were some people more too. At one table sat some dudes, I don't know their names, but everyone knows they ride with a band of robbers. They were two and with them was another guy I newer saw before. He was tall and rough looking, and well armed too.

Down by the back wall sat four women, really scary ones. Someone said they were earth avengers, warriors all the way from Esrolia. Two of them were as big as any man and armed with those really big axes. The other two were smaller but I tell you one of them looked like a demon, with tattoos and scars and teeth filed into pointy fangs.

Suddenly all four of them got up and the biggest of them popped the tall guy over the head so hard I thought his neck was broken. The two guys who ride with the robbers went for their swords, but the other three chicks had their axes out and looked like they would use them, so the guys didn't do nothing when the women backed out, dragging the knocked out man.

Now the chicks dragged this guy out and roped him up for the night and the other two guys went for their steeds and took off in great hurry.

Next morning the chicks put the roped up guy on a pack horse and rode out, but they didn't get far, for five of the robbers were waiting for them, charging as soon as they got out on the street.

These robbers are a mean gang. It's whispered down there that they are Gagarthi. Now I wonder which were the worst, the robbers of the chicks. First thing the chick with filed teeth cuts the prisoner's head with a bright sickle and then the fight started.

I can't say what happened blow by blow, it was so over so quick and they were so many fighting. But I do tell you it's the ugliest bloodiest fight I ever saw. Those chicks are bloody-handed murderers all of them. They cut down four of the robbers real fast. The fifth tried to run but the chick with the teeth ran him down and hacked him to pieces with the bright sickle and an axe like a crow's beak.

So the chicks take the robbers' steeds and leave the rest of their stuff for the oasis people and let them clean up the mess. Seems the guy they popped on the head was wanted for stealing something from the earth people, dunno what. One thing's for sure though, I'll stay well clear of those maniacs.'

(Author's note : This happened in one of our campaigns. The Babeester Gor "ladies" are our characters. The campaign isn't too seriously intended, but it's quite fun to indulge in some totally politically incorrect

mayhem now and then. The scene above played out like a show-down from a spaghetti western teleported to Glorantha.)

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The Council of the Gods by Sandy Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest November 16, 1994)

This is one of Sandy's myths of the Artmali gods.

Qualyorni, the Cold One, came from the north, bringing her blanket of ice, and her breath of fog. Artmal, Emperor of Perfection, went to meet her, and was crippled forever. Who honors Artmal nowadays? The people leapt and jumped nervously. "What will we do? No one can conquer the Cold One!"

They turned to Lodril. "Oh, grandfather! You saved us from the Smother Jungle and the Poison Sea! Save us from the Cold One!" Lodril peered through his beard. "I am old, so old. And my mountains will not hold back the Cold One. She thrives in the heights. But I will try to help." And he made the first spear.

"Oh, grandfather! Take the spear and strike the Cold One!" "Alas, my grandsons and granddaughters. I am old, so old." The people scampered like crickets. "What will we do? Who will use the Spear? Sikkanos, will you use it?" Sikkanos looked at the spear with lust in his eyes. He wanted the spear. But he feared fighting the Cold One more. "Give me the spear." he said. "I am a good fighter. But I will not fight the Cold One. Follow me and we will hide in the desolation. We can use the spear to stay alive. Come, flee with me." But the people would not flee. "Jelmre, can you save us?"

Jelmre was abashed. "I am too small to even pick up the spear. How can I save us?" The people moaned and wailed. "Hoolar, can you save us?" Hoolar was sad. "I am no warrior. If you gave me the spear, the Cold One would beat me just the same, and take the spear away. Then where would we be?"

The people asked their old enemy, the Smother Jungle. "Save us, Smother Jungle! Stop the Cold One." But Smother Jungle was asleep and could not answer.

And finally Pamalt came forward. "Someone MUST fight the Cold One. I am no warrior. I am afraid of the Cold One. But no one else will do it. I can pick up the spear, and I will fight." Pamalt fought the Cold One, and he was helped by Hoolar and Jelmre, but Sikkanos ran and hid in the desolation. He did not help. The spear was so mighty that it struck the Cold One to the ground, and she could not get up again. Instead, she bled blackness into the earth and crawled away. "Do not hit me again." she said. "I will stay in my own country." And Pamalt agreed.

But then the Cold One's Mother came.⁵ And her Grandmother. And her monster-brother and sister.⁶ The night monsters said, "Pamalt, you have crippled our daughter-sister. Now we will cripple you." Pamalt

⁵ This second part of the story is very peculiar. It's hard to imagine the troll gods agreeing to a formal Doraddi-style trial, in a potent Doraddi example that might by itself does not make right, even when gods are fighting for their life.

said, "Let us not fight about this. If I did wrong, I should be punished. If I did well, I should be rewarded." The night monsters were puzzled, but agreed to let the Council of the Gods adjudge Pamalt's deeds.⁷ They were not afraid of this, because their grandmother's sister was part of the Council, and Pamalt had no friends there.⁸ The night monsters said, "Pamalt has crippled our daughter-sister. We demand that he be crippled in payment." Aleshmara spoke for her son-in-law. "The Cold One was evil. He deserved his punishment."

The night monsters said, "We are not here to judge the Cold One, but Pamalt." The Council of the Gods agreed. "The Cold One was crippled. This is true enough. What matter if she was bad? Bring her to trial if this be true, but do not defend your actions thereby." Faranar spoke for her husband. "Pamalt had no choice. He had to fight the Cold One or all the land would be blasted." The night monsters said, "This is not true. The Cold One was just bringing winter to the land. We all know winter is good." The Council of the Gods agreed. "The Cold One would have changed your land. What of that? All lands are being changed nowadays." Pamalt finally spoke. "I say that the Cold One was right. I say that the Cold One was justified in all her actions." The night monsters muttered among themselves. Then they said, "That is right. Our daughter-sister was good and true. Now, we demand vengeance." Then Pamalt said, "The Cold One crippled Artmal. Was this fair?" "Yes, yes," said the night monsters.

So Pamalt said, "I acted just like the Cold One. He crippled an enemy. And I crippled an enemy. Both of us were fair." The Council of the Gods gnashed its teeth, but agreed that Pamalt was right. The night monsters howled and mourned for their crippled sister.

And Pamalt never went to the Council of the Gods again.

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Creator and Sedenya by Terra Incognita

A Lunar myth about the goddess.

Verithurusa told her lover and master,
"I love you."
Creator questioned this,
"What is Love?"
Lesilla replied,
"You and I."
Creator replied,
"You cannot see me, you only see yourself."

⁶ The Mother is presumably Kyger Litor, and the Grandmother Subere. The monster-brother and sister are probably Zorak Zoran and Xiola Umbar.

⁷ The Council of the Gods seems to be a rare Doraddi reference to the Celestial Court.

⁸ Presumably the night monsters' "grandmother's sister" was Dame Darkness, and the fact that Pamalt had no friends there is, to the Doraddi, evidence that the Council was ultimately useless.

Gerra sobbed,
"Don't you love me?"
Creator shrugged,
"As you like."
Rashorana murmured,
"If you don't admit my love, I am as nothing."
Creator kept silence.
Orogeria was angered,
"If you want me to forget you, I should do so."
Creator replied,
"You cannot ignore me as you cannot ignore yourself."
Natha smiled,
"Being absorbed by you must make me happy forever."
Creator taught her,
"But your innocent love itself prevents you from lapsing."
Zaytenara whispered,
"Is Mercy all your Love?"
Creator chuckled,
"No, now that you call me Lover, I remember it."

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The Crippling of Lokarma by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest June 17, 1994)

(The following is a piece of the Imtherian Lightbringer cycle. Lagavar is the Lightfore planet and is considered the hero/leader of the quest. Khalana is the healer. Orlantio is the trickster and not the leader in the Imther version. Kagozhim Gearmesher is a dwarf and the keeper of knowledge. Lokarma is the Imtherian goddess of trade and is seen regularly in the sky--the star known elsewhere as Wagon.)

Now when the Lightbringers approached the River of Swords, they could see a large crowd gathered there. All were pale, shadowy forms which cried in anguish or wept profusely. They shied away from the light of Lagavar--all but one, but looked hungrily upon the party.

Lagavar was surprised for this was none other than Basmal, the Lord of the Lightnings. "Who are these folk that you stand amongst and how came you to be with them?" asked Lagavar.

Basmal scowled, "These are the dead who lack coin for their passage. They are left behind, forgotten and unloved, in their death. Therefore they weep and will always weep lest someone find their rotted bodies and offer up their fare. As for me, ask that foul traitor amongst you." Basmal pointed angrily at Orlantio. "He stripped me of my spear and claws, then cast me here. My followers are gone and none

came to give me a coin. I am stuck here, too, but I can and will strip him of his very skin." And Basmal stepped forward to rend Orlantio.

But Orlantio ducked behind Lagavar and Lagavar stood firm. "Stop cousin! Though I see your hate and understand it, you cannot have him."

Basmal bellowed in rage. "I will make him pay!"

"No," replied Lagavar firmly, "you will begone and let us pass. For though he is a traitor, I still need him for the final dance."

Basmal glared and stomped, but finally left their company. "Good riddance to you, too, broken hand!" Orlantio called out after him.

"Hush, insolent wretch!" answered Lagavar. But Orlantio continued taunting the wretched dead until they reached the river's edge.

At the edge of that harsh river, where all the world's swords rush by to destroy any who would touch its stream, sat a Ferryman in his boat. Now the Ferryman was a gloomy god bound by oaths sworn upon the black waters to carry those souls who had their coin into the Second Hell.

"Master of this boat, we seek to cross this river," stated Lagavar simply.

The Ferryman surveyed the party but shook his head. "You are not dead and only the dead may cross this river."

The Lightbringers had expected this and Lokarma, she of the coin, stepped forward. "Ah, but we have the proper payment. Surely that will mitigate such a trivial detail. Accept these seven coppers, one for each, so that we can be on our way."

The Ferryman shook his head. "You are not dead and no seven coppers will make you so. You may not cross."

Lokarma, still smiling, answered, "I see your price is higher for such as us. We offer you five coppers apiece so that we can be on our way."

Still the Ferryman frowned and shook his head. "Such an offer has no meaning here. You may not cross."

Lokarma touched her cheek and pondered this before continuing. "Your position is hard, but I think you could allow us passage for, say, 100 coppers apiece or if that won't do, a wheel of purest gold, freshly cut." She smiled at her skill.

But the Ferryman was unmoved and repeated his position once again. Lokarma offered jewels, but the Ferryman refused. Lokarma offered magics, but the Ferryman would not budge.

Orlantio shook his head. To Lagavar he said, "Slay him and be done with him. He only blocks our path and we can guide a boat as well as he."

"Violence is not the only way, fool," said Lagavar angrily. "The Ferryman has a task which we should not stop. We will go and find another way."

And as they were about to leave, Lokarman cried out, "Wait. I have one more offer." She turned to the Ferryman. "You who are so dark and gloomy, why are you so? Do you not enjoy your task?"

"I do," replied the Ferryman, "but I long to see my kin who dwell elsewhere and have their own tasks. But I am bound to stay here to keep my vows."

"This then is my final offer. Go and see your kin. For if you give us passage, I will perform your task until you return and ensure that your vows are kept."

Now at this offer, the Ferryman looked puzzled. He thought long and hard upon the matter. "Very well, for this offer I shall give you passage with one final condition--you must give me your hamstrings as surety of your word."

Lokarma was reluctant to do so for she was a dancer and did not like to be left without motion. "Is one sufficient? For with just one I could not keep up with the others and would die by myself in this hell. I am a goddess of her word."

"No," replied the Ferryman, "it must be both."

So Lokarma came and sat in the boat and gave up her hamstrings. The others then entered the boat. Under the steady strokes of the Ferryman they crossed the river of swords and reached the far bank.

There the Ferryman scrambled out and up the bank with a smile upon his face. "Farewell and remember, you are now bound to my oath--see that the dead do not back up or the black waters shall consume you! I will return when I am ready." And then he was gone into the shadows of the Second Hell.

Lagavar asked Khalana, "Can you heal her so that we can depart together?"

Khalana replied, "No, for to heal her I must give up those very strings needed to make my magics."

Lagavar went up the bank then and the others, all but Lokarma, followed him up the bank. "You have undertaken a grave task for our sake, dear sister."

Lokarma shook her head sadly, "If it is needed, then so it shall be. I will follow as I can when the Ferryman returns."

Lagavar broke a branch from his torch and lit it. "Keep this with you as a reminder of our task. It will guide you to me when you can come. Know that your tasks are not yet at an end and I will need you yet again."

Lokarma took the torch and kissed Lagavar goodbye. "I look forward to that meeting."

Then with slow strokes, Lokarman dipped the oars into the sword waters and crossed back to fetch the dead. Lagavar and the others moved sadly and quietly on into the shadows of the Second Hell.

Notes:

- 1) It is said in Imther that the Ferryman eventually returned but made another bargain with Lokarma--that she must return regularly to relieve him of his task so that he could visit his kin. That is why Lokarma moves so slowly across the sky, for she only reluctantly agreed and tries to prolong her time away as long as possible.
- 2) An ending popular amongst the Grigor marl is that Lokarma fell in love with the sad Ferryman and agreed to marry him. Since she was still bound to assist Lagavar, she did so, but gave the Ferryman a hamstring so that he would know that she would return.
- 3) An another alternate ending says that on the way across, Kagozhim fashioned a new pair of hamstrings out of gold and copper which he gave to Lokarma in secret. When they reached the far bank, Lagavar insisted that his party be allowed out so that the Ferryman would have room to show Lokarma how to work the boat. But when they were out, Lokarma jumped out too using her new hamstrings and the Ferryman was left in the boat. But the new hamstrings were not as good as the old ones and always have to be repaired--that is why Lokarma takes so long on her journey.

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The Curse of the Spolite Queen and The Spolite Queen's Tests by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest February 25, 1998)

(Author's Notes: The recent discussion about Yolanela prompted me to dig out these two tales regarding the original Spolite Queen of Sarenesh (who I do believe is different from Yolanela, but definitely the woman whom Yolanela models herself upon). These tales are pieces from a collection about the youth of Verenmars, part of a larger work called Verenmars Saga that I've put together).

The Curse of the Spolite Queen

When Sarenesh the Darvagarn [+foe of the Dragon+] declared his intent to take a Carmanian bride, a daughter of Nadar the Avenger, there were many who opposed this. Amongst those who did were 2 grandsons of Samandar, Manacar and Mandaras, called the Black Haired Twins.

Now Manacar and Mandaras had succumbed to the Dark Dragon of Jealousy and they reasoned that the Emperor of Dara Happa would never take a bride who was not pure. So they arranged to entice their cousin from her palace in Spol. They would take her to the [Forest of Rist] {Tarvadas Woods} and summon wild men to rape her there, forever destroying her purity and thus halting the marriage they so hated.

Though Manacar and Mandaras kept their plotting to whispers and told no one else, a small sparrow overheard their words. The sparrow carried the news to the Spolite Queen, but the Queen had already left for the Woods with her black-hearted cousins. The Queen and her faithful maidservant were well into the [Forest of Rist] {Tarvadas Woods} when the sparrow found them. The two women sat in a sunny glade where the cousins had left them while they ostensibly hunted, but really sought the wild men. The sparrow spoke the words then to the Queen and she was much afraid.

The faithful maidservant then told the Queen to hide high in a tree. She did so, her feet guided by the voice of the sparrow. When she had gone as far as she could, she heard voices approaching below. These were the wild men and even from high above she could see their lust. The faithful maidservant was despoiled by the wild men who cared nothing for kindness. When their lusts were sated, they left as they came.

The Spolite Queen hurried from the tree, her steps again guided by the sparrow. When she reached her maidservant, the woman pulled the Queen down beside her. The faithful maid tore the Queen's dress and rubbed dirt on her face and body and marked her thighs with blood. Thus did Manacar and Mandaras find the two women when they returned from their 'hunt'.

The women were returned to the palace and arrived just as Sarenesh himself did. When Sarenesh asked what had occurred, the Black Haired Twins said that the two women were attacked and ravaged by the wild men of the [Forest of Rist] {Tavardas Woods}. Sarenesh was outraged and sent men to find the wild men. But his heart was filled with compassion for the two women and he brought them into the palace and ensured that they were placed upon soft beds.

Manacar and Mandaras felt their task was done and went to attend other business. But the Spolite Queen asked that Sarenesh stay for a moment. When they were alone, the Queen told him her tale. Sarenesh then left her, for he had to consider the truths of each tale. He went to face the light of Yelm and in that light, Sarenesh knew what was true and what was false.

The next day, Sarenesh summoned all within the palace to hear him. Even the Black Haired Twins came, for they hoped to hear Sarenesh declare his bride-to-be to be impure and beneath him.

First, Sarenesh called forth his warriors. They stepped forward and brought the wild men they captured with them. Sarenesh spoke his words of justice. "You, who would ravage innocent and pure women, are no better than the beasts of the woods. Worse, you know no limit to your lusts. Therefore you shall be tamed. Your bodies shall be as the tortoise, slow moving so that all can catch you if they please. Your necks and your legs shall be short, so that you will forever see what you desire but can never reach it. Your sex shall be hidden and forever concealed, so that you feel your lusts but can never achieve them. By the glory of Yelm, so be it!"

And there before Sarenesh the wild men turned into slow moving tortoises, condemned to their life of unattainable desires. The Black Haired Twins merely smiled, for who could now speak against them?

Then, Sarenesh called forth the faithful maidservant. She stepped forward into the imperial presence. Sarenesh spoke his words of justice. "You, who gave your purity to protect your mistress, are better than the cruelties of this world. Therefore, I call upon Ourania, Mistress of the Heavens to restore your virginity and ease your pains with the Light of Gentleness that only she can bring. And I would offer as well my own household, that you be raised from your position and into the imperial court which can only be blessed by your noble presence. By the goodness of Ourania and the glory of Yelm, so be it!"

And there before Sarenesh the faithful maidservant was restored to her purity and given a new robe to denote her new status. The Black Haired Twins were unmoved, for they cared not a whit for a maidservant and the Emperor could have her for his toy if he so desired.

Finally, Sarenesh called forth the Spolite Queen. She stepped forward into the imperial presence. Sarenesh asked her to speak and she spoke her truths. The Black Haired Twins cried forth in anger, saying that these were all lies. Sarenesh then spoke his words of justice. "Yelm has seen the souls of all of you. And I have seen the truth through the lies of these men. My Queen, who would be ravaged by the plots of these vile, I offer you judgment upon these men, your cousins. Tell me now what you would ask and by the glory and all-seeing wisdom of Yelm, so be it!"

The Black Haired Twins tried to flee, but spears of pure sunlight descended from the sky to trap them in that place and hear their sentence.

The Queen spoke then her judgment. "Those who would rob us of our purity shall know what their lusts bring. [One of these shall be a vrok eagle and one an avarna eagle. For one year they shall grapple with each other in the skies and each other only, and they shall feel the tears of their talons and beaks from the heat of their lusts.] {One of these shall be a wild boar and one an angry sow. For one year they shall rut with each other and each other only, and they shall feel the pain their lusts bring.} When that year is complete, they shall return here and I shall judge them again, but any child of theirs shall be given to me."

Sarenesh cried "Done!" and so it was. The warriors chased off the [vrok and avarna eagles until they were high in the skies and the cries of their lusts could no longer be heard] {boar and sow until they were far into the woods and the grunts of their lusts could no longer be heard}.

A year passed and the [vrok and avarna eagle] {boar and sow} came to the court and there delivered a son. The Queen received the child and spoke her judgment. "This child shall be a warrior and guardian to my first born child. He shall be called Varmarmon for he will contain the great [glory of the eagle] {anger of the boar}, ever ready to unleash it to protect my child. But he who is now [a vrok] {a boar} shall be a lioness. And he who is now [an avarna] {a sow} shall be a lion. For one year they shall mate with each other and each other only, and they shall feel their claws and the pain their lusts bring. When that year is complete, they shall return here and I shall judge them again, but any child of theirs shall be given to me."

Sarenesh cried "Done!" and so it was. The warriors chased off the lion and the lioness until they were far into the hills and the roars of their lusts could no longer be heard.

A year passed and the lion and lioness came to the court and there delivered a son. The Queen received the child and spoke her judgment. "This child shall be a warrior and guardian to my second born child. He shall be called +Proud Mane+ for he will contain the great strength of the lion, ever ready to stand before and protect my child. But he who is now a lioness shall be a hound. And he who is now a lion shall be a bitch. For one year they shall mate with each other and each other only, and they shall feel their teeth and the pain their lusts bring. When that year is complete, they shall return here and I shall judge them again, but any child of theirs shall be given to me."

Sarenesh cried "Done!" and so it was. The warriors chased off the dogs until they were far into the meadows and the howls of their lusts could not longer be heard.

A year passed and the dogs came to the court and there delivered a son. The Queen received the child and spoke her judgment. "This child shall be a warrior and guardian to my last born child. He shall be called Ganaragar [+Night Barker+] for he will contain the great loyalty of the dog, ever ready to follow and protect my child. Now let these two dogs both be curs and keep them in the kitchens where they must fight for scraps with the other curs until death finds them."

Sarenesh cried "Done!" and so it was. But the 3 sons of Manacar and Mandaras grew to be great companions to the children of Sarenesh and the Spolite Queen.

[Notes: There are two variations on this story. The first is of Sylilan origin (marked with ++ where it differs from the main text), probably from the period after Verenmars, but reflecting Sylilan fears of the dark woods and the wild land of Carmania beyond. The second is of Terarir origin (marked with +{+ where it differs from the main text), from a later period (start of 3 Generations of War?) that reflects a growing hostility toward Dara Happa.]

The Spolite Queen's Tests

Verenmars was born to a lowly [i.e. foreign] wife of dark [i.e. sorcerous] ways. Though his father had been brother to the Emperor, the Spolite Queen knew that Sarenesh would be eclipsed by his sons and set about to ensure they did so.

The Spolite Queen tested each son in different ways, but with Verenmars, she went so far as to try to slay him. With the aid of dark powers, she bound the boy Verenmars to a reed mat and sacrificed him to the Serpent Demon, the Devourer, the Cold Swallower, who devours the reed mats which bear the dead.

But a Water Dog [Sairdites say a spaniel, though Vanchites say a raccoon] heard the cries of the baby and struggled against the cold current to reach the mat. The Water Dog, using only its nose, pushed the reed mat out of the current to the shore. Then, the Water Dog pulled the mat up the river bank and brought Verenmars to safety.

Verenmars was raised in the home of the dog's master, an aged, but great warrior. In the home of his foster father, Verenmars learned the secrets of the 10 Dogs and the 10 Arts of Warfare. It was here that Verenmars first fought, when the Shadow Lion sought him out for the Spolite Queen.

Verenmars broke the teeth from the Shadow Lion and then stole its sinews. Crippled, the Shadow Lion limped back to court with its news. Satisfied with her son's performance, the Spolite Queen called him back to court and rewarded the foster father with a castle of his own.

[Notes: this piece is probably of Sairdite or Vanchite origin and contains Dara Happan prejudices against Carmania.]

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Daran and the Hearth by Harald Smith

(as originally appeared on the Glorantha Digest December 5, 1994)

(This is another Imtherian folktale common to the Southlands and the Western Lowlands. Similar tales are told throughout Imther though)

There was once a young farmer named Daran who always worked hard. His parents were so proud of him that they always told everyone in the village how smart and hard-working he was. After Daran became a man, his parents brought him to the Khelmal festivals hoping that he would meet a bride that he fancied (or at least one they could arrange a marriage with). They were sure that with such a smart and hard-working son, that finding a bride would be easy.

But Daran always disappeared during the festivals. Whenever his parents found the parents of a young eligible woman and went to show Daran to them, they could not find him. Only when they were ready to depart did he reappear. When asked where he had been, he said, "I was looking at the fields" or "I was examining the herds."

His parents shook their heads. "But you can do that anytime. How can you find a bride in the fields or with the herds?"

"It's always good to see another's field or herd so you can judge your own," Daran replied. "And as for a bride, that is of no matter, for I don't plan to take one."

At first, Daran's parents were amused and thought he was just afraid. But several years passed and Daran always did the same and said the same.

The parents grew more and more worried. Other villagers made fun of them, that they had a son without a wife. What would happen to their hearth, they thought, if there was no one to keep it going? They argued this with Daran, but Daran always replied "It is of no matter, for a hearth is but a clay pit and I can always use yours--I don't need to waste effort making a new one."

Daran's parents aged noticeably with their worry. Finally, one darkseason day, they both died and Daran was still unmarried. When the death services were done, Daran with heavy heart returned to his parent's hearth to take over their home. But he found inside the home a small flame dancing in the air. "Who are you," he asked "that you dare disturb me in my mourning."

"I am the hearth of this home," the dancing flame replied. "I am alone, too, and share your grief for your parents were a good and kindly couple. They always saw to my needs from the time they made my gift until this very day."

"Yes, they were a good couple," Daran replied hostilely. "But they are gone now and I have work to do to keep this place going."

"We all have work to do," the flame agreed while whirling through the air. "And you should find a bride, for a hearth and fields cannot be well-maintained by one alone."

Daran said angrily, "Leave me be and go back to your hearth. I have wasted enough time here. And as for a bride, that is no matter, for I don't plan to take one."

Rebuked, the hearth flame returned to the hearth. Daran went out into the fields and amongst the herds and used the knowledge that he had gained over the years. He knew that soon his farm would far surpass that of any other village farm. But when Daran returned to the hearth at the end of the day, he found that the fire was not as warm as it had been. So he skinned an extra sheep that day and made himself a new sheepskin tunic to keep his warm and he went on with his life.

The seasons passed and the bounty of Daran's farm increased. Indeed, his knowledge proved to be of worth and his farm did surpass that of any other village. That next darkseason, on the anniversary of his parent's death, Daran returned to his home to find that the hearth did not burn as brightly as it once had. So he went out to the forest and cut more logs. These logs he tossed upon the hearth to make it burn more and he went on with his life.

The seasons passed again and his farm continued to produce. The villagers avoided him for they were jealous of his good fortune, but the merchants who came for grain and meat were quite happy. So Daran felt that his knowledge was still of worth and that the villagers were just fools for not practicing as he did. But that next darkseason, on the anniversary of his parent's death, Daran returned to his home to find that the hearth would no longer cook his food. So he decided to dig out the hearth and make a new one.

Now when he dug into the old hearth, he found the hearth gift of his parents. It was small, just a clay vessel with a lid. He picked up the gift to look inside, but the vessel crumbled in his hand. He brushed the dirt aside and scoffed at the poor quality of the clay.

He continued clearing the old pit until he came to the flag stones at its base. They were black from years of use, but he could tell that they were just right to line the base of his new pit. But when he picked up the first flagstone, it crumbled in his hand. And every other flagstone that he touched likewise crumbled until he stood over a pit of dirt.

Daran scoffed at the old pit and wondered how it had ever served his parents. He went out and found new flagstones and placed them in his new pit. He found a good clay vessel on a shelf and filled it with good grains and so fashioned his own gift. This he also placed in his new pit. He filled the hearth with logs and went to make a fire. But the flint produced no sparks to kindle the logs. So he tried his firesticks which always worked, but they too could produce no sparks. Finally, angered, Daran prepared his magics and cast them at the logs. Once more he failed to light the hearth fire.

Daran shrugged his shoulders. "I have seen men live without fire and I can certainly do so too." So Daran went out into the fields and amongst the herds to produce more food. He brought the food back to his cold and dark kitchen and prepared his meals. He brought back wool to his cold and dark spinning room and prepared warmer clothes to wear. But he had to spend longer and longer in the kitchen and the spinning room. Soon the fields and herds began to dwindle from neglect. Daran also dwindled growing skinnier and smaller, hunched over from the weight of the clothes he wore.

Finally, Daran was so cold and weak that he could go out no longer. Huddled under clothes and blankets, he stared bleakly into the darkness. And as he stared in his faltering state, he envisioned a tiny flame dancing before his eyes. The flame spoke to him then, "And as for a bride, it is of a matter, for a hearth cannot be maintained without the love given by a man and woman."

Daran reached out then for the spark, but it was gone. The effort made was too much for Daran and he, too, passed from the world.

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A Day at the Executions by Mark Galeotti

A jolly day out for everyone. Almost everyone. By the time we had reached the Earth Gate, it was already near Yelmrise, the sky beginning to purple on the horizon, the night air beginning to be thawed by the first promise of a hot, bright day. Around us were others intent on the same purpose, from every walk and rank. The gates were open specially early this morning, and the guards in their heavy capes waved us all through, the younger and cheekier stealing a sweetmeat or sixberry from the maidens' baskets as we passed. By the time we finally reached First Field, the purple was turning violet, and we cursed the revels last night that had so delayed our rise. (Though Wyredd predictably enough said that it only showed that we should have stayed at the wineshop all night and not tried to get any sleep!)

We finally managed to find a place behind some thanes and their inevitable entourage of slaves. These unfortunates, pigboys⁹ by their look and smell, had obviously been worked hard. The thanes and their families sat on finely carved stools (six-legged ones for the traditionalists, three-legged for the more

⁹ Balazarings. It is an item of faith with all polite Tarshites that Balazarings are fonder of their pigs than their mothers. Impolite Tarshites claim to see no distinction between the two. Balazarings are a popular source of work slaves in Tarsh. Flathead Furth, the stock comic Balazaring slave character in the Furthest Dramatic Re-Enactors' repertoire, is known for his catch-phrase, on spying a beautiful woman, 'prettier 'n any pig I ever did see.'

fashion-conscious), eating sixberry tarts from silver platters and drinking wine from gilded horns. Judging by the way they were quaffing their wine and the volume of their chatter, at home they were more used to drinking thin beer like the rest of us, but this was Furthest, and appearances were all. Our fare was rather poorer, but Traytha laid out her prized applecloth blanket and we piled up our respective offerings of food and drink. We had scarcely started toasting the Dark Earth when a clangour of bells from the earth temple by the field cut across the hum of the crowd. A second of silence, and then the first gleam of Yelm's glory cut across the horizon. We all cheered lustily, the women shaking their tintina,¹⁰ as the light washed across the field, picking out the executioners' copper axe heads.

Six of them stood motionless as statues on the far side of the field. Although I could not see the detail from here, I knew from other visits that they would be painted white and red, the colours of execution.

The first six criminals were dragged into view. As ritual demands, they were sprinkled with water, marched under a burning branch and spun round in a wind-rune on their way. Judging by their shambling, uncomplaining gait, they had also been fed softbark to keep them quiet and compliant.¹¹ The priestess of Sorana Tor stepped from the temple and approached. We all joined in the chants of 'Land-Mother, Land-Mother', until she had reached the worn stone plinth by the field. Again, we were silenced by the chime of copper bells.

The priestess spoke. We should not have been able to hear her, but somehow her quiet voice filled the air. 'The Land will Take for the Land to Give.' (A murmur of agreement swept through the crowd.) 'The Land will Eat for the Land to Feed.'

The imperial priestess joined her beside the plinth, arms folded in a gesture of deference. Even so, a few tintina registered their protests – many had still not accepted this addition to the ritual.

'You have taken from the land and from its people. You have been judged, but you have been blessed. Having taken, you now may give.'¹²

Almost at once a few voices took up the chant: 'Give them to the Fields!'

Soon we were all chanting at the top of our voices, 'Give them to the Fields!'

'Give them to the Fields!'

The six prisoners were marched past the priestess of Sorana Tor, as her fingers picked out mystic combinations on her rosary of teeth, each being draped with a sash of unbleached linen to symbolise their marriage to the Land Goddess.¹³

¹⁰ A small copper bell tied to the end of a stick, used by women to scare away ghosts, scold feckless men and welcome the Dark Earth goddesses.

¹¹ Softbark, the crumbly mould that grows on dark alders, is a mild natural sedative, much used in Tarsh by healers and exasperated parents.

¹² Prospective sacrificial victims are drawn from those found to have committed one of the so-called 'Red Crimes' such as kinslaying, secret murder, incest and despoiling fields.

‘Give them to the Fields!’

Each was forced to kneel on a rune-carved stone block before one of the axe-maidens.¹⁴

‘Give them to the Fields!’

Six copper axe-blades swung into the air as the Babeester Gori began their keening, eerily audible even over the roar of the crowd.

‘Give them to the Fields!’

Hitherto silent, the Gor Chime, largest of the copper bells of the Manse of Teeth, finally spoke. Its chime hung in the air for a silent moment between breaths. Six axe blades fell.

‘Give them to the Fields!’

We screamed ourselves hoarse. Traytha was still frantically shaking her tintina, not even noticing that the bell had fallen off and lost itself amongst our feet.

‘Give them to the Fields!’

Blood flowed through the sangueducts, rich and lush, a trickle becoming a gush as more criminals were dragged to the stones and Babeester Gor axes rose and fell.¹⁵ Six became twelve became eighteen. The copper bloodpot, which takes a small ladle-full from each Giver’s first bleed, would no doubt be filling up by now. The blood coursed through the unseasoned wooden channels taking it to all corners of the field, nourishing and enriching the waiting and hungry earth. For a while, thanes, freemen, freedmen, thralls and slaves were all as one as we felt Sorana Tor taking the blood to refresh the life of the dark earth. A warm rich glow suffused the earth, making it look as if the whole field was awash with blood, invisible energies rippled through the air above the field.

‘Give them to the Fields!’

Suddenly, a change of tone from the crowd closest to the front. Peering across, I saw that one of the prisoners, clearly having somehow managed to avoid taking the softbark, had wrenched himself from the burly women holding him and was running back from the field as quickly as he could with both arms

¹³ Women are not Given to the Fields. However, in times of hardship, it is not unknown for women to be ritually dressed in men’s clothes, festooned with the symbols of manhood (a leather belt, a knife, a phallic pendant and a blue and red cordwork headband) and symbolically become men for the purposes of the rite

¹⁴ That Babeester Gor axe maidens have retained their traditional role as the executions of Tarsh is not surprising. By allowing them to continue to wield their axes in defence of earth temples, as executions and in the pursuit of rapists and defilers, their bloodlust is sated and they are assimilated into the new order, rather than being driven into the arms of the Exiles.

¹⁵ The executioners decapitate the victims, then teams of prepubescent maidens already destined for the Dark Earth cults, wearing red tunics and black masks, lower the headless bodies, neck down, onto wooden troughs leading into the sangueducts, for their blood to continue flowing. This size execution is relatively rare, usually only six or twelve are killed, and thus there may also have been other, burlier assistants to (wo)manhandle so many bodies.

bound. He must have been lucky or powerful, for he dodged one of the axe maidens, then one of the soldiers who had been maintaining a discreet watch on the crowd. He was making for the squat temple to the Land Mothers. Behind him raced two more axe maidens, screeching and keening, and a dusty shimmer at his feet suggested other earth magics were trying to stop him. We shrieked and yelled encouragement to the pursuers, sounding more like the crowd at the Temple of Gamara¹⁶ than spectators at a holy rite. One of the viragos was almost upon him, her axe raised, but as we had already started to cheer with triumph, it was as if the very air around her began to twist and tug. She squared her shoulders and smashed through this magic with a stroke of her axe, which now seemed strangely larger and darker. But this had been enough to allow the prisoner one last dash, and he collapsed on the front step of the Manse.

At once our bloodlust disappeared like the shadow when Yelm breaks through the clouds. Little Mosser whined with disappointment: 'aren't they going to kill him?' I absently cuffed the back of his head and helped myself to another handful of sixberries. If the Land Mothers had allowed him to reach sanctuary,¹⁷ then who were we to question them? Either way, we knew that, respected, revived and refreshed, the fields around Furthest would be kind to us again this coming year.

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The Death of Jannisor by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest July 18, 1994)

(Author's Note: This tale is most common in the Southlands and Westlands of Imther. It is derived from two sources: The History of the Lunar Empire-1st Wane which appeared in Wyrms Footnotes 11 and an early Wyrms Footnotes article on the Twin Stars counter for Nomad Gods.)

Jannisor stood upon the Great Bridge, the Silver Road, rising high in argent radiance toward the mountain called the Crater and upon its edge, the City of Dreams. All looking at him knew him for a hero. His eyes, his stride, his voice all gave away his status. As if these were not enough, the unblinking eye of Brighteye his magic shield, the peculiar radiance of his Spear of Hope, and the dark aura of his netlike cloak all spoke of the hero who bore them. In all his army, there was only one who knew him as friend and companion, not as hero, and that was Onstheus, champion of the Mastine marl.

Behind the beard, fashioned as always in the style of Khelmal, and the crested helm given by the lords of Raibanth, Jannisor looked ahead toward the home of his final earthbound foe. He did not think now of his old friend and companion. He barely thought of the army behind him. Only his bride, the Sable Queen, broke upon his concentration.

¹⁶ Temple to the Horse God – and the Furthest horse-racing stadium.

¹⁷ If a captive manages to reach the temple, then he is deemed to have been pardoned by the Land Mothers. However, by next Yelmrise, he will have been cursed by them. If he ever is within earshot of the copper temple bells of the city where he was convicted, the land itself will turn against him. He will suffer a constant, debilitating weakness (an impediment at 10w). Local earth cultists will also realise that the individual is in some way cursed.

"Will he attack again?" asked the queen, referring to that eternal foe, the Red Emperor.

"Of that there is no doubt," replied Jannisor. "All that matters is the form he takes and when."

Jannisor made several motions to advance his forces up the bridge. Inhuman elvish archers moved first to clear the bridge of its remaining foes. Along the flanks moved the brutish nomads sitting on their shaggy horses. Behind Jannisor and his queen came first Karash'arll, the daemon of the Fourth Hell. The others who followed--the pikemen of Dara Happa, the Sable Riders, the southern allies led by Onstheus--all kept their space from the daemon.

For the moment few foes bothered Jannisor's army. Most of the Lunar army fell early when the lords of Shargash shattered the Outer Gates and crumbled buildings atop their foes. Those lords still kept the Lunar remnants at bay in the streets below.

Jannisor considered the likely actions of the Red Emperor, a cripple since their encounter two years prior. "So close to the heart of the Red Goddess," Jannisor thought, "is chaos not most likely? Yet I am prepared for that and he knows that, too." Jannisor thought upon the madmen bound to Tork, about the four-horned servitors which he dispatched as readily as the Emperor himself, about the power of the Emperor's own spirit. Jannisor thought about the Crimson Bat, the greatest chaos beast known to men. But surely that was needed in the provinces. "If he brings the bat here," said Jannisor to himself, "then surely he will lose the provinces to the Carmanians or others."

"What do you think, my husband," asked the Sable Queen, masked in her great horned helm.

"I think he pursues a devious and deadly plan. See now," and he pointed, "they come again."

"Then he is impatient and rash."

"No, not impatient," answered the hero. "He seeks to distract us. Guard your gift well for I am sure he seeks it."

The Sable Queen patted the pouch at her side, smiled, and winked at her husband. Within that pouch was the marriage gift from Jannisor himself, given at her request--the privy part of the Emperor taken by Jannisor when last the two had met. "Fear not. Only I have access to it. You can even see the wards upon it."

Jannisor turned his attention toward the advancing foe. More of the Imperial bodyguard approached, grim-faced soldiers with deeply scarred faces. Jannisor moved the Dara Happs forward. Cold-blooded strokes rained down upon the pikemen. The arrows of the elvish archers were matched by strange red comets streaking down from the heights of the Inner City. Men and elves cried out, but Jannisor marched on. With Karash'arll's aid, Jannisor cleared a path for others to follow.

"It is like moving through a forest," he said to his bride. "Save only that these trees would as soon kill you as shelter you."

Where Brighteye glared, grim-faced men fell and begged for mercy or red comets vanished as if mere illusions. Where Jannisor's Spear of Hope struck, the defenders were daunted and fell back. Where the daemon, Karash'arll, walked magic vanished and death spread. Before these weapons and the pikes of Dara Happa, the Lunars broke and fled.

It was not long before the next wave came. Now red-faced brothers and sons of the Emperor walked forward, sickles and scimitars glowing with the power of their magic. The elvish arrows bounced off their magic shields, falling harmlessly to the earth far below. Jannisor ordered the nomads forward in a furious assault followed by the solid phalanxes of pikemen. Honed to perfection, though, the moon sons proved deadly foes. Each move by a moon son brought down many of Jannisor's allies.

So Jannisor advanced. Brighteye's glare broke the lesser sons. The Sable Folk, led now by their queen, proved immune to the madness the moon sons sought to invoke and they brought down many of their foes. In the center of the fray, Jannisor met the five greatest of moon sons. He danced with them, circling first one way and then another. They met and parted and met again. They dropped when he rose and he rose when they dropped. Jannisor spun upon his heels and with each spin he struck with his spear. First one moon son and then another fell until all five lay dead. Jannisor repeated his dance with another group and another. Under the hero's deadly thrusts, the defenders fell back and Jannisor's army surged ahead.

Wiping sweat from his beard, Jannisor smiled at his bride. "It is like a game of Empire, each ploy and counterploy carefully designed to conceal the real strategy. But each move brings the game closer and closer to completion. I can feel the ending upon us."

Now invisible assassins sought the side of Jannisor, but Brighteye revealed them and Jannisor brought them down. Moon spiders dropped from the sky to seize the Sable Queen, but her blade was not mere ornamentation. She cut their life threads and led them down to hell itself. A demon with three heads, each shouting curses, came against them, but Karash'arll met it and took the curses. He wrestled it and crushed it and ate it to prove the curses worthless.

Jannisor now placed the Sable Folk on his right and the Dara Happs on his left. Onstheus held the center behind the hero as they reached the Dreaming Gate. The Sable Queen nodded approvingly and Jannisor said, "Now we shall see where the Emperor hides himself. The end is but one move away."

The Dreaming Gate stood open and mists shrouded the city within. Upon each side of the gate, raised up on twin pedestals, stood two women. Twins they were with flowing hair of crimson and scarlet. "Halt," cried the one upon the right who carried book and spear aloft. "Hold," cried the other who kept her hands concealed within her silver cloak.

Jannisor approached. "Begone maidens of the moon, lest I slay you, too."

The first twin, the one to his right, replied, "Hear me, people of the Lunar Deer! I am Erelia and I tell you that you are here to meet your mother. I am Erelia and I tell you that through you alone the Red Goddess came to shine upon your darkened land."

Before Erelia, the Sable Folk watched as her book opened and the annals of the Mothers poured forth. Words never heard before, words of the past, came out to the Sable Riders of a destiny they did not know. They sat confused, for they had not known these words, but the words spoke true for Brighteye did not dispel them.

The second twin, the one to his left, replied, "Hear me, Jannisor! I am Verelia and I tell you that you are here to meet your doom. I am Verelia and I tell you that your queen, your bride, has handled the member of your foe and has lain with it in darkened hall."

Before Verelia, Jannisor turned upon his bride and watched as confusion and guilt spread across the Sable Queen's face. Surprise and suspicion grew within the heart of Jannisor, feelings that he did not know. He sat confused for the words spoke true, but when he turned again to his bride, Verelia cast her cloak upon his shield, the magical Brighteye. Naked but for a dagger, she caught the hero from the side and plunged her dagger into his back.

As Jannisor fell, chaos erupted on the field of battle. Nomads and elves in the rear charged upon the Sable Folk calling them traitors to the hero. The Full Moon Corps charged out from the gate to meet the Dara Happans while Crater Makers hurled great stones upon the pikemen. A tentacled demon reached up from beneath the bridge and pulled Karash'arll down.

Around the body of Jannisor was a fight for the hero's soul. Erelia with her magic book stole the mind of Jannisor and locked it shut within. Verelia pulled Brighteye from his arm and carried it into the City of Dreams. But Onstheus, champion of the Mastine marl, stood over Jannisor, shielding him from soul-wasting blows, while the Imtherian allies, whether Mastine or Cratar, Laramite or Wilktar, fought the dreams that drive men mad.

When the Red Emperor marched out and claimed the Sable Queen as his bride, Onstheus slew the traitoress. When the Red Emperor freed his own spirit to roam again, Onstheus turned it with the Spear of Hope. And when the Red Emperor sought to take a third grisly portion from the hero, Onstheus stopped all the dark and deadly blows with his mighty Shield of Light. Then Onstheus wrapped the hero's body within the fisher's net cloak and carried the body from the bridge.

The Cratar marl gave up its soul to allow Onstheus to carry Jannisor to safety. The Mastine, Laramite, and Wilktar marls led the moon sons on a merry chase away from Onstheus' path from which few returned. And at an unknown hill in far Kostaddi, Onstheus, who had shared his cheese with Jannisor, burnt the body, cloak, and soul of his friend and companion so the hero could escape to live again.

Upon the Great Bridge, the Silver Road, rising high in argent radiance toward the mountain called the Crater stood the Red Emperor. All looking at him now knew him for a hero. The Emperor was whole again and his gaze swept wide across the southern lands as he planned for his next victory.

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The Death of the Hearthmother by Harald Smith and Peter Michaels

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest September 19, 1994)

In the days when Lodrem wandered on and within the earth, he had many children. One was called Enveria, a goddess of fire. When Yelem fell from the sky, the people called upon Enveria for help and she aided them for Enveria was the Communal Fire. She lived both among the people on the world below and among the gods in the world above. Among the people, she lived in every fire they lit: the hearth, the candle, the bonfire, etc... She helped and aided the people, providing them with a spirit of community as well as with tools to warm themselves with and to guide themselves thereby.

One day, Orlantio espied her and desired her for himself. He came to Enveria as a gentle breeze, but she shied away. He came to her again, winds swirling around, but she tried to escape and eluded his grasp. Finally, he came to her to show her his great majesty¹⁸ with a cape of huge clouds and a mighty flail which he waved around himself. Enveria tried to run from this terror, but the storm was too great. The ground tore up around her and she tripped upon an uprooted tree. Orlantio, in his lust madness, did not see that she had fallen. He brought his flail down upon the tree and Enveria, destroying her very being. Orlantio howled in fury, but it was too late. Enveria fled upon the path of Yelem and finally escaped from Orlantio's clutches. But upon the earth, the people were left without fire and they grew cold and hungry.¹⁹

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A Dragonewt Joke by Andrew Solovay

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest RPG Digest July 09, 2003)

Q: How many dragonewts does it take to refill a lamp?

A: The wind in an empty forest.

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Drogarsi and the Three New Things by Jeff Kyer

Before there was the Storm Tribe and before Orlanth saved us all from Stasis, there was no music.

¹⁸ Among the southern clans: Orlantio comes to her engorged with lust.

¹⁹ Among the northern clans, especially along the border with Tork, a variation is told: Enveria ran into the Darkness in an attempt to escape Orlantio. In her panic, she ran into a horrible demon named Bagog. When Orlantio saw what Enveria had met, his lust left him and he quietly slunk away amidst the shadows. Bagog devoured, enslaved, and perverted Enveria, forcing her to become the community focus for her terrible children. Upon the earth, the people were left without fire or a sense of unity, and they grew cold, hungry, and isolated.

One day, Wandering Drogarsi found something he had not seen before. He chanced upon the body of a strange beast on the edge of the wildlands far from Orlanth's Camp. The small winds accompanying him made an appealing moan as they played through the reeds nearby horns. Inspired, Drogarsi took the creature's bronze horns and fashioned the wind instrument. He smiled at the tones for he had sung and drummed but nothing like this had been heard.

Others heard the sound and came to listen. They had heard nothing like this either. Some of them clapped. Some of them danced. Some of them began to sing. But some of those who heard the music were afraid of the new thing. Some of them stood still. Some of them ran away and hid. Some of them ran and told the Emperor of the World. He had decreed that there would be no new things. When he heard of this New Thing, he was wrathful and sent his Guardians to punish Drogarsi. Ysar The Burning led the Guardians and many fled at his fearsome coming. Drogarsi then did another new thing: He played the first of the War Songs and those with him were heartened. They began to fight the evil Guardians with sticks rocks and spears. No one had resisted Ysar before and he fled howling.

After this, Drogarsi did the third New Thing and sang a Victory Song.

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A Dwarf's Task by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest May 18, 1995).

(Author's notes : The following is a tale heard in the Southlands of Imther. The speaker is thought to be a former innkeeper in the village of Moonpost, though at least one other innkeeper claims that this is untrue and that the Moonpost innkeeper had stolen someone else's story).

You've never seen a dwarf you say? Well, you are a young one still and you may have a chance yet, though they don't come down this way often. Why I've only seen them twice myself and once was at a distance while I journeyed in the mountains.

But some twenty-eight years ago, right around when your father was born, we were over at Valusi Villa²⁰ for the Khelmal Festival.²¹ Unusual, that was, to go to the Marex' own village instead of Storbeth or Munn's Grotto.²² But the Marex invited us and we could hardly refuse.

²⁰ The Valusi are one of the clans of the Southlands of Imther. They are known for their conservative ways.

²¹ The Festival of Khelmal is a weeklong celebration of the leading god of Imther during Fireseason. It culminates in Khelmal's High Holy Day.

²² Storbeth and Munn's Grotto are two villages within the land of the Valusi.

So we were over there and the festivities had barely started when a shrill blast upon a horn brought us to attention. Corvoral's father, Durdaral, was Marex²³ then and he stood upon a dais to address us. When he finished, this little short fellow, stood upon it and spoke. Could barely understand a word he said either. But Durdaral said that this dwarf fellow sought volunteers for a glorious task to aid the restoration of the world. In return, there would be a rich reward. Though I never knew it was still in need of restoration, I was always willing to gain a good reward, so I volunteered as did several others of bold and daring natures.

I was the first to arrive at the dwarf's tent and the servant escorted me in. There upon a small stool sat this very dwarf with hair and beard as rich as sunlight and a twinkle in his eye.²⁴ Before him lay this great book and he held a short twig in his hand.

"What is the task?" I said, for I was ready for any task.

"Sitteth thy gross rotundity 'pon yonder throne," he replied.²⁵

Now this made little sense since there was hardly a throne in the tent, nor would I have presumed to sit on such if there had been. But there was another stool and since he pointed in that direction, I sat. Of course, I was not stupid either. Since that action seemed to satisfy him, I immediately asked for the reward.

"Reward?" he said.

"Yes. Clearly I have performed your task," I answered, "therefore I should receive fair coin."

He looked puzzled for a moment, but then seemed to understand. He cranked some device at his belt and a coin fell out.²⁶ He gave it to me. My jaw nearly dropped then, for this way a whole gold piece, not like the kind the Lokarma merchants make of course, but I know my gold. I quickly tucked it in my pocket and looked back at him.

"Completesth thou thy truest accounting?"

I nodded agreement with this statement though it did confuse me somewhat. He continued though.

"Answereth thou the understandings for these vocabularies."

I nodded again, though I didn't truly understand what he was getting at.

"Combhead".

²³ The Valusi family itself leads the entire clan. The head of the family is the Marex or lord.

²⁴ Dwarfs with golden hair and beard are among the two most common types of dwarfs found among men in Imther. They are referred to as Gold Dwarfs by those with knowledge of such things.

²⁵ Imtherian dwarfs who come to the surface are difficult to understand for they commonly speak an archaic version of Imtherian (a Pelorian Theyalan tongue related to Tarshite).

²⁶ The dwarfs are known to carry their coins in strange metal containers, usually attached to their belts.

I was puzzled. What did he want to know? Was this part of the task? I knew my hair was messy so I ran my hand through it. This did not seem to get a reaction from him. But then I thought this might be a word test so I gave the first answer that came to mind.

"Do you mean 'a cock'?"

"Cock?" he said. I nodded and next thing I know he is scribbling with this stick in that book of his. When he finished, he reached for his belt, cranked the device and handed me another coin. I took it without hesitation, of course.

"Hors d'oeuvre".

Again I was puzzled, but figured I might as well give some answer. As long as I got coins for answers, I was going to give them.

"You must mean 'the whore's song'. Verse, song, yes?"

He looked as if he would throw me out then and there, but then he's scribbling again in that book and tossing me a coin.

This went on for ten more words and I left there a good 12 wheels the richer. That's how I got this inn, you know.

Never did get a real man's task out of it, though. Nor did any others who met this dwarf. Don't even know what that book was all about, though my guess is he was working out strange magics. But I tell you all, should you ever meet a dwarf, you just make sure you bargain with them first and get the best deal you can for they don't know the meaning of good coin.²⁷

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Elmal and Gold-Hoarder by David Dunham

Author's notes: "I wanted to portray Survilstar's "invention" of Carmanian dragonslaying in my Imperial Age game (currently a few years before the Mongoose RQ "now"). I came up with a quick myth that I hoped would fit the story."

Gold-Hoarder was a fearsome foe. By promising great gifts, he lured away many of Elmal's friends. (As Elmal had warned, these gifts were not nearly as glittering once received.)

But Gold-Hoarder had not gained his wealth by accident; he was a deadly warrior, and drove Elmal from the battlefield. Elmal was hard-pressed to blind him momentarily, so he didn't see the homestead and

²⁷ This tale is unusual, though not unique. The majority of tales record how the dwarfs end up with the best treasures.

passed it by. Some of those Elmal defended, disheartened by his defeat, departed. Others proposed to pay tribute to Gold-Hoarder, but Elmal convinced them what lay at the end of this road.

Elmal's own faith was never shaken, but he realized he would need a different approach. "Being loyal and steadfast is one thing, but I must also be clever. Sometimes the best way to defend is to attack. Gold-Hoarder is taking advantage of the greed and fear of the people. I must take advantage of his weakness."

Elmal went to where he knew Gold-Hoarder would travel. He waited patiently, watching. Finally he saw what treasure Gold-Hoarder valued above all.

[Variants here include having it stolen, finding a similar one, or challenging Gold-Hoarder for this. With Gold-Hoarder enraged or distracted, Elmal defeats him, but suffered a grievous wound]

Here's Rob Helm's writeup of how the quest worked. The players are members of the Longneedle clan of Anadikki. I've edited out some character-specific stuff. We began the quest late in the session, so I ran it quickly, without as much detail as usual. Note how even though the myth is only about Elmal, all the player heroes can participate.

Player Characters

- Anukal: devotee of Elmal (most have turned to Yelmalio) [Michael]
- Lormak: surly hunter of Urtelos (the bear) [Neil]
- Orlev: hot-headed warrior [Mike]
- Tanekke: forager and worshipper of Darkka (the bear) [Rob]
- Voski: piper, who spent part of his youth in Carmania [Pam]

To Brolia Again (Summer 902)

Orlev was enthusiastic about the possibilities of loot and glory from fighting dragons in Brolia on behalf of the new Shah of Carmania. Voski and Lormak were quick to agree, although Voski inquired whether

"standing around and getting melted" was part of the plan.²⁸ Not at all, said Orlev. "And if the Shah gets melted again, we'll run away, come back to the puddle, and be rich."

"If you are seeking gold," observed Anukal, "don't forget to put enough away to pay for carriage of the dead."

"If we are killed by dragons, we'll be immolated on the spot and sent to Orlanth's hall," replied Orlev. "Sheep die, cattle die, kinsmen die, the only thing that doesn't die is glory well won."

"We should not be seeking glory," Anukal said, but nevertheless reluctantly agreed to accompany an expedition with that goal.

²⁸ Shah Saman the Lion's magnificent golden armor was melted at Lionkill.

The ring was favorably inclined to let warriors join Londrulf Windeye in Brolia²⁹. Knowing they would need auxiliaries, Tanekke reluctantly handed Brynith over to one of Kolbyr's sisters and joined the warriors, laden with food and healing supplies.

Meeting Londrulf

We reached Brolia after a long but uneventful journey. Not long after, we caught signs of a seventeen-person EWF patrol. Lormak led us to evade them, helped by Orlev's advice on likely-looking hiding spots, but in the end they spotted us and began to close on us. So we took to our heels. Voski said a prayer over Tanekke to speed her up, and a good thing, because she barely managed to keep up with the men. But in the end, we outdistanced our pursuers with Orlanth's help.

We were eventually spotted by Londrulf Windeye's sentinels and brought to him. Lormak and Tanekke gave gifts of food and mead, for the next holy day. "May the taste remind you of our land and renew you in your protection of it," Tanekke wished him.³⁰

He looked much worse than before, harried and drawn, but Orlev observed, "You look excellent for a dead man."³¹

"Death could not stop me from fighting the dragons," Londrulf replied. "But it seems that I won't need to take the vow of a Windlord to never sleep twice under the same roof, with all the warriors pursuing me!"

His men were dispersed to avoid being spotted, although Londrulf said that he could call them at need.

We asked for news of the Carmania army, and whether they had aided Londrulf. Londrulf said he had met the warlord of Carmania, Survilstar, brother of the Shah.

"The warlord is trying to learn the ways of the dragons," said Londrulf, "He did not bring a great army, just his companions. Few speak any Anadikking, other than a certain Sir Javinu." (Voski was pleased to hear a familiar name).

Londrulf said that Carmanian aid would be useful, but he was loath to attract too much EWF attention, and the northerners might not be as useful as we hoped. "They are bright and soft, like the gold they carry," agreed Lormak.

Seeking the Carmanians

Londrulf gave us permission to make contact with the Carmanians, in hope of identifying a target for a joint strike. We headed off in the direction that he had last seen Survilstar. On the way, we met a Brolian

²⁹ Londrulf Windeye is a noted resistance fighter from Anadikki.

³⁰ Londrulf has been in Brolia for several years, having been outlawed by his own clan when they became dragonfriends.

³¹ There had been rumors that the EWF had finally killed Londrulf.

hunting party who told Orlev of the sad death of his paramour.³² Orlev mourned copiously, and gave them two javelin heads, earning their friendship. The Brolians reported that dragonfriends had been hunting them for helping the rebels. "We have no quarrel with the dragons," they said. "We just don't want them here."

The Brolians shared what they had as we rested for a meal. They indicated that Londrulf and Varnorl³³, despite their grudging entente, had not been getting along. They could point us to the Carmanians: "Horses are good eating. You have to drive them into a gopher field to break their legs.³⁴ You have to pick the right fields though, there are oddly-pocked holes that don't go down far. Those are where Arkat's great handfuls of salt gouged out the craters, when he cursed our lands."

We proceeded toward the Carmanian camp and were soon challenged in the strange language of Tawari sentries. Voski gave the proper greeting in Carmanian and was taken to meet the warlord. The horsemen enjoyed the luxury of a real camp, with a fancy pavilion, concealed so well by the magic of warding rods that even Lormak might have missed it. We caught glimpses of horses, warriors playing some kind of board game, and Carmanian magicians with pointy hats looking into crystal balls. Voski was please to warmly greet Sir Javinu, who replied briefly in our own language. (Voski later observed that the knight's accent had not improved.)

Voski introduced his companions: Lormak the Pleasant, Orlev the Bold, Anukal the Stout (of heart), and Tanekke the Angry, and said that we had answered the Carmanian call for fighters. We boasted of dragon-slaying deeds, which Sir Javinu said that we should recount to the warlord. As we headed for the warlord's tent, Sir Javinu explained the Carmanian's enmity with the dragons: "They are of the dark god, who took dragon form to take out the eyes of the light god." We said that as for us, our people were weak and starving under the dragon tribute, and ready to join such a strong and wealth ally against the scaly menace.

Survilstar's Quest

Survilstar, warlord and brother of the Shah came in, and the Carmanians knelt. Voski and the Anadikkings offered gifts and cheers. "We kneel to no man," Voski explained, "but we greet him as a great chief in our own way." (Tanekke and Voski observed that Javinu's translation left out the part about not kneeling).

Javinu then explained the warlord's goal: To follow a myth to discover the weakness of a dragon and then defeat it, just as high light god Idovanus had done³⁵. He asked if we have myths of defeating dragons. The warlord believed that he could not kill a dragon directly with the myth of his own people, because the dragon did not actually die in "The Battle of Two," and pursuing that story might bind

³² She had died in childbirth; I'm running a saga-style game using Pendragon rules for annual family events.

³³ Varnorl Dragonbreaker is a rebel from Dragon Pass itself, from Starfire Ridge.

³⁴ In our game, gophers have become the theme of impoverished Brolia. I blame Mike O'Connor's marvelous illustrations.

³⁵ See *The Fortunate Succession*, p.94-95.

Survilstar to one side in the battle of Light and Darkness. "Balance is the preferred order of things. If you turn too much to the Light, you create a shadow, as Lokamayadon created Arkat."

Having heard the Carmanian story of their dual gods, Anukal was intrigued by parallels between Elmal's defeat of Hoarder of Gold and the struggle of the bright god of Carmania. He told how the Hoarder lured people away by their greed, though his gifts are not nearly as glittering once they have been received, and how Elmal discovered his weakness. Voski also described how Orlanth prepared to kill Aroka, but Survilstar did not think it was as likely to be effective: "The Lion Shah prepared carefully to kill a dragon, as your wind god did in that story, but my uncle died all the same."

Lormak then asked the obvious question, "What's in it for us?" which Tanekke repeated more loudly, and in Carmanian. More eloquently, Voski pointed out, "Our clan suffered greatly to support the Shah at the Lionkill and is weighted under the tribute of the dragons.³⁶ They deserve wergild for their greatest priest of light, and for the four warriors we place at risk." Anukal nearly queered the deal when he protested to Voski, "This is a sacred myth of Elmal, not something to be haggled over. Is this man honorable? If you believe in him then I will risk what it takes."

The calculations and negotiations were sped by a sudden hue and cry: A full-sized dragon, not just a wyvern, had been sighted to the south. Under this sign, we began to prepare for a ritual on Victorious Sun Day.³⁷

Preparing for Gold Hoarder

Survilstar gathered many oxen to sacrifice³⁸, while Orlev enjoyed the warlord's thanely hospitality in full. His revels were redoubled when news reached us that Varnorl Dragonbreaker had defeated the flying dragon we had spotted.³⁹ Strangely, the warlord did not join his men whooping it with strong drink in Carmanian fashion: For all his wealth, he seemed less free than a chief.

Some of the preparations were aided by a truly weird foreigner among the warlord's advisors: a man with dark brown skin and a bizarre accent to his Carmanian, who said he came from the distant south, across the ocean. He claimed to have a degree in heroquesting from a university.⁴⁰ When Lormak hoped to pull Leikulf⁴¹ into the quest as Gold Hoarder, the foreigner observed that anything would be possible, but the most likely foe drawn in would be the dragon that Survilstar would ultimately kill with the secret learned.

That dragon soon revealed itself. Runners reported that a great legless wyrm was approaching from the east, travelling along the ground. It was immense, tall as a lodge but ten times as long. It moved slowly, but covered ground quickly, because it moved day and night. Its path was taking it where Varnorl had

³⁶ Clans that fought alongside Saman the Lion have been assessed double tribute. Many of the PCs have been suffering wealth penalties as a consequence.

³⁷ Sacred to Elmal,

³⁸ The Shah's brother has an unlimited budget.

³⁹ Varnorl's command of the winds lets him smash dragons into the ground.

⁴⁰ University of Newfroswal, famed throughout the Empire of the Middle Sea.

⁴¹ Lormak's rival suitor (who happens to be Londrulf's dragon-loving brother)

defeated the earlier, flying dragon. Orlev and Lormak resolved to go to that spot and get dragon scales for an effigy, and see if Varnorl would come on the heroquest.

They found Varnorl preparing to face the oncoming wyrm. Reports came that it was shiny, almost as if it were made of rubies. ("Beautiful," observed Lormak. "All we need is one fistful of its hide to make this trip worthwhile.") Though the wyrm was huge, it left a surprisingly small swathe of destruction as it came slithering through Brolia's scrubby trees.

Varnorl was still in good shape compared to the haggard Londrulf, excited at the opportunity to meet the foe. So excited, in fact, that he refused to join the ritual. "The great dragon is just on the other side of that ridge," he said, pointing. "And I cannot run away from a dragon."

"We aren't asking you to run away," said Voski. "We are calling on you to fight it, as Orlanth. The brother of the Shah has heard of your great deeds and sent us personally for your help."

"You will not lose this beast," Lormak added, "for I swear by all that is sacred that I can track it."

Persuaded, Varnorl set out with the Longneedles and his retinue, and arrived just in the nick of time. His arrival set off a flurry of activity among the Carmanian magicians, as they reworked their star sightings to fit him into the ritual.

The Quest

The plan was to drop out of the quest after learning the dragon's weakness.⁴² With the great sacrifices that the Carmanians could provide⁴³, we were soon under the orange skies of the Storm Age. But the landscape was strange: Orlanth's people were hiding in camp, under attack by a great wyrm. When Varnorl, as Elmal's champion, challenged the creature, it opened its mouth, tall as four houses, and drew in a vast breath. Varnorl disappeared into its maw in an instant, and we were driven from the battlefield.

As we brooded on our defeat, the wyrm appeared in Orlev's thoughts, promising him great wealth. "You could have your own ruby cloak if you join me," it whispered, "and ruby armor as well. Rubies as big as a dragonewt's egg. No woman could take her eyes off you."

"You are a dragon, full of lies," retorted Orlev. "Everyone who talks with you comes off worst, while everyone who fights at least has a chance." Loyal to Anukal, he turned away from the monster, and convinced many others not to take the dragon's poisoned gifts.

As the monster drew nearer, Tanekke led the villagers to hide from the approaching monster in the earth. Elmal (Anukal) shone brightly despite his fear of the dragon, and blinded it to hide the village. However, in their refuge, the villagers thought that Elmal looked weak. "Why don't we just buy it off?" asked some. Then Voski as Drogarsi struck up the notes of the Lionheart Way, and Elmal pointed out that freedom and courage were the only alternative, that the dragon would just suck them dry if they began to pay tribute. Encouraged, the villagers pledged to keep up their resistance.

⁴² See HeroQuest, p.200. First edition.

⁴³ See note 11. No need to roll for the crossover...

Elmal then sought to find what the dragon treasured most, hoping to use that against him. Orlev puzzled over the wyrm's pattern of travel (including a flight from the air), aided by careful tracking of Lormak, and determined where it would be going next. When the wyrm reached that spot, Elmal's huntsman Lormak was there waiting, concealed. He saw the wyrm lingering to look into a still pond at a missing scale on its belly, before going on. And so he learned that what the wyrm most valued was itself.

Attack on the Dragon

We returned to the Mortal World (or what the southern sage called "the Mundane Plane") with Survilstar. He immediately gathered a Carmanian army to confront the ruby dragon. The EWF forces deployed in response. Not many locals emerged. Londrulf stayed away, blaming the Carmanians for the loss of Varnorl, leading some to grumble that he honored his ally more in death than he had in life.

The ruby wyrm came after the army at once, sometimes sweeping the ground, sometimes snapping its jaws, killing dozens of men at a blow. But it did not realize as it drove toward the center of the force that Lormak and Survilstar were buried in a gopher hole⁴⁴, waiting for their moment. Although Survilstar had refused to wear the proper gopher hat for the occasion, he at last spotted the dragon's vulnerable spot. Striking out of darkness, guided by the light of Knowledge, he called on Idovanus and killed the monster with a single blow. He emerged from the gopher hole covered in dragon blood but still aglow, to count the hundreds who had sacrificed themselves to enable him to kill the creature, and start what he hoped would be a glorious career of dragonslaying.

The Longneedles had survived the battle. Voski, Lormak, and Orlev all managed to kill and loot retreating EWFites. Anukal was slightly wounded.

Aftermath

As we returned home we brought Londrulf the news: Two dragons dead, and a great dragonslaying hero arisen. Londrulf was impressed, and appeared more likely to help us.

And here is

Nick Brooke's writeup:

902 - Samandar's half-brother Survilstar discovers the Carmanian Dragonslaying with aid of refugee Brolian anti-EWF fanatics. First time is like Siegfried and Fafnir: the old pit trick against one of the crawling Behemoth dragons (combines darkness/concealment with the bright death wielded by Our Hero). Survilstar must do this to prove himself to the rebels.

©David Dunham

⁴⁴ I presume this is metaphorical on behalf of the chronicler. The pit was obviously a bit larger.

End of Term Exam by Hervé Ancelin

The following document has recently been acquired by the Library of Nochet. It was found with other objects of the Middle Sea Empire in Slontos among debris pushed inland by the waves of the submersion.

According to the Issaries priest who sold it, another expedition is planned but he refused to reveal other details.

End of term exam 702 ST, University of Irenstos, Department of Applied Mythology, 2nd level.

Reminder to the students :

- Mind and memory altering by magical or mundane means are forbidden except Blessings by a member of the Holy Church.
- Communication with any kind of being or object, dead or alive, is forbidden for the duration of the exam.
- Time flow tampering of any kind is forbidden.
- Wardings of different natures will be in effect to enforce these restrictions. They may cause permanent damage to transgressors.
- Proofs of successful transgression(s) brought by the author after the exam will not be sanctioned and he will get a bonus in the "Dealing with pagans" exam.
- Countermeasure for a successful transgression supplied by a student during the following week will be rewarded with a Prefect position for one year.

Mythology applied to Metallurgy.

Pagan theist worshippers of the Storm pantheon believe that brass can be obtained by mixing tin and copper because Umath was born of Earth and Sky (Lesson 5).

- Is this a mundane operation or a theistic ritual ? (1/2 scroll)
- What would be the explanation of this phenomenon given by a pagan theist worshipper of the pelorian Solar pantheon ? (1 scroll)
- What would be the explanation of this phenomenon given by the different kinds of pagan animists (Pent, the Waste, Left Hand path, Right Hand path, Hunschen) (Lesson 6) ? (5 scrolls)
- What would be the explanation of this phenomenon given by a pagan mystic from the East (Lesson 7) ? (2 scrolls)

- What is the true explanation (Lesson 4) ? (1/2 scroll)

- If this phenomenon is reversible, give an operating method, otherwise give an explanation of the blocking mechanism. (1 scroll)

You have until sunset.

May the Prophet give you the help that you deserve.

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Enkoshons the Dragon by Jamie "Trotsky" Revell

(Editor's Note: An Orlanthi myth about Vadrus (among others)).

It came to pass that, many seasons after Orlanth had slain Aroka the Dragon, the rains stopped once more. Orlanth was both puzzled and angered, and he called Heler to his hall, that he might explain himself.

"Why does it not rain?" asked Orlanth, "My carls are not able to till the land or grow their crops, because it is too dry! This is as bad as the old drought!"

"I am truly sorry," replied Heler, "but there is nothing I can do. As you will have seen for yourself, there are no clouds in the sky, and without clouds I cannot make rain."

"Then summon the clouds!" thundered Orlanth.

"This I cannot do," replied Heler, mournfully, "though I have tried mightily. Only my sister Tarena can make the clouds appear from clear air and, alas, she has been eaten by the Dragon Enkoshons, as I was by Aroka."

"Very well," replied Orlanth, "It is clear what I must do. I must find this new dragon and slay it, to release your sister. I have done such a thing once; I can do it again. Then we will have rain."

"Alas, no," responded Heler, appearing yet more dejected, "For Enkoshons knows what you did to his kinsman Aroka, and he will not allow you to come near. He skulks in some distant part of the world, I know not where, and should you approach, he will flee. He cannot be defeated by you, nor anyone within your clan."

"Then I shall send a message to all the corners of the world, for surely everyone suffers as we do. Let someone slay this wicked dragon!"

And so it was done.

It came to pass that, in the very northernmost parts of the world, a young godling was patrolling the bounds of his father's tula. There he encountered a terrible dragon, with glittering scales like ice crystals

and eyes of deepest violet. Knowing that he could not hope to challenge such a mighty foe, the godling, who was not yet fully initiated, fled to his father's stead, that more warriors might be brought.

Breathless and wild eyed, the godling blurted out the news to his father, and explained all that had happened. And Vadrus looked at Gagarth his son, and said, "You fucking useless gitt! Look at you, there ain't a bloody scratch on you! You wimp!"

Gagarth stamped his foot and wailed, "It's not fair! You're always picking on me!" and he whirled off to hide.

"Ah, well," thought Vadrus, "A dragon on my tula, eh? Great! I love a good scrap, me!"

At that moment there came a knocking on the door on the door to Vadrus' hall, "Hail, Vadrus, chieftain of the North Clan!" called a voice, "I come bearing a message from your brother, Orlanth."

"Bugger off!" said Vadrus.

"But it's really important! It's about the drought..."

"I don't bloody care! Come back when I'm less busy!"

So saying, Vadrus girded himself for battle. He put on his horned helmet of frozen iron and his magical cloak of white fur. In his right hand he grasped his axe, Galecutter, and in his left, his Hammer of Mighty Fun. Then he stormed off to meet the dragon that threatened his clan.

And there, at the edge of his tula, he encountered the mighty beast. "What have you got to say for yourself, you big scaly bastard?" he asked.

"You believe you can defeat me," replied Enkoshons, "but in this you are incorrect, for to do so you must first show true understanding, and this is against your very nature. Consider: when a butterfly is struck by the horns of a ram, is the butterfly injured? And when the cherry blossom falls from the tree, does the tree weep?"

"What the fucking hell are you talking about?"

"The path to true enlightenment is in this way: Consider the badger in its lair. When the..."

"Will you bloody well shut up? Just listen to yourself! You're talking shite! Are we going to fight or what?"

"Or what," replied the dragon, and disappeared in a flurry of snow. There in its place, stood a mighty maze of purest crystal, its paths of dazzling complexity, and filled with cunning traps and complex puzzles that only the most enlightened of gods could hope to solve.

So Vadrus hefted up his Hammer of Mighty Fun and smashed his way through the maze, crushing the crystal walls to powder and smashing the logic puzzles into tiny fragments. Eventually, he battered his

way to the centre of the maze, and there encountered a little old man with five nuts of varying shapes in front of him.

"That which you seek is concealed beneath one of these nuts," explained the old man, "but to learn which, you must first answer me this riddle: What..."

And Vadrus hacked off his head with Galecutter, and smashes the nuts to pieces with his hammer.

"Come out and face me, you big girl's blouse!" he roared.

At last the dragon leapt forth, and performed the Celestial Justice Power Strike.

So Vadrus nutted it.

The dragon performed the Graceful Happiness Seven-Fans Throw.

So Vadrus hacked its leg off at the knee.

Enkoshons performed the Maiden Faintly Surprised by the Unexpected Appearance of a Fox Counterstrike.

So Vadrus hurled it the ground and smashed its brains out with his hammer.

The dragon performed the Invisible Shadow Wisdom Leap and sprang back to life again.

"Will you bloody well stay dead when I kill you!" roared Vadrus and ripped the dragon open from crotch to throat with his axe, then scattered its innards across the land so that it could not re-form.

Just then, from within the slaughtered body of the dragon, the goddess Tarena stepped forth and raised her arms to the heavens to give thanks for her freedom. As she did so, clouds rushed forwards to fill the sky and the rain began to pour down everywhere across the parched earth.

And Vadrus looked at the blue-skinned goddess, as she stood there with rivulets of rainwater running down her naked body and thought to himself, "Hey up, I'm in luck tonight!"

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The Erdman's Bride: An Amad Folktale by Robert Darvall

(Author's note: It's a new yarn from Amad. Ostensibly a traditional one brought by the initial Kasdarni refugees).

Anwyn was the most beautiful of lass in the Kasdarni. Her hair was full and long and her figure firm and plump. All this and a mind of her own too. She would wander long on her own, fearing few and wise to brood and Uz. Come the berrying she'd go out by herself and return long after the evening bread started baking, for she knew the local sprites and they were feared of others. But for all her skill her Granma still feared for her saying "Beware the Erdman of The Needle. He likes young maidens."

'Twere in the earth season of her initiation year that she stayed out longer than e're before and returned with few berries. From this time her manner changed. She was e're stranger and more like to go wandering the high and hidden places, staying out o'ernight and returning with dawn but seeming fresh and rested.

Her family feared for her initiation. Would Ernalda take such a wild one? Or would she be claimed by Tara to become one of the wild Gwydas of the hills, eventually to be sacrificed on the wild altar? Their fears were for nought. She was initiated well and her omens were some of the best in years, promising wealth, long life and happiness mingled with no more than the ordinary griefs. So the stead made shift to find her a husband. Her omens and beauty attracted many suitors, all offering fine brideprice. But with each suitor she found fault. When asked of Venharl, the Chief's Thane and owner of 15 cows she said "He's too old. I'd rather marry the Erdman of The Needle."

Now her Granma hears this and says "Beware of what you wish for girl, You may get it." And then Golost Fleetfoot son of the Culbrea and but 4 years her senior is dismissed with "He's so ugly, I'd rather marry the Erdman of The Needle." and her Granma hears this and says "Beware of what you wish for girl, You may get it." So it goes with one for this and another for that 'til her suitor is none other than Joskin Twoday champion of the Maboder and a truly great man. But Anwyn says "He's so vain I'd rather marry the Erdman of The Needle". Lucky that only Granma hears and says "Beware of what you wish for girl, You may get it."

But her father was so incensed when she refuses the tribal champion he says "If it's the Erdman you want it's the Erdman you'll get." and goes to Herla Bedhopper to get help with the wooing of the Erdman. She tells him the right ways and off he goes. First he takes a cow to The Needle and leaves it o'ernight in a secret cave. Next morn the cow is gone so he knows the Erdman is listening. While he's at this Himself sends a lamb and a cock to Ernalda. When Himself returns from the cave in the morn he tells Herla to offer a marriage feast of beer and sticklepick. The Erdman appears and offers gold and Iron as brideprice. Herla tells Himself of the offer and, so as not to be shamed, he offers Whisky and sticklepick as the feast. The Erdman offers Iron and Bronze. Himself offers Whisky and mutton. Erdman offers Silver and Bronze. Himself offers Whisky and beef. At this last the Erdman says done.

"We will marry on Clayday of Fertility week in Earth season." and so it was done, but according to the Ernalda rites not the Orlanth ones as the Erdman is a thane of the Earth Mother and Anwyn her initiate. Come the marriage day though there was no shy bride nor yet a diffident groom. Anwyn's absences on the mountains were explained to all when the two rushed together. Himself near choked on his beer when he realised his daughter's ruse and herself had a face like pussie's bum. Still an' all the feasting went off well enough and the couple jumped the rill and went off to his house.

Life with the Erdman was, it seemed, not all she thought it to be. He took her to a small, mean, dwelling with rotting thatch and an unswept hearth. The Erdman says "This is my father's house where we shall have to stay until I recoup your brideprice. As it is to be our home for some time you can make it presentable." Her husband was for hunting a chamois for leather and the pot and left her with bread and cheese for lunch and cabbage and a bit of salt pork for their dinner. So Anwyn binds up her hair and

sets to with broom and water and spell to clean a place no-one has touched in over a year. While she was sweeping the stoop a ragged man came by. He begged for a bite to share with his wife and child as they collected firewood in the waste. Anwyn thought of the child and what it is to be very little and hungry and gave the stickpicker her lunch. So she went on though her stomach growled. She penned the sheep, fed the cows, and watered the pigs and chooks, all as had to be done before night. Then she went in to her now clean house and started on the dinner.

The Erdman returns come dark and is mighty pleased with the state of the house. "You make fine shift with the broom" he says " but why give good bread and cheese to the lazy and shiftless?"She says "First up it were mine to give and beside neighbours should support one another. If one base stone shifts the whole wall may crumble" and the Erdman has to make do with this answer for Anwyn has the right of it.

The next day Erdman shows her the cheese room with great rounds of cheese, thick as a man's leg and wide enough to be a table. "Wife" says the Erdman "None of the cheeses have been turned properly. I'm off down the valley snaring Eiders for their fat. Make sure the cheeses are well cared for." Anwyn looked at the cheeses. They were far too big for her on her own to turn. But for the making of huge cheeses you need huge cheese weights. The weights were too great, e'en for the Erdman, to lift. So there was a tackle installed to lift them. Anwyn got a couple of big baling hooks, slid them under one side of the cheese and tied them to the tackle. Then she lifted each cheese on its side and wheeled it to its place. Then she went in to make supper.

As is usual the sheepdog came to lie before the fire. It had not been there long when an Alynx stalked in, gave it a swipe and settled into its spot. "So master Yinkin" says Anwyn "you're as much of a bully as your brothers" and so saying she took up a broom and drove the Alynx to the other side of the fire leaving Shep in possession of his warm nook. The Erdman returns come dark and is mighty pleased with the state of the cheeses. "But" he asks "why drive the high from the prime spot to make room for the low." She says "The dog works for his place just as hard as the cat. Strength and size does not make Urox worth more to the stead than Mahome." "Well wife" says the Erdman "You are the lass for me. Hardworking, clever, generous and just." and so saying he dispels the glamour showing her the glories of the Hall Of the Thane of the Needle. "Thats all well" says Anwyn "but shouldn't you have figured that before you wed me?" The Erdman at least had the grace to look abashed.

Now Anwyn had been with the Erdman for just on a year and had a longing to see her own folk again. So she went to her husband to say she would go visiting. He was less than pleased. "This is not the pleasant thing you think it is wife of mine. You will not find things as you expect. Still if you must go return within eight days and not look toward your father's house within a day of leaving it." So Anwyn set out for her father's stead. Things were not as she remembered. She was greeted and offered hospitality by the man of the house. The little brother she'd left tending sheep was a warrior, grown and bearded. She asked how it was that he, not her father, was man of the house. "Father and both his brothers were killed 5 years gone, and our older brothers outlawed by their killers." In her grief Anwyn thought upon the words her husband had said. This was indeed not the pleasant thing she thought. But e'en then she thought, as women do, on vengeance for her kin.

She sped herself home to her Erdman, not looking back at all. That year she plagued the clan of her father's killers. Their sheep ran off cliffs, boulders bounced through their hunting camps and the man who outlawed her brothers was found alone by the goatkin. Come the year's end she wanted again to go to her family to see how they fared. So she went to her husband to say she would go visiting. He was less than pleased. "This is not the pleasant thing you think it is wife of mine. You will not find things as you expect. Still if you must go return within eight days and not look toward your father's house within a day of leaving it." So Anwyn set out for her father's stead.

Things were not as she remembered. She was greeted this time by her eldest brother sporting many tatoos and a significant paunch. "These seven years have been good ones little sister. But that our mother died of the brain fever all has gone well. Braggi oath-breaker who outlawed our men was taken by Broo some four years gone and so we came back to the stead. Since then we have prospered." But the news of her mother was too much for Anwyn. In her grief Anwyn thought upon the words her husband had said. This was indeed not the pleasant thing she thought. But e'en then she thought, as women do, on vengeance for her kin.

She sped herself home to her Erdman, not looking back at all. And for a year Anwyn harrassed the Broo. Rocks fell giving up their ambushes, caves collapsed burying their shamans, and their Malia Priestess was taken by rival Thanatari. Come the Year end she wanted again to see her family steading. So she went to her husband to say she would go visiting. He was less than pleased. "This is not the pleasant thing you think it is wife of mine. You will not find things as you expect. Still if you must go return within eight days and not look toward your father's house within a day of leaving it." So Anwyn set out for her father's stead.

Things were not as she remembered. A bearded Stormvoice greeted her as his older sister. This was the younger brother she left as a mightythane. "Well met sister. I took the stead when our brothers were lost to the Thanatari of the hills but all else has gone well." Anwyn took bread but the absence of her brothers weighed on her. In her grief Anwyn thought upon the words her husband had said. This was indeed not the pleasant thing she thought. But e'en then she thought, as women do, on vengeance for her kin. She sped herself home to her Erdman, not looking back at all.

That year she took vengeance on the Thanatari. Their secret places fell in, beasts nested in their scrolls and the Priderni found their high priest and he was long in dying. The year turned and she wanted once more to go to her kin. So she went to her husband to say she would go visiting. He was less than pleased. "This is not the pleasant thing you think it is wife of mine. You will not find things as you expect. Still if you must go return within eight days and not look toward your father's house within a day of leaving it." So Anwyn set out for her father's stead.

Things were not as she remembered. The Godi, her brother, was now a man of large belts and grey hair and the stead was much reduced. "The cursed Priderni burnt half the stead else all has been well" and Anwyn left greiving for the deaths of her playmates. In her grief Anwyn thought upon the words her husband had said. This was indeed not the pleasant thing she thought. But e'en then she thought, as women do, on vengeance for her kin. She sped herself home to her Erdman, not looking back at all.

That year the Priderni suffered. Their herds were lost in mountain storms. Their raiders were buried in rockslides and their holy places swallowed by the earth. Again at years end Anwyn would return to her folk. So she went to her husband to say she would go visiting. He was less than pleased. "This is not the pleasant thing you think it is wife of mine. You will not find things as you expect. Still if you must go return within eight days and not look toward your father's house within a day of leaving it." So Anwyn set out for her father's stead.

Things were not as she remembered. She was greeted by a crone. "Two years gone I laid out your brother, taken by Orlanth he was. Do you not know me? I was your playmate when we were both young." Anwyn was grieved. Grieved for the loss of family and friends, grieved for being young when all that knew her were old or gone. In her grief Anwyn thought upon the words her husband had said. This was indeed not the pleasant thing she thought. She sped herself home to her Erdman, not looking back at all. That year Anwyn gave birth to a healthy son. She came to show her kin the son of her love for the Erdman but none in the stead knew her. It is told that as she left she turned back and waved.

©Robert Darvall

Extracts from the Life of Saint Danbala by Barry Blatt

This is a lengthy account of the life of Saint Danbala.⁴⁵

Danbala was born in the ancient days when the people lived in the Southlands beyond the Great Ocean. In those times the people were, sad to say, Pagans who had never heard the word of Malkion and lived lives steeped in Error and Sin. As in other Pagan peoples Men lay with men, women with women, sheep with Goat and even Man with Goat, leading to the great curse of the Broo which has plagued the whole world ever afterward. They ate each other's Flesh, Raw, and they stole each other's property. Men coveted other men's goats, Lusted after their mules and Drooled Lasciviously over their Sheep ...
[Editor's note: This goes on for another three paragraphs even in the condensed version, here skipped for the sake of the sensitive reader]

Danbala was a shepherd who lived far away from the Sinful City of Oranis where these terrible events were a daily occurrence. He was a son of the Duke of that city, but had from an early age become

⁴⁵ This is a post-Rokari conversion account, and a highly condensed edition at that. All the older Saint's lives are constantly revised and extended in order to fit in with current religious thinking, justify various current political claims, invent new miracles to bring in the pilgrims and in the case of saints intimately involved with an Order or Guild to justify or even invent property rights and charters of liberty (in Pithdaro the Golden Monks of Saint Onokos have become infamous for this kind of fabrication, even claiming at one point that a Duke who died before Onokos was even born had exempted their founder and therefore the Order from paying import duties on Pasos wine). These additions are pretty ad hoc, and often further confused by crude removal of entire pages bearing possible heresies and/or possible elements useful for the concoction of a new spell, and rarely is the whole thing edited to make sure the account is still self consistent. This is great fun for the law courts and scholars and provides the raw material for many a doctrinal dispute.

disgusted with the behaviour of the people and had renounced his right to the throne to his brother Nisaro. One day, while tending his flock he heard the Great Voice of the Invisible God speaking to him from within.

‘Danbala,’ IT said, ‘Your people are Sinful and in Error and daily flout My Laws. They Worship False Idols and I am going to teach them a lesson. Return to the City and witness my wrath, and Tell Them that their ways Must Change or yet Greater Disaster lays ahead for them.’

So Danbala returned to the city and saw the Wrath of God, a hideous disease that struck down many with weeping sores and aching bones, with pustules and goiters, with buboes, lice and Great Stinking Wens upon the nether parts which...[skipped as before]

The people cried out in their agony to the Sorcerers of their City to save them, and the Sorcerers, many of them suffering these self same Woes, met in the great fane of the chief of their False Idols. Danbala attempted to gain entrance, to tell them of what the Great Voice had said, but he was Denied access.

The Sorcerers announced that they had divined that the miseries of the City were due to the Great Sins of the People, and Danbala was relieved; he thought they had realized their mistakes and now would turn to the path of Righteousness. But Nay! Their remedy was to plunge into even greater excesses of Sin and Error and Pagan Idolatry! They said they would draw out the sin of the people and transfer it to a Great Idol to be built of Brass upon the lip of a Mighty Volcano which was Sacred to one of the Demons who held them in Thrall. When all the sins had been transferred the Idol would be tipped in and thus, they reasoned in Their Great and Vainglorious Error, would all the troubles of the People disappear.

Danbala tried to tell them that they had made a Great Mistake, that this action, far from Pleasing God, would anger him even more. But the Sorcerers went among the people and with their Evil Tapping Magic drew from the people their sin and gave it to the architect of this Foul magic, a mean and crafty Sorcerer Called Bolongo.

Bolongo looked at Danbala and said: ‘Here is one who will not give up His Sin to Me, he is clutching it to himself thinking he, a puny shepherd, can dispose of it. Unless ALL the Sins of the City are Given to Me this Plague will rage on Forever!’

And he said further things, saying that Danbala had always Plotted against Them. He had not respected the customs of his ancestors, he had refused to lie with goats as his father had done, and his grandfather before him, he refused to drink blood and sacrifice the bloody flesh of his mother to the Idols, he had Refused to pick his nose and eat it, and it was rumoured that he had not even ... [deleted]

And the People turned on Danbala and beat him and chased him into the Wilderness, forbidding him to Return as he was accursed and Sinful in their Sight, and the cause of all their Woes.

Hunted and fearful Danbala hid in a Cave, and the Great Voice spake unto him again.

‘Danbala! You despair at the Error of your people! But Fear Not, for They Shall get Their Come-Uppance and they shall learn the Error of their ways!’

Danbala said ‘But they are Right! I am Sinful! Once I succumbed to Sloth and lay upon the Grass when I should have been watching my Flock, and another time, while alone looking at the Wonder of Your Heavens, I thought lustfully after the farmers daughter, and [deleted]’

‘My Son, I know all this,’ replied God, ‘I see All. And I forgive you, as you know that These things are Sinful and have troubled your heart and that You will not do them Again. The People do far worse and it Troubles their hearts Not, and That I cannot Forgive.’

And God told Danbala that there would be further Chastisements, but Danbala pleaded with Him that He show Mercy.

And day by day the great Brazen Idol grew, and they thanked Bolongo as the plague began to Abate. They gave him all their gold, as he commanded, and their flocks, and their daughters and their sons to do with as he Would.. Duke Nisaro grew troubled at this, as none of these things were really theirs to give, but belonged to him, their Rightful Lord. But such was the Power of Bolongo he raised the people against the Duke and drove him out of the Palace to join Danbala in his cave.

The Day of the Great Ritual arrived, when Bolongo was to cast all the sins into the mouth of the Idol erected in His Name and thence into the Maw of Hell. God Stopped the Sun in the Sky as a mighty warning not to proceed with this Blasphemy, but the People Heeded it Not, instead hurrying to give Bolongo all that they had in the hope he would be able to start the Sun again.⁴⁶

Bolongo, his Evil Smile hidden by a mask, climbed into the mouth of the Idol, which then stood and Poised itself on the brink as the People Gaspd in Awe. It then turned, and uttering a Mighty Snigger, ran amongst them squashing them like ants beneath its feet. It then strode among the Towers of their city and Cast Them All Down leaving the place a ruin. He then lowered his undergarment, made of beaten silver foil, and... [Editor – deleted through sheer disbelief.]

And the Great Idol did not stop there. It ran to the Sea where it fell upon the City of Thiras, a town of innocent fisherfolk who had in previous times been the Friends of the Citizens of Oranis. And thence it plunged into the Ocean, the seas boiling from its red hot skin, and all the beings of that sea died and floated putrefying on the boiling tide.

And the People Wept.

Danbala returned, saying unto Them, amongst other things, ‘I told you so.’

Danbala prayed unto the Invisible God before them and He allowed the Sun to continue on its path.

⁴⁶ Did all this really happen before the Sunstop? Scholars have argued about this over the centuries, but the claim occurs even in a fragmentary history that survived from the ninth century, which was apparently based on interviews with Pithdarans whose grandfathers apparently witnessed these events.

'Oh Danbala!' they cried, 'What shall we do?'

'Look ye upon thy works and despair!' said Danbala, 'The Beast created by Your foolishness and arrogance, made of the Vast Weight of Your Sins is now unleashed upon the world. It will destroy anything unless you redeem yourselves. You must find that thing and destroy it, and you must live your lives by God's Laws, then maybe you shall be forgiven for being so Stupid.'

And he Named the Idol Gbaji, the Great Deceiver, saying never again shall the monster's true name pass people's lips.⁴⁷

At his command they went unto the ruined city of Thiras and begged the people there to forgive them and did what they could to mend the damage Gbaji, the product of their own Sin had caused. They then built a mighty fleet of ships to pursue across the Ocean, felling three forests to do so, and set sail, following the path of Boiling and Polluted Water that the monster had left in its wake.⁴⁸

[There follows a long account of the voyage which was beset by storms. The fleet found a land devastated by Gbaji, at which they stopped and attempted to redeem their sins by putting things right. At one point the storms grew so bad they decided to go home and dumped Danbala and a few adherents on a desert island where they spent several weeks, miraculously feeling no hunger or thirst, being sustained only by fervent prayer. The fleet meanwhile ended up facing even worse storms and went round in a circle until they came across the same island where Danbala had been abandoned. They took him back on board and the storms abated.]

After a year and a day they arrived in the northern lands, and they were amazed at its beauty and richness. On the beaches they saw an army in battle array, all dressed in red surcoats with iron spears shining and at their head was a great hero bearing a Mighty sword that was wreathed in Fire.

At this the people shouted. Here at last was the foe Gbaji, or so they thought, and they prepared their weapons. Danbala, moved by an inspiration from God, stayed their hand.

'Be calm my people,' he said, 'We have come too far and struggled too much to make a mistake now. We are far from home, perhaps in the realm of the Deceiver himself, where All Appearances are to be Mistrusted and temptation and Sin lie all around.'

And so saying he took his brother Nisaro by the hand and jumped overboard, Miraculously walking ashore upon the waves.

⁴⁷ Gbaji is a western word, and unlikely to have been used even by the divinely wise Danbala. Pithdarans to this day still refuse to utter the name Bolongo aloud though, believing that to name him is to attract his unwelcome attention. Depending on their education and beliefs they call him Gbaji, the Masked One, the Great Sinner or the Sinner's Saint.

⁴⁸ Western scholars doubt this seriously since it implies they had large ocean going ships several centuries before the Battle of Tanien's Victory. They also appear to be going into the Togaro Ocean, which by every account known is suicidal. It is not known where Thiras was (see note 9), but if it was anywhere on the currently inhabited coasts of Pamaltela they must have been going south east. Yet they ended up northwest of their starting point and took 344 years to make a journey that they claim took 'a year and a day' including a lengthy shore break and going round in a circle for several weeks.

Nisaro laughed when he saw the men upon the shore close by. They were so small, and so weak looking. They were pale as fish and had to go astride strange beasts to get around. Danbala felt the magic and power within them and knew they would be a dangerous foe and stilled his brother's laughter.

'Laugh Not at these knock kneed Midgets,' he said, 'For even a Lame sheep is Scared to Our Lord, even if it is First into the Oven at Feast Time.'

'What brings you to our land?' said the man with the Flaming Sword. 'I am Duke Haran, ruler of this place and ask you in the name of God why you come arrayed as for War.'

Danbala fell on his knees at the mention of God and wept. Here at last there was faith! Here at last there was Law! When Duke Haran told them Gbaji threatened his fair land they immediately pledged themselves to fight by his side.

And so they disembarked and singing hymns and chanting the Praises of The Great God and His Holy Prophets they marched northwards. But Danbala was Unquiet in his heart. When they arrived in the North they found themselves at a great crevasse. And on the other side was another great army, all dressed in blue surcoats with iron spears shining and at their head a great hero who bore a sword that glittered with the cold of ice and snow.

'Death to Gbaji', cried the army, preparing to curse the enemy with the sight of their nether Parts, and to hurl darts and stones and javelins but Danbala again was more cautious and kept his Entirely Benetah his Sober Robe of Scarlet.

Taking his brother by the hand he stepped out into the void and miraculously flew across to the enemy beyond.

And Nisaro laughed again, for this army too was strange. The men here were even smaller, barely as high as his knee. They had dirty grey skins and the faces of dogs and cowered in the light reflected from his Golden Cuirass. But from behind these wretched creatures appeared another of their ilk. This creature loomed over Danbala and looked down upon him. Nisaro met his eye and ceased to laugh, though not to smile, and he knew at that moment that he would be seeing this creature again.⁴⁹

'What brings you to our land?' called out the hero with the Frozen Sword, 'I am Duke Narah, ruler of this place and ask you in the name of God why you come arrayed as for War?'

And again they spoke of Gbaji, and Danbala realized he had been deceived by Haran. Gbaji had been known in this land, said Narah, but was slain long ago.

'I think not,' said Danbala, smiling.

⁴⁹ Twenty years later in 740, Marshall Nisaro led the army of King Annmak the Peacemaker into the Dark Empire for a final showdown with Emperor Paslac. The only forces who managed to put up any serious resistance were Paslac's Uz regiments. Pithdaran troubadours have several rousing lays about Nisaro, and of course claim the hero as one of their own (and proudly point to the eight foot long tombstone in the Cathedral of St Danbala to prove it) but the same songs are known all across Seshnela and the southern Duchies and almost every district has a similar claim. No other church has his actual tomb though.

Danbala now realized where Gbaji had been all along. The great idol had been slain, it was true, but Gbaji lies everywhere, hidden in men's hearts, inspiring them to seek to deceive others for their own gain.⁵⁰

The army went Again South, not quite so jaunty as they Had been, intending to take ship and return to their own Land far to the South, but they found their fleet sunk and lying wrecked upon the beach. In their fury at Haran's deception they slew him, and they drove all the people of that land across the border into Nolos. Nisaro declared himself Duke of that land and took Haran's Flaming Sword to be his own.

Far away in the Iron Mountains, Emperor Ullamal took note of this and as he was pledged by his own Law to defend his Nobles he mobilized his army and prepared to do battle against the usurping Duke Nisaro.

On the Borders of the Duchy a Gigantick host assembled, with brazen graisles and leaden drums and Iron and Silver on the tips of their Spears and righteous anger written on their furrowed brows. And witnessing this sight the people did gnash their teeth and howl at the Sky and did Mess their Chainmail, but having Nowhere to Flee they Eventually Calmed Down and Prepared to Die fighting.

For a third time Danbala stayed his countrymen's hand and set off to meet Ullmal, but found all ways barred by his vengeful armies. Danbala took a spade from a peasant and dug a miraculous tunnel all the way from his own land to the Emperor's pavilion.

This pavilion was all of bronze, and was as big a cathedral. Around it stood Soldiers dressed in silvered armour and carrying greatswords as sharp as the wind. Danbala stepped inside and found a second pavilion all of silver, surrounded by wizards with snow white beards that brushed the ground, who walked in constant meditation among the fragrant fumes of incense from faraway lands. Inside this pavilion was a third, all of gold where all the princes of the Northland stood arrayed around their overlord, all in golden circlets with the light of the Invisible God's Authority in their eyes. And in the midst of them all was the Emperor himself, a triple crown teetering upon his powerful brow.

'What do you want?' asked the Emperor.

'To look into your eyes my Lord,' said Danbala. And he looked and he asked God 'Can I trust this Man?' And God replied 'Yes.'

The Emperor handed Danbala a copy of the Abiding Book, that had been written by the Hand of God Himself and said: 'War would be terrible, and your people will lose, mighty knights though they are. Rather than waste their blood and valour I would have them as vassals and would grant your Duke the land he took from that fool Haran in perpetuity to get it, but even Emperor's must obey God's law and there a certain things that must be done.'

⁵⁰ In some older versions this line ends 'and to deceive themselves.'

And he lay down his conditions, that the people, once of Oranis, foreswear all other Gods than the One True God and abide by God's Law as in the Abiding Book.

Danbala was amazed and praised the Emperor for his mercy, and carrying the Book he returned to the people and told them what had to be done.

And to his disappointment he found Gbaji waiting for him. While he had been away the people had set up temples, and had dragged the figureheads of the ships that had borne them across the sea up into the city, figureheads that bore the likenesses of their old idols and Demons, and were worshipping them and seeking sheep in the surrounding hills.

'Have you learned nothing!' he said. And he prophesied that one day the beast Gbaji would be made manifest again. If they persisted in their foolish idolatry then on that day they would all be destroyed once and for all. If they stayed faithful and followed the Law of Malkion, victory would be theirs. And the duchy has since been called Pithdaro, the Place of Waiting,

And the people were angry. 'You sound like Gbaji yourself!' they cried, 'We have suffered too Much at the hands of prophets and demagogues! The only things that we have never abandoned and have never abandoned us are our Idols, the ones our grandfathers carved and our fathers worshipped! Spout all you want! You led us here telling us Gbaji would be here and we would have our revenge on him, now we find he's gone! Tomorrow We Will die, and we want to go to the same Heaven as Our Fathers!'

'Tis not heaven where your fathers went,' said Danbala, 'For your fathers did lie with sheep! And it seems you have Inherited the Wits of your Mothers!'

And they set up a great stake in the market place and tied Danbala to it, with the Abiding Book held to his chest. They piled up faggots and they doused him with oil and chanting songs their grandfathers' had taught them they lit the pyre.

And Danbala cried out, but not in pain. He called out the names of the idols, and one by one they came out of the temples and marched across the square and the people were amazed. Each idol wept as it hurled itself into the fire to be consumed, and cried out the name of their master, Gbaji, but he never came to rescue them. And, too late, they saw that Danbala was more deserving of their love and respect than any bit of carved wood, and they saw they had killed him, and they went home to mourn.⁵¹

⁵¹ The Cathedral of Saint Danbala stands on the site, proudly displaying that very copy of the Abiding Book and a thurible of still miraculously smouldering ash (inhaling the smoke is a sovereign remedy for insanity, headaches and other diseases of the head). Now heretical versions of the Life claim Danbala was taken bodily up into heaven at this point, making him a proper Prophet of the Invisible God, and further allege that the idols were transformed into statues of Saints which walked back into the now sanctified temples. This formed the basis of the quasi-henotheistic heresy of Danbalism, long since extinguished by the Rokari Inquisition. If relations with the Seshnelans get any worse it might be revived.

And so Saint Danbala was martyred, but with him died all the False Gods of the Southland, and with those Gods died their names, and the foul practices that they had demanded of their followers, and now no one can say for sure what any of them were called.⁵²

In the morning Duke Nisaro rode out across the square in battle array and saw something among the ashes of the pyre where his brother had died. It was the Abiding Book, miraculously unburned. He had been planning to go to war with the Emperor that morning, but he decided he would swear fealty instead.⁵³

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Eyes of the Enlightening Comprehension by Giorgio Merigo

In the Dark Garden of Genert
Stalked the Devil's Son
Tien! Tien! Tien!
A name hollered, cried to be feared
By all mortal men who saw our Lord.

⁵² Except Bolongo of course, whose name is exactly the same as the one used in modern Jolar. The modern Pithdaran language is an accented form of Nolosì, with almost no remaining words of whatever language the Pithdarans spoke back in their ancient homeland, except for slang terms relating to theft, smuggling and prostitution and the word 'Ukasi' meaning 'Talk which comes out of the arse'.

⁵³ When the Duke of Nolos decided to secede from the Kingdom of Seshnela in 1578 the Pithdarans followed suit within the month. In legal disputes the Pithdarans claim that the Duke was installed by Ullamal in his capacity as Emperor of Land and Sea, to be part of the Empire, not as the King of Seshnela to be part of the Kingdom. Any tribute, homage, treaties or whatever paid by Dukes of Pithdaro to Kings of Seshnela and/or Dukes of Tanisor at any time since they ceased to be Emperors of Land and Sea as well was (and I would like to be clear on this m'lud) purely honorary or matters between equally sovereign princes (as defined in numerous statutes and treaties in Druvin the Verbose's Case Law in Inter and Intra Post-Imperial Relations volumes – err yes, I'll get the point...) and THEREFORE not legally binding in ANY WAY WHATSOEVER. (Thus the Duke is not asking for any cash or lands be returned, even though he has a watertight claim to large bits of Gilboch and pannage, cordage and coaling rights to the entirety of the Royal Forest of Laurac.) The documents relating to this, if there ever were any, all disappeared centuries ago conveniently enough.

As part of the Middle Sea Empire Pithdarans participated in expeditions to Pamaltela in the 860's, and since they stood the hot weather of Jolar better than Imperial troops from Seshnela and Fronela they formed a large part of the garrison controlling the Six Legged Empire. However, they failed to find any trace of a city called Oranis or a port called Thiras any where in Jolar or Fonrit, and no nation or tribe they contacted had any legends relating to a vast animated brass statue on top of a volcano.

South he fell, south he marched
Plundering, eating devouring,
A Monster Army Never Seen Since!
Till the Grey Sage used wit and guile,
And forced the legion back, unsated.

Eating a thousand learned men,
Tien had the mind, the stalwart thought,
That brought Lhankor Mhy to his Pit
A meal to feast, to chew for a decade
To suck his great mind dry.

With equal wit, with equal guile,
The cursed Sage escaped to freedom
Horrible freedom! Cursed freedom!
With rituals Tien marked his quarry
And all his legion chanted his doom.

In sacred vestibules, in the vacant rooms,
Of the shattered World Pinnacle
Tien took his fury on the Sage's wife
Never has tarnished silver cut so deep,
Her head fell from atop, and Knowledge was our Lords.

So in the Dark Hells, a Bull's Son came,
"Fight me!" He cried, "I am strong"
A battle was wrought, a fierce fight,
From Tien's severed neck came the son's demise
A darkness to envelop him, to seal him away.

His head lost, lying in cavernous Hell,
He fled to the Human Realm,
A monster with no head
Than! Than! Than!
A name hollered, cried to be feared.

But the head was not dead,
For Chaos was its soul,
But the Grey Sage found it,
Cast it to a far off water realm,
To lie where it could never be found.

A traitor to the Sage, years after Dawn,
Found the skull, and saw it's might,
Awakening its wrath to the world,
Atyar! Atyar! Atyar!
A name hollered, cried to be feared.

Atyar and Than wished to wed again,
Together they met, knit together again,
The Severed God, weaker than past whole,
Thanatar! Thanatar! Thanatar!
A name hollered, cried to be feared.

(An excerpt from the Book of Drastic Resolutions) by Nikk Effingham

Cosmology

When Yelm had been sent to the Underworld by Orlanth before Time, those gods somehow tied to the light followed him to Hell and among them was Elasa, goddess of the Light of Knowledge and spouse of Lhankor Mhy.

In the darkest period of the Storm Age, while all the gods were fighting and dying, the Unholy trio taking advantage of their weakness, completed its foul cabal and so the universal ties were lacerated.

Once the Cosmic Structure had been compromised, the Chaos Gods could gain their admittance from the deep emptiness.

They spread themselves throughout all Glorantha wreaking havoc, and tainting anything they reached or they were touched from.

Among them, one was the mortal enemy of Lhankor Mhy, Tien, still growing while he was himself creating.

During the Great Darkness, devoid of Elasa guidance, that who had been exiled and beheaded by Tien, Lhankor Mhy created the Supreme Scrolls, the ones which he utilised to share Knowledge with his followers.

Having done this, he joined other deities with repentant Orlanth, the LightBringers, in an impossible mission to bring back Yelm from Hell.

After incredible defeats and glorious victories, they reached their purpose and Lhankor Mhy, having revenged his spouse, obtained to bring her back with him to the Sacred Ground, in that same place at the beginning of Time, where they had the first and biggest Temple of Knowledge built.

Lhankor Mhy represents Knowledge

Elasa is the light of Truth unseen behind the Knowledge

Tien/Thanatar identifies stolen or corrupted Knowledge

Elasa's Fall

When furious Tien concentrated his efforts and researches with the double purpose of avenging himself of Lhankor Mhy and gaining full Knowledge, he unleashed all his wrath and hate against Elasa, consort of the Grey One.

She had followed Yelm to Hell, when he had been defeated by Orlanth and it was not difficult for Tien to find out where she was and to ambush her.

Ushered by multitudes of foul creatures and followed by slithering monsters, Tien vomited his deceitful darkness against the Goddess to isolate her, and He succeeded in befuddling Elasa just enough to come close to her.

Hundreds and then thousands of Chaos creatures threw themselves on the Goddess and the hundreds and the thousands were incinerated at the contact of her Pureness, until Tien, with his tarnished silver lace and ravenous greed, cut off Elasa's head, detaching it from the body to steal the truth kept within.

But as she was dying Elasa could have a quick glance of the future and a sneering grin appeared on her mouth the instant before her head fell off the body.

Scores of light beams burst from the severed neck and trunk, as Tien exulted delighted clutching his trophy, thousands and thousands of unnameable denizens laid on the ground in agony amid atrocious screams of pain as the light beams were hitting them passing through.

"Against the staining spark
Call for Hope
Light of Truth
Beams of Light in the dark "

Many dispersed in the void drawing the attention of other gods: Urox answered the call launching his hate and justice against the Chaos god.

Many faded as the brightness purged some of the Chaos: thousands and thousands of foul monsters were stricken where they were.

Many reflected ineffective off Tien renewed body: he had gained much more strength from the newly drawn knowledge.

But some were swallowed by minor demons and powerful followers: they were trying to mime their Lord's accomplishment.

Most of them could not survive the effort, too pure the True Knowledge for their might, but eight beams of light were 'frozen', revealing their material nature, and were collected.

The Eyes of Truth

Living crystals, incredibly pure, formed by a myriad of tiny luminous beams that recoil eternally shaping themselves into spheres similar to eye bulbs.

The havoc unleashed amid the Chaos creatures was caused by the impossibility of their bodies and minds to bear the beams of pure light and the immediate and violent truth that revealed them their corrupted nature and void origin. But once some of them were frozen into eight small spheres, the eyes were collected and used by their owners so that they could somehow work out the permanent powers.

The first creatures to own the living spheres, though very mighty, could not bear to watch directly at the spheres without suffering terrible torments, and in fact they used them just to impose themselves on other chaotic creatures as they could force them to stare into the Eyes of Truth.

Then Tien became Thanatar and his followers more capable and daring and here is the story of one of the Eyes of the Enlightening Comprehension.

Brazrog the idiot macaque with seven mouths laughed insanely as four creatures made only of arms were squeezed under its weight, and a fifth, similar to a dog but human headed, was held by the neck by a mortal grasp.

With the free hand he took his sphere of light found on the corpse of a monster it had killed. Savagely he thrust it on the human nose of the victim and it, fixing the eyes into it, roared in great pain.

The cacophony uttered from the seven mouths of Brazrog became a choked gurgling of agony as Radabar the Dog-Brood stabbed him again and again from behind.

The Sphere changed hand and Radabar, with his fetch he had saved, enveloped it in the transparent wing of an infernal bat to cancel its blamed powers.

After a time, the daring Radabar handed it over to a commanding shaman to gain his favour and he was beheaded, because he knew many things and the Shaman had an incredible thirst of knowledge.

Nurah-Silor together with some followers studied and experimented any kind of ritual and magic to try and use the intrinsic powers of the Eye, but it was its nature to be in complete contrast to Chaos so that none of its minions could ever really use it, never!

But after some decades a devotee of Lhankor Mhy was captured and no sooner was his head hanging from the belt of the Shaman of Thanatar than he had already formulated a new idea.

With trickery and cunning he succeeded in his purpose:

He enfolded the Eye in a magical permanent membrane with features similar to the envelop already used by Rarabar, he cast a very powerful illusion on himself, wearing the characteristics of the killed

Lhankor Mhy, and, when eventually the Eye looked at him benignant, thanks also to the newly acquired powers of Nurah-Silor, he suddenly established a complete and definitive link with his cult.

As the decades passed, the Sphere changed hand many times providing help to all the Thanatari owners (others of different chaotic cults tried to use the Eye, but failed wretchedly)

The most awesome place to find Thanatar followers is Than Ulbar, among the Tunnelled Hills, in the eastern part of the Wastelands, and Serpeo the petrifier was slowly acquiring power, and his rise had become less difficult since he used his Medusa head to turn to stone a broo leader of Malia, that who was troubling Serpeo in his bargain.

His skills in diplomacy were indeed the reason why the Cult often sent him as ambassador to potential allies to convince them to cooperate.

On that occasion, after having defeated the broo, he was not attacked by vengeful followers of the broo, instead they greeted Serpeo and agreed that it was good thing to join the Tunnelled Hills. Serpeo was given all the spoils of the killed leader as a gift, after he had used some of his abilities of course.

As he found out that among them there was an object that was especially attractive to him, he went back immediately to his hide, and telling none, began studying it finding soon out its powers and thus Serpeo rejoiced.

He always succeeded in handling the Eye of Elasa with extreme self control, when he was not away from the Thanatar temple in a diplomatic mission, and this helped him a lot as he knew what would happen to him they found it in his grasp.

Years passed and he became even more powerful, gaining allies more often than enemies, but one day, during the Fire season in year 1617, there were troubles near the Tunnelled Hills, a scorpionmen hive was destroyed and an extremely powerful artifact stolen.

The Tyrant of Than Ulbar decided to send some followers to discover the cause of this sudden and unforeseen loss, and Serpeo was to guide them.

But as he was near Prax, following a trail that would lead to the responsible of the assault at the Tunnelled Hills, he and his bodyguards were themselves ambushed and only him was left alive to be questioned.

Among the questioners there was Zarrus an acolyte of Lhankor Mhy from Pavis, the only one who didn't agree to spare his life even in exchange for vital information about Than Ulbar, since he hated the Thanatari with devout passion.

Serpeo succeeded again in using his subtle powers to gain some chance to survive betraying his lord and turning all of his belongings to the band who attacked him.

Unharmmed and alone Serpeo could not go back to Than Ulbar anymore and fled west not to be seen anymore, but hiding and using again his skill to become strong again, to avenge himself and to recover the extremely precious orb that was stolen and kept into custody by that unknowing and hated Lhankor Mhy.

As Zarrus kept the light of Elasa in his hands, he could not recognise it at first, being it so fouled and corrupted with a lurid membrane of Thanatari magic, but he could anyway perceive a strong power within so he brought it back to his temple in Pavis to be understood and studied with his Patron Hillar the Faded

Great was his stupor as he discovered the true nature of the object and painful was his heart as he understood what happened to the wife of his God.

With effort and time and with sanctified sacrifices he succeeded in bringing back the small sphere of light to his original state freeing it from the ties and nearly all the spells of the abhorred foe and with a ritual ceremony he celebrated his union with the sphere as a symbol of the more glorious one between Lhankor Mhy and Elasa.

The sphere of living crystal is made by tiny rays of light that reflect and turn constantly on themselves giving it the shape of an eye as big as a human one.

The Powers of the Eye:

-
- 1) Comprehension: doubts, dilemmas, misunderstandings and problems are clarified for True Knowledge (penalties in the Knowledge affinity or related feats are halved down)
 - 2) Truth: The touch of the bulb helps forcing the truth emerge.

Drawbacks:

-
- 1) The persons who becomes owner of the artifact has to accomplish a sacrifice before using the drenched powers and thus, being forced at first into a long long stare, some sort of myopia will affect the holder.
 - 2) Any Thanatari that should directly see the eye, would feel a special longing for it and will do anything to get it and tame it under his/her control.

Note:

Zarrus and his patron, even through his extreme efforts could not succeed in bringing it back to his primal state, and the Eye has now lost forever the power to cause pain to Chaotic beings that would look at it.

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Famous Five go Pillaging by Keith Nellist

(as originally appeared on the OpenGlorantha Mailing List)

A humourous spoof of Enid Blyton's Famous Five set in Glorantha.

Chapter One

'the Collapse of Lunar Imperialism=

Bill and Enid were coming back through Tadger's Field when suddenly they saw the collapse of Lunar Imperialism.

"Gosh," said Bill.

"So a combination of factors, both magical and martial, has brought down the mightiest Empire the world has yet seen." murmured Enid.

Soon they were home, and gobbling up their tea.

Enid inclined to the theory that imperialism of any sort was a self-defeating process and she argued her case forcefully until Kallyr sent them both off to bed.

"Good heavens," she said. "It won't be the first empire that's collapsed," and she tucked them up and snuffed out the candle. But secretly she was worried.

What would replace the Lunar hegemony? Would it mean a return to... she could hardly bring herself to think of it...

Argrath returned home late that night. He had had a bad day at work. Someone had thrown a thunderstone at him and broken four of his ribs, and he had caught his leg in a plough and severed it below the knee. As if that wasn't enough, he'd broken his nose sorting turnips and his heart had stopped beating for three minutes. He flopped down in the chair, killing the alynx.

"They're all taking about it down at the chief's stead." he said, pulling his boots off.

"What dear?" said Kallyr innocently.

"You know..." he said impatiently, breaking one of his legs just below the knee, "the collapse of Lunar Imperialism."

"I know", admitted Kallyr, "it worried me stiff when the children told me about it."

She put some butter on the table.

"Mmm...it's nice with butter," said Argrath.

"I suppose," said Kallyr, "that what with the collapse of Lunar Imperialism it'll mean the return to..."

"Sssh!" said Argrath, wrapping a tourniquet round his arm to stop the bleeding, "the children."

But Bill and Enid were wide awake in their beds, listening. What did the collapse of Lunar Imperialism mean for the ordinary Sartarite? What was it a return to...?

They were still awake an hour later when Argrath finished the table and came to bed damaging his skull on the door jamb.

Chapter Two

'the Dark Stranger=

Bill, Enid, Johnny, Liz and Paul were looking for bird's nests in Tadger's Wood when suddenly Liz looked up and gave a little gasp.

There...staring her in the face was a lean young man with piercing blue eyes and a cloak made from the pelt of a white bear.

"Ik kallhoved tak di gevinstsejre," he whispered.

From the little Yggite she knew she recognised only "kaalhoved" - a cabbage and "gevinstsejre" meaning "prizewinning".

"Would you like to come and meet my friends?" she asked him cautiously.

He nodded.

It was only then that she noticed that he had an army with him. At first glance it looked to be about 9000 strong, with bowmen in the front, spearcarriers on the flank and several thousand wolf pirates in the rear. She pretended not to notice and led her new friend into the clearing where Johnny, Paul, Bill and Enid were looking around anxiously for her.

"Hello!" said Enid, "who's this?"

"Look out!" said Pail noticing one of the spearmen idly running his spear through Kipper the alynx.

"Poor Kipper," said Enid.

In the massacre that followed, Argrath was decapitated (twice) and Moirades of Tarsh was sick (eight times). The children could hardly believe their eyes as many thousand of the infantry wiped out the Red Emperor, a newtling that had come to call and all of the rubble runners.

"Well!" said Enid, "this is a day!"

While they were burning the house to the ground, Bill and Johnny and Liz slipped away to see how things were back in Tadger's wood. There, sure enough, were piles of corpses, their parents and friends and all the neighbours. Many had their ears cut off and bits ripped away and...

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Finovan's First Raid by Jeff Kyer

Before Finnovan led the Great Raid on Aron, before he claimed Searing Bolt, he rode Rolling Thunder. This is a tale of how he gained his horse. In those days before he became the Raider he was no one special. He was a Thunderbrother but only a part of the fyrd. Other Thunderbrothers had tasks: Yavor hurled the lighting; Drogarsi played the pipes; and Vinga did everything well.

Finnovan was a young god in those days. His youth was spent fostered out to relatives among the Storm Tribe. He was sent to learn hunting from his cousin Odayla but he was too loud for his feet kept breaking twigs and scattering leaves. He spent a winter with his Uncle Kolat but he could never manage to fill a bag with wind or breath. He even spent time with young Voriof watching sheep but he spent time too much time staring at the horizon and not enough time looking for wolves.

Finnovan sighed. He was nothing special and went home. That night, Finnovan took his place in Karulinoran, the feast hall. Finnovan's bench was near the back with the other untried youths. Eskiviki Mountain Witch* stood before the High Seat, demanding justice for the wrongs done to her people. She was one of Quivini's folk and Orlanth's distant kin. Golden haired and proud, she entranced the young god with her fiery spirit.

Irumar Beastlord, an old enemy, had raided her home. He laid waste to their fields, pillaged and looted their herds, and burned the steeds. Worst of all, they had taken their finest stallion, Rolling Thunder, which was a gift from Elmal to her father.

The Great God listened and thought, stormclouds gathering around his brow. When Eskiviki finished, Orlanth cried out, "This insult cannot be borne. Who will right these wrongs?"

Now Irumar Beastlord was a mighty magician. He was a descendant of Aron and had always hated the Storm Tribe. His holdings lay to the West in the deep forest where he kept strange beasts and great strength of war. To overthrow him would take a great raid and war. Irumar was cunning as well as powerful and had chosen the time of his raid well. Vingkot and his army had departed on the

Northfaring. Many of the Thunderbrothers were away raiding the Serpent Brotherhood. Vinga and her warband made war upon the Men of Darkness. Few remained in the hall to avenge Eskikvi.

Foolish and brave (much like his father), Finnovan was amazed to find himself shouting, "I will!" And with that, he left the hall. Once he was outside, he realized what his foolish tongue had just done. What would he do? What could he do?

Finnovan sat down to think. What would he do? How could he defeat such a powerful foe? He had no great powers like the Thunderbrothers. While he thought, Bright Elmal approached him and said, "Rolling Thunder was always an unruly stallion. You might need this." With that, he handed Finnovan a bit and bridle and departed.

Encouraged, Finnovan went to his friend Yinkin who he found lazing on the hearth. With a sharp-toothed yawn the cat-god said he was too tired to help but perhaps one of his nephews or grandchildren might be persuaded to come along. Finnovan nodded and went to call upon his Uncle Kolat. Hevren the Chaser decided to come along "just to see what would happen next."

When he arrived at Kolat's hut, his Uncle was expecting him. Without a word, Kolat handed him a leather bag – empty of winds. Finnovan asked his friends if they would each lend him a single breath. Soon the bag was filled it to bursting. Even scruffy old Eurmäl helped, offering up a suspiciously smelly clay pot. Very much against his better judgement, Finnovan accepted it.

That night, Finnovan gathered up his courage and started walking in the direction of his foe. Hevren led the way and together they stole past the Bad Dogs that guarded Irumar's stead. While too noisy for Odayla, Finnovan easily slipped past the weaponthanes guarding the Beastlord's stable. Once inside, he soon found Rolling Thunder. The stallion raged against his captors, battering his stall with hooves of sharp bronze. Remembering Voriof's way of talking softly, he greeted the stallion as a brother and made friends. Rolling Thunder took the bridle willingly.

But as Finnovan slipped away, Irumar's Totem cried a warning its master. The magician whistled and fierce dogs and warriors sprang to do his bidding. Irumar and his warriors leapt into pursuit but Finnvan had a plan. He reached back and tossed Eurmäl's jar at his foes. Inside was a truly disgusting thing. The dogs howled. The men wept. The fetid blast stung his enemies and threw them into confusion. Finnovan the Raider rode off upon Rolling Thunder, leaving only laughter behind.

Once off Irumar's Tula, he opened the last bag. Before his pursuers could rally, the breeze had wafted him home. He returned to Storm Town to great acclaim. At the feast, Orlanth awarded him the Champion's Portion for his deeds. Never again would he be seated among the lowly. The witch gave rewarded him with far more but that is for another tale.

* Many clans have other names for the Mountain witch. Aileena, Ailrene, Camille, Dorasa, Dushi, Elnor, Enderos, Enerin, Enothia, Entarios, Erissa, Ernaldesta, Ernaldinna, Ernaldess, Esrania, Flesso, Frieda, Frithorf, Garneneva, Insterid, Ivarne, Janerra, Jareen, Jareena, Jeraka, Jerenalda, Jeresrola, Kallyr, Kareena, Leikan, Levru, Lismelder, Lyzal, Marlesta, Morganeth, Myara, Natalina, Neela, Nevana,

Niquena, Onelisen, Rolla, Sora, Uraldinna, Yanioth and Ysra have been cited by various clans and tribes. All of them are correct. Finnovan was always a travelling man.

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Fires Keep Burning in Yuthuppa by Mark Galeotti

Author's Note: This originally appeared in the GlorathaCon VIII program book and links to the Birth of the Goddess LARP

Fires keep burning in Yuthuppa. There is a league in the city, the Black-Face Potboilers, who make these amazing torches. Usually the ones they sell to outsiders are extravagantly made to justify the extravagant prices, on carved bronze stems and shot through with burmic and tarspit, so they flicker with green flame and hiss like a sleeping wyrm. But most of them, the ones we use all over the city, are just simple affairs, a plain cage of bronze filled with charcoal and hemp, laid for a week in the gently bubbling vats, as above them one of the Black-Face's kinzers mumbles the same prayer to Yuthu, over and over and over again. What with the constant prayer and the sharp, almost-make-you-sneeze-but-not-quite gases bubbling up from the vats, that's hard and thirsty work. One of the first jobs I had, I can't have been more than eight, was running between the vats with mugs of milk with a dash of egg rum for the kinzers. Anyway, the thing is that once these torches are lit, that's that, they will burn for a week, maybe longer. You still catch the foreigners doing all sorts, burying them, throwing them in the Oslir, but whatever they try, the torch stays lit. One even had a pet gargoyle eat one - didn't bother him none, although it was quite a sight when out it came next day by, let's say, the natural way, in pieces but still blazing merrily.

There's something about fire and Yuthuppa. There's the great Yutha's Progress which runs all the way from Three Chariot Gate to the Flaxen-Walled Citadel, on its great pyramid of rock overlooking the Water Gate and the harbour. I can still remember that, lined with torches. In the night, it was like Lodril's footsteps running through the city. Then there are the cloaks the Suits-You Curs league used to cut out of living, frozen flame. They still do that? Haven't seen one for years. Yes, when I think of Yuthuppa, I think of fire.

Like the great bonfire old Lantafal once had built in Radial Square. That was a cold, cold winter, as the frost demons howled and screamed their way from the north, and even the Oslir was sluggish and sullen under a sheath of ice. Whole families were dying in the reed-roofed shanties in the outer ring, and Lantafar had his private game forest cut down to build this great fire. The kinzers splashed it and consecrated it, and by Lodril's hairy balls, I swear it burnt for a week and you could feel the heat from half a city away. That was an amazing sight, as Rinliddi, Dara Happans, everyone just thronged the square and the streets around, holding hands, singing and laughing, as the ice melted on roofs and frozen fountains once again began to gush.

Or different kinds of fires. I remember the day the Carmanians broke our satrap. He had powerful enemies, both at home in Yuthuppa and also at the Imperial Court. What Lantafar didn't realise is that to a Great Shah who even suspects his own arse of plotting behind his back, too popular and too efficient

could be worst sins than unpopular and inefficient. It was a hot, dry night in Fire Season. I'd been working night and a day on the docks, and my sleep must have been as deep as Voshgatyuth. The first thing I remember was little Maka tipping me off my pallet to wake me up, crying and trembling. We had a shanty up on Erenbaya's Dug, on the Third Tier, and as I scrambled out to see, do you know what I first thought? That it was pretty. Pretty!

Below me, the city spread like a spidersweb of light and fire. I could hear a dull coughing from afar, and what looked like shooting stars arced through the hot, heavy night. For a moment, it was as if the entire city was laid out as a spectacle for my personal wonderment. Then the shooting stars burst against the Inguard Rampart, tearing through the carved basalt in gouts of sparks and flame. It was some sorcerous Carmanian siege engine, even if for a moment it looked like the Kralori star-showers we sometimes had at Foundersnight celebrations. And the trceries of fire outlining the streets were torch-wielding Carmanians storming along the main streets. The mighty Yelm and Yuthu statues on the First Tier, usually glittering beacons, were for once dark, silhouetted against the flames which licked from every window and the roof of the Starstruck Compound. The gates had been barred, and the tiny figures of guardsman tumbled down from the battlements as they desperately traded one death for another.

You might think that this fire actually didn't last long. Whatever else you might want to say about the Carmanians, they knew what they were doing. By morning, the compound was just a smoking ruin and the streets were full of bronze-mailed soldiers, tough veterans from the Last Vow Army keeping the rest of us under the blade. Truth to tell, it didn't take much. We hadn't been ready for this, and it was all over before we could gather our wits. Oh, a few people tried, but the Carmanians never gave them the chance to gather their strength and raise the city.

The closest it got was at Yelmhigh. Lantafar was dragged into Radial, and there the Carmanian leader had him torn between four maddened war-bulls. You could see that the Carmanians knew that if anything was going to kick off, this was going to be the moment. There was a ring of bronze around the square, five soldiers deep. There were wild Anadikki javelineers up on the rooftops, with red-painted faces and wolverine pelts. The sidestreets were full of cavalry, horses nervously side-stepping as they picked up the tension of their riders. It felt like half the city, sullenly, reluctantly, but inexorably, was drawn there to watch. I was there too, almost like I felt that if I had let it happen, at least I should see it end. It was quick, at least, but as what had been a man splashed in its components on the marble square, an angry murmur ran through the crowd. You ever heard a hundred hundred people sigh? It's a sound like a hushed storm, a sound that could deafen you quietly. You could feel the anger growing. Here a knife flashed in the crowd, there a marble cobble was levered out of the road. The Carmanians knew it, too. There was a hiss as a thousand long, heavy swords left their scabbards, the half-conscious hunch as the bronze cliff prepared for the human tide.

Then suddenly the Carmanian leader leapt ten cubits onto the orb in the hand of Yelm's statue, and the stories I had heard about him suddenly seemed for the first time like they might be true. He raised his sword so that it blazed in the Yelmlight and his bellow cut through the rising sussurus of discontent. 'This is a city of the Abode of Peace,' he roared, 'and peace shall prevail.' A pause. 'If I must drown this city in the blood of its people.'

It shouldn't have worked, one man's threats oughtn't intimidate an entire angry city. But it did. You know the really scary thing? This general, this Bisodakar, he was just fifteen years old then. Fifteen years old, but built like one of his war-bulls and with the presence to face down a city.

But like I say, fires keep burning in Yuthuppa. Sure, on the surface, things went back to an uncomfortable normality after that, like the way we try to pretend everything's fine when Old Borgo has burnt the oatcakes again and they taste like clay tiles. A new satrap was appointed, the Radial was cleaned and soon Bisodakar and his army had gone. But don't you believe it. A couple of years later, after my lucky find had meant I could set myself up as a spicemonger, I was over in Rinliddi, buying some ganbarri sumac. I was waiting for the ferry when a score of horsemen pulled up, all jangling mail and fluttering pennants. I recognised their leader; it was Yanafal Tarnils, Lantafar's son. The last thing I wanted was to make myself noticeable, but when my mule stepped on my foot, he heard the Yuthuppan accent as I cursed and bewailed, and came across. We spoke for a little while, but I could not tell you what was said, for I was too much struck by his eyes, by the pain, the guilt, the anger and the purpose in them. And then, I knew. That Yuthuppa and the Tarnils would meet again. After all, fires keep burning in Yuthuppa - and in Yuthuppans, too.

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Fonritan Circle of Light Myth by Simon Bray

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 23, 1997)

Anarchy and disorder ruled the world, all were unsettled on the Ruby Mountain.
Beneath the Ruby Mountain, the Earth Bull roared, beneath the Earth Bull the
Sea Remora screamed, beneath the Sea Remora the Hell Wind churned, beneath the
Hell Wind was the Mist beyond which none can comprehend.

Above the Ruby Mountain, beyond sight within the seventeen heavens was peace.
The beings of heaven wept for those below and looked to each other for the answer.
The ructions in the worlds below began to shake the edge of the Seventeen Heavens.
The world stood at an end, the standstill, the edge of annihilation.

From the highest heaven there came a sound and then a sight and then a movement.
The Sun as the Bird of Heaven appeared. A feather from his tail fell.
Through Seventeen Heavens it fell, singing to the world below.
Through Mountain, Bull, Remora, Wind and Mist it fell, singing to the world above.

The people of the Ruby Mountain learnt the song and sought the Sun Bird.
The song was the path, the song was the feather, the feather was the guide.

The some lost heart at the outset. The first was lead by love and was lost.
The second lost himself in himself. The last could not leave the ruins behind.

The pilgrims set upon their deadly and perilous path. The crossed the nine seas.
The first was named Bewilderment, the next were Loss, Self, Fear, Doubt and Hate.
The seventh was Remorse, at the eighth faltered and thought it was called Hope.
The Last was called Annihilation and was the easiest to cross by far.

The Pilgrims then crossed the eight chasms, seventeen hells and Bulls Field.
The journey had taken its toll and many fell, others were pushed, a few jumped.
The Pilgrims fought within and without until the strongest and fiercest ruled.
The Leader became lost. He pulled and pushed, but could not go straight.

The Pilgrims then made a circle, so that none could pull or push or jump alone.
Thirty remained, made pure by their sufferings. Thirty were together but lost.
They tried to look in their own directions, but could only look at each other.
The looked and understood and saw beneath them the Ruby Mountain.

The Sun Bird ascended to the seventeenth heaven and so did the pilgrims.
The Earth Bull slept, the Sea Remora was still, the Hell Wind still howled.
Beneath all was the Mist which none can comprehend.
The Pilgrims were the Ring, the Ring was the Sun Bird, the Sun Bird was the World.

Notes

1) This is a shortened version of the myth. It is Based upon the Parliament of Birds or Mantiq al-Tayr by Farid al-Din Attar. The original(earth) poem was very complex and had 4,500 couplets, the Fonrit Poem has 4913, and was compiled by Januk Halabari of Siwah-El

2) In the later revised version of the myth the Circle looks inward and creates a leader at the centre of them. The "Leader" then organises the Triangle of Hierachy. This is of course Garangordos' reworking.

3) The Sun Bird may be Fida'Is, or an ancient deity similar to him. The Idea is that the creature is a Simurgh, a bird like animal that is immortal and nests in the branches of the Tree of Knowledge. This creature is also mentioned in Southey's Thalaba(1801) and Flaubert's Temptation of St. Anthony (1874). In the latter it is described as having orange coloured feathers like metallic scales, a small silver coloured head with a human face, four wings, a vuture's talons and a long,long peacock's tail. It is also mentioned in the Book of Kings and in the Wonders of Creation by al-Qaswini it is said to live for seventeen hundred years and upon the coming of age of it's son, the father burns himself on a funeral pyre. This I feel if translated to Fonrit would be used to justify some of the practices of the Jann.

4) By the way all these earth texts do exist, but I have never read them, only about them. The Poem is my own, inspired by the idea of an idea.

5) All as I need now is an idea of what the Pilgrims are called.

The Fortunate Strangulations by Simon Bray

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest 1997)

The Garan states that inheritance shall pass from one man to his oldest living relative, rather than from father to eldest son. Thus it was established as a right amongst the Janns to kill all their brothers in order to secure the throne for their own offspring. This act of fratricide was strictly controlled by the laws of Garangordos, the act had to occur at night and the victim had to be strangled by someone known to him the body was then carved into seventeen pieces and placed in special canopic jars, these jars were then placed within the great dynastic temple in Hombori Tondo. The murdered brothers were always treated to a funeral procession worthy of a dead Head of State.

The city of Goan in Banamba is famous for its non-alcoholic but highly intoxicating drinks. These drinks called Avanufas are derived from specially selected fungi. The secret of their making was stolen from the jungles. So if you are in need of a drink and can't find any beer, Goan Avanufa, you will feel better for it.

In the year 1027 from the coming of Garangordos⁵⁴, Alexahmed I came to the throne of Hombori Tondo, he did not wish to slay his insane brother Tafamus. Instead he built the "Crypt" a vast and ornate palace without windows and only one door. Into this edifice was thrown Tafamus, along with a dozen barren concubines and the so called Snake Tongue Eunuchs, these huge deaf Veldangs had their tongue sliced in half so that they talked in hideous sibilant tones. It was made clear to Tafamus that the eunuch were ordered to kill him whenever the Jann pleased. From then onwards all princes were incarcerated in the "Crypt" as a matter of course, being believed by the Janns to be a necessary part of preparation to rule correctly.

When Jann Alexahmed I died heirless in 1047 a great internal conflict arose, with many Massarin houses seeking the Coral Throne of Hombori Tondo. The High Priest of Darleester the Noose intervened by releasing Tafamus from the "Crypt" and placing him on the throne as rightful heir. The deranged Jann was assisted to perform the ritual of Compulsion to return order to Afadjann, although he drooled constantly on the paraphernalia and had to be propped up by several assistants.

At the same time Jalenga Kosem one of the many wives of the dead Alexahmed declared that within her womb was growing the child of her dead husband who she claimed had come to her in a dream. Within a month ten more wives and concubines claimed to have been visited by the lusty spirit of Alexahmed. Tafamus was unable to comprehend the situation and foolishly gave the women a palace of their own rather than putting them to death as his advisers suggested. By the end of the year Jalenga Kosem had given birth to twins Soman and Namos. The other pregnant wives of Alexahmed were discovered dead several days after the birth of the little princes, "Something they ate?" inquired Jalenga Kosem when questioned about the mystery massacre.

⁵⁴ The year 1527 ST

Tafamus proved to be unfit to rule, he did many foolish things, such as appointing to Veldang pages to govern Sarro and Tavu et Teba and he replaced the Head Astrologer of Karkisso with an old woman who had given him a cup of water while hunting hippo on the Gargos River. After only two years of rule he was overthrown by the High Priest of Darleester the Noose and his Enkidu eunuch warriors and imprisoned once again within the "Crypt", along with two concubines and Tafamus' beloved camelopard.⁵⁵

Jalenga Kosem had taken the infants Soman and Nomas to the city of Siwah El where she had employed the magics of that city to change her infants into youths. She however angered the Sorceress and so had to flee to far Yngortu to evade the witches demonic servants.

In Hombori Tondo was torn by internal conflict, and Kareeshtan leaders looked greedily upon the Coral Throne and the lands of Afadjann. Once again the High Priest of Darleester the Noose intervened and sought out Jalenga Kosem and the two princes. In 1049 Soman II was made Jann of Afadjann. The younger brother Nomas was not incarcerated within the "Crypt", as it was already occupied, but instead was married to the daughter of a Faladjian noble and thus revoked all his claims to the throne .⁵⁶

Soman and Nomas had both been initiated into the cult of Two Brothers during their stay in Yngortu, a fact that became clear after their separation. Soman II became immensely sadistic after his brother left. He was very fond of a crossbow he had been given, and practiced its use daily upon slaves and pages. He invoked the ancient rite of the Jann to kill seventeen innocent people a day and would practice the use of his bow from the palace roof killing any who passed by, marking his kill upon a great slate for all to see. He began to become envious of his brother, even though the two had not met for many years and ordered his execution, when Jalenga Kosem told him this was foolish and may cause a war with Faladje he flew into a rage and ran about the streets killing all that he met, including children and livestock.

In 1055 Soman II attempted to have his mother killed, but his plan was spoiled and instead the Palace of the Jann was stormed by the Eunuchs of Enkidu. Soman II resisted bravely and slew twenty of their number before he finally fell. Jalenga Kosem was reported to have taken her sons body in her arms and cried "You have taken my son the madman, a mad Faladjian woman holds my other in bondage. Go release the mad man from the crypt, he can do no worse!" The body of Soman II was then taken, divided into the seventeen parts and buried beneath the dynastic temple.

Tafamus had become increasingly deranged while in the "Crypt", during the coup nobody had bothered to feed him and so he had ravaged his concubines and consumed their flesh. The guards were so horrified at the scene that met them that they threw themselves upon their swords, rather than remember it. Tafamos was eventually dragged "giggling" to the throne and once again performed the Ritual of Compulsion, but got all the words wrong. Tafamus then ordered the execution of all those who

⁵⁵ Camelopard - very similar to Earth's giraffe, but with a shorter neck. A favourite of Fonritan nobles as it is the only animal that knows how to bow in order to drink.

⁵⁶ Husbands of Faladian princesses are considered slaves of their wives. Nomas was a particularly willing slave to the homicidal Princess Nefreti, although it is said that on their honeymoon he wore a breastplate and magic at all times.

had slain his nephew, Soman II, proclaiming him to be, "the most sane Jann to sit upon the Coral Throne for a long time, and I should know!". Thus was the end of Jalenga Kosem and her manipulations.

Tafamus then set about begetting an heir for the throne, or more truly the High Priest of Darleester the Moose arranged it. Before Tafamus were brought the finest and most beautiful women of Afadjann, which he inspected from the stock into which he was strapped. He showed no interest in any, but instead looked to his camelopard and said, "I will lie only with a woman who has female parts like those of my beautiful camelopard, I decree it." Seeking to keep his master pleased, the High Priest of Darleester the Moose sent a representation of the creature's parts, made of gold throughout Afadjann.

Eventually a woman was found, living in a hut in the Kanem Dar hills, her name was Seki Pumra,⁵⁷ a hag of a girl weighing some two hundred jars.⁵⁸ Immediately Tafamus fell in love and began the begetting.

Tafamus died in 1067, it is said he died of love, but doctors of the time say that it was more likely a broken back. His sole concubine Seki Pumra had given birth to five daughters and one son. The daughters had the beauty of their mother, the son the wit of his father.

In the year 1067, after the coming of Garangordos, Azmurad III ascended to the Coral Throne of Afadjann at the age of ten. Azmurad III was very close to his mother Seki Purma and she ruled the state from the harem, with her son never disobeying her orders. Much power was sold to rich Massarin families during this period in return for exotic favours, political support and military power. The military was sold to an individual called Jalap Khan of Ebbeshal, an insane sorcerer of that city. He began to turn the army against Azmurad III and eventually the soldiers mutinied and broke into the Palace, killing the High Priest of Darleester the Moose, the Great Eunuch Dancer of Seven Bells, Azmurad's sister Kalamine and seventeen other high officials. Azmurad II was forced to use the Rite of Compulsion and cause three thousand soldiers to strangle themselves. He then called upon Ikadz and Ompalam to bring to him the leaders of the rebellion. Jalap Khan and his supporters were then forced to climb the Tower of Submission, where each was stripped of his seventeen layers of existence and then their bodies were hung from the Bridge of Seventeen Tears.

Azmurad III grew quickly, he was a giant amongst his fellows, some say standing half as tall as a tree. His mother was fearful that the politics of the harem would cause Azmurad to stray from his true destiny and so she tried to encourage Azmurad to take only his sisters and herself as concubines. This he did, but her actions caused Azmurad to hate all women not of royal blood. Once Azmurad came across a group of women from Siwah El singing in the mountains, he instantly ordered his eunuchs to strangle them so that he could hear the birds sing. On another occasion he had the wives of a Massarin boiled alive for being more beautiful than his mother.⁵⁹

Azmurad was a great warrior and during his reign he expanded the lands of Afadjann greatly, he spread the cult of Darleester the Moose widely and was proclaimed High Priest of Ompalam and Ikadz in 1077.

⁵⁷ Seki Pumra - Afadjanni for Sugar Lump or Sugar Sack, only the Jann called her Seki, everybody else referred to her as, Her Majesty the Grand Pumra, glittering jewel in the Janns Crown, Mother of Plenty.

⁵⁸ Two Hundred Jars - About three hundred Earth pounds.

⁵⁹ More beautiful than his mother - not a difficult task.

His wars with Kareeshtu and Umathela became legendary. It is said that Azmurad's favourite tactic of war was to enter the streets of an enemy sister accompanied only by his executioner, the two would murder all that they met, especially women, always by decapitating them. He would then use his stealth to crack open the cities magic and then their gates.

Azmurad was a great lover and bestowed upon his family thirty four children, seventeen boys and seventeen girls. Of the boys only two survived, Istam and Astamanyx, the rest it is said were dispatched by their father and mother/grandmother. Istam was prepared for Janndom by being placed in the "Crypt", while Astamanyx was saved when his mother Falara fled to the city of Teshvashoros.

In 1085 Ships arrived from the sea, they had not done so since the Week of the Squid some four hundred years before. Azmurad was away, fighting the Doraddi to the south and so Seki Purma and her son were first to meet the visitors. They were of course the Vadeli. Through intimidation and manipulation the Vadeli coerced Seki Purma into allowing them to take control of the city. They did not know of the Rite of Compulsion and the Coral Throne and so did not rule the land. The period is known as the Brown Year. Messages to Azmurad were intercepted and so he did not return until his campaign was completed.

Upon his return Azmurad III was unable to remove the Vadeli influence as they were not subject to the Compulsion of Darleester the Noose. Their ships controlled the Strait of Poysida, their merchants held the granaries and their warriors the barracks. Azmurad was forced to support the Vadeli in there attack on Kareeshtu in 1087. The Kareesti were defeated and Azmurad II was given back his city. The Vadeli however kept Azmurad as their puppet by causing him to become addicted to narcotics that they could only supply.

In 1089 Azmurad resisted the Vadeli and slew all those that dwelt in his city, many by his own hand. During the battle Azmurad fell, slain it is said by exhaustion, withdrawal and evil sorcery.

After his father's death the Coral Throne was inherited by Istam I. He had been locked in the "Crypt" for twenty years and was so terrified of the outside world that he had to be led from the building by his mother/grandmother Seki Purma, "like a monkey on a chain". When he had finally left the "Crypt" he began to dance about the palace singing "I am the butcher, as was my father, kill the Vadeli and bring me wives!".

Istam was so relieved at his new found freedom that he began a two year stint of wanton debauchery. Seki Purma was more than happy to supply her son/grandson with and endless supply of concubines and wives, and decreed that no Jann should ever love his mother or sister again. During this period many new laws were created which gave more rights to slaves and Istam personally oversaw the sealing of the "Crypt".

Many Massarin families feared for their daughters in the presence of Istam, for none had the power to refuse him, during his two years of hedony he took a concubine from nearly every noble house until his harem numbered seven hundred. Unfortunately for Istam he was nearly impotent and fathered only one son Ovgormangis and two daughters Sedna and Halhabra. The harem became a hotbed of scandal

and politics, concubines and wives were known to fight openly with daggers and the aging Seki Purma was killed in one such duel. The cult of Seseine became popular and Incubi were seen to haunt the harem roof at night. Istam was enraged at the actions of his wives and death of his mother that he called his Calari Police to his side and drove the women from the harem, running them into the hills with "leopards at their heels".

The Massarin houses were so distraught at the treatment of their daughters that they sought the downfall of Istam. On many occasions were his servants caused to revolt or his food poisoned. But Istam survived each coup or assassination.

Istam began to rebuild the content of his harem, taking into it foreign or slave girls. He eventually settled with only seventeen concubines, hoping that the magical number would preserve him. Istam it was noted had a great fetish for feathers, his clothes, curtains and wall were all decorated in feathers and he insisted that his courtiers dress as birds to honour his fetish. He began to sell concessions and positions of power for exotic feathers, but would buy none handled by a Vadeli.

Istam was prone to great rages, which lasted many days. Unlike his forefathers he channeled theses rages and used them against the enemies of Afadjann, unfortunately his actions often turned friends into enemies.

Throughout Istam's reign the Vadeli Empire was ever present, his country was in no position to resist their power, as they controlled all the seas. Istam would not cooperate, but could not refuse to do so. His ambassadors smoothed the way and kept the peace with the oppressors, but secretly Istam boiled. In 1094 the Vadeli fleet was engaged in conflict at sea by the hero Hoom Jhis from the East. Istam had heard through his on land connections of the war fleets arrival and made sure that his flag ship was present at the battle with him aboard. The Vadeli were smashed against Oenriko rocks, as was the Maslo fleet, but Istam sailed from the battle victorious.⁶⁰

Upon his return Istam made sure that he was proclaimed a hero and had statues depicting his valour erected in all coastal ports. He also took the measure of having each crewman entered into his household as personal servants, those that refused died secretly.

It is said that for the next seventeen years Afadjann became a place of peace and harmony.⁶¹ Istam chose his governors and ambassadors wisely,⁶² the harvests were bountiful and the slaves gained new levels of freedom. Ovgormangis, the young prince grew up happily in the harem, educated by the finest tutors and attended to by the most beautiful of concubines.

Istam still had enemies though, the Massarin houses he had dishonoured had no love for him, in back streets Vadeli still lurked and in far off Teshvashoros Astamanyx plotted against his brother.

⁶⁰ Battle of Oenriko rock - Istam I is believed to have hid in a cove until the battle was completed and was then going to choose a side to support, fortunately there were few witnesses to the event.

⁶¹ Peace and harmony - According to all state sanctioned sources, but folk songs tell a different tale.

⁶² ..ambassadors wisely - They were selected by the High Priest of Darleester the Noose and not Jan Istam.

Astamanyx had become ruler of Teshvashoros through wit and force, his people had become totally loyal to him and were willing to die for their lord. Astamanyx told the truth of the former and present Jann's sanity, and proved the stability of his own mind⁶³. In 1113 Astamanyx made an alliance with His Holy Munificence Archiodomides the Heartless and Openhanded, vessel of Tndiji and Ikadz. Through this alliance Astamanyx gained money and then ships. He sealed off Hombori Tondo and raided the Palace, with the aid of "two thousand Massarin houses and their servants."⁶⁴ Istam was found hiding in the harem, "dressed in ostrich feathers and cowering behind his wives!". Astamanyx seized his brother and threw him from the Tower of Submission. The corpses of Istam I was noted to be grinning as he was carved into the seventeen pieces and placed in the sacred canopic jars. Astamanyx I was proclaimed Jann on the same day, "blessed by Darleester the Moose and the world itself!"

Ovgormangis escaped the fate of his father, it is said that he was carried away to Barueli by, "inhuman servant of the High Priest of the Hungry Goddess." The rest is history.

Section Six

The cult of Calari is noted as being the police of Afadjann. The cult's members come in two groupings, the first are the Jann secret police, individuals who are integrated into all levels of Fonritan society, so well integrated in fact that none apart from the Jann knows their true identity. The other group are the Black Guard, these burly warriors can be found throughout the city domains. They are highly paid mercenaries, often gifted with horses at huge expense and equipped with the finest weaponry. It is common practice for this police force to use animals to hunt down criminals, especially fearsome black baboons and leopards, both animals are trained to follow criminals wherever they go, even over roof tops. Despite the small size of the apes they are fearsome and easily have the strength to rend a man's arm from his socket or tear through chainmail with their fangs. In fact most thieves and criminals fear the baboons more than their masters or the leopards.

On the day of compulsion, when the Jann casts the great spell of Darleester the Moose all Afadjanns are bound by law and pain of death to wear about their necks a noose of black rope or cloth, which acts as the focus of the spell. The nature of the spell means that all those of Afadjann nature who do not wear the noose are open to psychic assault from the spirits of Ikadz and Ompalam that are summoned during the ritual. However few Afadjanni refuse have ever refused to participate in the ritual, in fact the noose has become somewhat of a fashion statement amongst the Massarin houses who pay extortionate rates to have the most ornate and intricate nooses made, these works of art are inlaid with jet, black pearls and black coral and are often made of rare timinit silk from Kumanku.

Money in Afadjann is a rare thing. Only the Massarin use it openly, most people are paid in either slaves or more commonly millet seed. A complex system of barter has been established and each market has an overseer from the Jann's granaries who establishes the value of all items in terms of millet seed or other barterable commodities. The millet is weighed using a special weight known as a Jar, a copper Jar is the smallest weight and a lead is the greatest.

⁶³ ..stability of his own mind - With the help of a Pamalt shaman and the Comprehension spell.

⁶⁴ Two thousand Massarin Houses - Only three hundred existed at the time.

There are seventeen Jars used in this system. The coinage used by the Massarin is called a Jann Jar and like the weights used by the over seer is shaped like a small jar, they are produced from silver, aluminium, coral, electrum, gold and platinum. The size varies with the value. The smallest denomination is the silver Jann Jar which is worth the equivalent of a thousand silver pieces in Genertela.

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From the Burning of Wahnakar the Adamant Bison, Emperor of all Dara Happa by David Hall

When the evil darkmen killed Emperor Khorzanelm and butchered his wife, our Lord Wahnakar stood over their son and shed his own blood defending him. Wahnakar was the Faithful Bison.

When the Sable Riders asked our Lord Wahnakar to spare their lives he spat upon them and ordered them torn to pieces - all of them, man, woman, and child. No Sable scum now defile Our Plateau. Wahnakar was the Wise Bison.

When the stinking horse-riders asked for mercy, our Lord Wahnakar ordered them killed swiftly with their own bows and arrows. Wahnakar was the Merciful Bison.

When the Scarlet Bat attacked the City of the Emperors, our Lord Wahnakar stood against it and killed it with his mighty blows. It has not returned since. Wahnakar was the Iron Bison.

When Wahnakar rose above the Iron Vrok in the eyes of the Emperor, he commanded the Dara Happan Armies in their victories. Wahnakar was the Adamant Bison.

When Mathiman the Impaler ordered that the Silken Cord be used, our Lord Wahnakar used his own girdle to serve the God Project. Wahnakar was the Selfless Bison.

When the squabbling and disorderly subhuman members of the Old Council attempted to deform our goddess, Osentalka, within her Egg, our lord Wahnakar stayed aloof. Wahnakar was the Sensible Bison.

When the people with the Blue Third Eye showed their true nature, our Lord Wahnakar hunted down every last one of the treacherous dogs and had them impaled. Wahnakar was the Just Bison.

When the scrawny Bird Men of Kestinaddi foolishly defied the Emperor's commands, our Lord Wahnakar led us to pillage and plunder their rich lands. No birds now fly over barren Kestinaddi. Wahnakar was the Generous Bison.

When Estorex of Esvuthil denied the divinity of the Emperor, our Lord Wahnakar was the first to cast his spear into the heretic. Wahnakar was the Pious Bison.

When Osentalka ordered Mathiman the Usurper thrown to the snakes, our Lord Wahnakar did not stint from his duty. Wahnakar was the Loyal Bison.

When Gbaji the Deceiver came to these lands, our Lord Wahnakar led us in our glorious fight. Though he fell in the service of the Bright Goddess his spirit guides us still. Wahnakar was Our Emperor Bison!

©2003 by David Hall

From the Jonstown Compendium, entry #182,466 by Andrew Solovay

A strange report from Sword Sage Hothrik of Heortland: "While traveling, my companions and I were set upon by bandits. We drove them off, but one of my retainers was wounded, and I lacked the skill to heal him. His wounds were not great, but were so painful that I feared he would die of exhaustion before we could reach help.

The second night after the ambush, a powerful Dark Man appeared by the wounded man's pallet, slipping unnoticed past the guard on watch. Before I could move, he threw himself on the wounded man, seeming to tear at him with his teeth--but after a moment's shock, I saw that the Dark Man was not actually injuring my servant, though the teeth appeared to rip into his flesh (yet leaving no mark behind). After a short time he stood up, and to my amazement my servant was sleeping peacefully, no longer in pain.

The Dark Man said to me in halting Heortling speech, 'I go? Or we fight?' He was unarmed, but so large and strong that I preferred not to press the issue. I responded, 'You may go. But what did you do?' He answered, 'No pain in Good Home' (by which I surmise he meant the Trolls' Hell before the Sun came). 'I eat pain, make this into Good Home.' He then vanished into the night.

My servant no longer seemed troubled by his wounds, and healed rapidly thereafter. When we reached my temple, I consulted a sage who knew of the Uz and their gods. He could not explain the troll's behavior, and said it did not comport with any of their known cults. He was shocked when I sketched the ritual scarring on the troll's face and arms, as he said the scars were most like those of the Zorak Zoran berserkers--whose behavior is certainly very different from that we saw!"

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General Joon and the Pig Men by Sandy Petersen

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest September 20, 1995)

In the time of T'hah Hanwuti [Thalurzni], Dzawan of Shiyang was mandarin of Hsin Yin. The Pig Men slew him, and General Joon decided to quell the Pig Men.⁶⁵ This was difficult, for the ruler of the Pig Men was

⁶⁵ See my earlier story about Dzawan's tragic demise, "It Is Just As Good".

Keng Shing, a valiant man, though less astute than General Joon. General Joon led a force of Mantis Warriors into the field.⁶⁶

The first night, General Joon told his men to light 10,000 cooking fires. The second night, he told them to light but 4,000 fires. The third night, he told them to light 1600 fires. Keng Shing saw this, and said, "General Joon's army melts away like honey on the tongue. See how his men fear the battle before them, and desert. Now that his army is weak, and his spirit is filled with forboding, we will strike!" And he led his Pig Men to attack General Joon's men in the night.

General Joon ordered his men to flee into the forest, leaving their fires burning, and abandoning their tents and much food and gear. Keng Shing laughed, "They think the woods will protect them in the dark! Do they not know we are Pig Men, forest fighters, experts in all terrain?" And he ordered his men to follow closely, forbidding to loot Joon's tents.⁶⁷

General Joon stopped halfway through the forest. He peeled the bark off a tree and painted a message there. Then he stationed his Mantis archers on a nearby rise and ordered them, "When you see a torch beneath that white tree, shoot with all your might." He stationed his Mantis horsemen behind a hill and ordered them, "When you hear a roar of mourning from the Pig Men, then rush around the hill and attack." He ordered his Mantis halberdiers, "Go back by this side road. Run quickly and station yourself at the road leading into the forest, by which we came. When the Pig Men come out of the forest, take them prisoner." All hastened to obey. When Keng Shing came to the tree, peeled and white, he could not read the message, for it was night. He commanded light to be made. When he could see, he read, "KENG SHING DIES UNDER THIS TREE" The archers loosed, and Keng Shing heard hundreds of green arrows rushing through the air. Then he died. The Pig Men were in disarray and trotted about pointlessly. When the horsemen came from around the hill, the Pig Men could not defend themselves and were routed. When the Pig Men came out of the forest by the road, they met the serried ranks of halberds. So all died or surrendered, except the few who were wise enough to flee by a different route through the forest.

So General Joon destroyed six myriads of Pig Men with only three regiments, losing no archers, and fewer than tenscore horsemen and halberdiers.⁶⁸

©1995 by Sandy Petersen

Gloryadze Extractorfan and the Mostali Sound Machine by Stewart Stansfield

(As originally appeared in the World of Glorantha list April 10, 2011)

⁶⁶ The mantis warriors are not some weird kind of Hsunchen, but a variety of martial artist, expert in the use of weapons

⁶⁷ Because it would delay his advance. No doubt he planned to go back and loot the tents after the battle.

⁶⁸ A "myriad" is 10,000. A Kralori Regiment is about a thousand men.

Oh-ay-oh-ay! (oh-ay-oh-ay) Oh-ay-oh-o-ah! (oh-ay-oh-o-ah) Oh-ay-oh-ay! [Yah-yeh-go] (oh-ay-oh-ay)
Oh-ay-oh-o-ah! [Yah-yeh-go] (oh-ay-oh-o-ah)... OOO!"

--Incantation to Mostal the Great Maker

Gloryadze Extractorfan was a true Gold Dwarf of the First Age, dedicated to restoring the perfect harmony of the Wold Machine. She concerned herself mainly with those minor parts of the World Machine known as 'Man'. Some of these cogs, gears and escapements were malformed and needed to be recycled. Others had the potential to run properly, but somehow didn't; and while some could be taken apart and put back together, a great many were simply poorly lubricated and required only minor regulation in a bid to fine-tune them and impart true rhythm.

Unfortunately, Man's life-habits make a broken dwarf appear virtuous. Since it couldn't keep itself running properly, the dwarfs had to get involved. Gloryadze knew that the manipulation of sonic energy could induce Man to behave properly and operate at the proper beat within the World Machine. She and her team perfected a sonic regulator that could achieve such a feat without a preliminary dismemberment: the Mostali Sound Machine.

This dwarfish treasure is hard to describe, but was constructed from the finest refined gold, silver, brass and tin - all forming a multitude protuberancies, levers, gears, jewels and springs. Partly because of this, and partly through racist defamation of dwarfs, the elves called them "cog boxes".

When correctly operated, a Mostali Sound Machine emitted a vibrant rhythmic refrain that caused those components of the World Machine to which it was properly calibrated to start to move with an irresistible beat. The reaction to this stimulus (particularly in the shoulders) was wholly unconscious, and unless a body was well-limbered could cause poses that inflicted pain and muscle and bone trauma.

The Mostali Sound Machine proved a useful weapon against those broken dwarfs infected with the Foolish Beat of heresy; it produced a signal to which any virtuous dwarf could move to freely, but caused arrhythmic spasms, dislocations and worse in apostates - a pitiful display known as 'break-dancing'.

The first Mostali Sound Machine was constructed in Gemborg; cog boxes were quite prominent in Caladraland during the First Age, when many of the savage tribes fell under Martaler the Blazing Forge's patronage. It's very hot down in Caladraland, especially when one lives in the middle of a volcano, so Gloryadze's companions kept their beards trimmed short and tended wear open-chested working jackets, with large, magically treated collars and lapels to shield them from the ablative heat, and glowing talismans on their chests.

The dwarfs took great interest in the volcanoes and their central function in the World Machine. Many Mostali were worshiped as gods by the savages; they presided over native ceremonies, which were often accompanied by Mostali Sound Machines. Even in the Third Age, some tribes preserve these traditions. In the west, those living around Bluesmoke worship Gloryadze Extractorfan as a totem: a tribal demigoddess; a patron of their ancestral hero-founder.

Unlike many tribes, which prize height and a honed physique, they value body forms that mimic the dwarfs and practise brutal eugenics. Babies are forced into cramped cradles, while children walk around with weights on their heads and are fed raw eggs. Girls especially are raised in Gloryadze's image, and a chosen few are veiled and shut off from the outside world, condemned to a lifestyle of industry, dwarfish elocution lessons and weight-training. When they reach puberty they are robed in ritual costumes and daubed in metallic paint, to be sacrificed as brides to the stunted gods of the mountain.

The dwarfs are utterly perplexed by this state of affairs, and hand the girls over to the Food Processors.

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Gordaval and the Yurmali by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest September 23, 1994).

There was a time when Yurmali was wandering through the wilds of Imther and spied a lovely vixen. Using the great luck which he had at that time, Yurmali seduced the vixen. Of course, the vixen became pregnant and soon gave birth to four hungry fox pups. Yurmali had used up his luck seducing the vixen and she left him and the pups to find a better mate. Yurmali was left to care for the pups on his own.

Yurmali went hunting to find food for his offspring, but he had no luck of his own left. As he sat miserably upon a rock beside a stream, wondering how he could feed his pups, he saw Mother Bear downstream. She stood in the midst of the river and with her great paws, calmly scooped fish after fish out of the river. Yurmali realized that he could do this, too. He called out to Mother Bear, who naturally looked up to see who was calling. As their eyes met, Yurmali cast his great magic, exchanging his worthless luck for hers. She dismissed Yurmali from her mind and returned to her task, but without success. Yurmali now stood in the river himself and quickly caught plenty of fish. Soon, in fact, Yurmali had caught every last fish in the stream so that none were left. As he departed, he passed by Mother Bear, and stole those fish she had set aside earlier. With his great catch, he trotted back to his den and fed his pups.

But the pups were soon hungry again, having quickly devoured all the fish. They wanted more, so Yurmali went back to the stream to find more food for his offspring. The fish were gone, though, and the luck he had gained had since worn off. As he sat miserably by the stream, his back against a tree, wondering how he could feed his pups, he looked up into the sky and saw Homeward Owl pass overhead with many rodents in his claws. Yurmali realized that he could do this, too. He called out to Homeward Owl, who naturally looked down to see who was calling. As their eyes met, Yurmali cast his great magic, exchanging his worthless luck for Homeward Owl's. Homeward Owl was so startled that he promptly dropped the many rodents he carried and flew off. Yurmali gathered up the dropped rodents and then went racing through the woods himself to swoop down upon the rodents still living. Soon he had caught every last rodent in the woods so that none were left. With his great catch, he trotted back to his den and fed his pups.

But once again, the pups grew hungry, having quickly devoured all the rodents. They wanted more, so Yurmalio went back to the woods to find more food for his offspring. Not only were the fish gone, but so were all the rodents. The luck he had gained had also since worn off. As he wandered miserably in the woods, he came to a rocky clearing. He sat down amidst the boulders wondering how he could feed his pups. While sitting he saw Alaczar the Toad hopping along, quickly snatching up all the bugs and lizards he could find with his fine long tongue. Yurmalio realized he could do this, too. He called out to Alaczar, who naturally turned to see if he could snatch up the caller. As their eyes met, Yurmalio cast his great magic, exchanging his worthless luck for Alaczar's. Alaczar was so startled that he promptly tripped over his own feet and fell upon his stomach. He disgorged all the bugs and lizards he had gulped down and Yurmalio promptly snatched those up. Then Yurmalio went hopping through all the rocky outcrops, catching all the bugs and lizards still living. Soon he had caught every last bug and lizard so that none were left. With his great catch, he hopped back to his den and fed his pups.

After all this effort, Yurmalio grew tired and fell asleep. Not even his hungry pups could wake him, though they wanted more.

It chanced that at this same time, the people sent Gordaval into the woods for they were hungry, too. Gordaval was a great hunter, but as he passed the stream and looked for fish, he could find none. Beside the stream sat Mother Bear, a beast so scrawny that Gordaval didn't even bother to catch her. Instead, he called out and asked her where the fish had gone.

Mother Bear replied, "Yurmalio came here and stole them all for himself. Now I have none and you can see the results yourself."

Gordaval was disturbed by this for in the past all creatures had shared equally in the bounty of the stream. Since there were no fish, though, Gordaval moved into the woods to look there for small game. He looked and looked, but he could find none. When he stopped, he saw Homeward Owl standing on the ground, a bird so bedraggled that it couldn't even fly. Gordaval didn't even bother to catch him, he looked so pitiful. Instead, he called out and asked Homeward Owl where all the game had gone.

Homeward Owl replied, "Yurmalio came here and stole them all for himself. Now I have none and you can see the results yourself."

Gordaval was disturbed by this for in the past all creatures had shared equally in the bounty of the woods. Since there was no game, though, Gordaval moved into the rock lands to look for the bugs and lizards that lived there. He looked and looked, but he could find none. Instead, he saw Alaczar flattened against a rock, his long tongue hanging limply from his mouth. Gordaval didn't even bother to pick him up since Alaczar looked like nothing more than a bag of skin and bones. Instead, he called out and asked Alaczar where all the bugs and lizards had gone.

Alaczar replied, "Yurmalio came here and stole them all for himself. Now I have none and you can see the results yourself."

Gordaval was disturbed by this for all the creatures had shared equally in the bounty of the rocks. Gordaval had found no food, though, and he realized there was nothing for him to bring home to the people. So Gordaval hunted until he found Yurmalio's tracks and followed those tracks to Yurmalio's den. Gordaval could hear the hungry pups inside, so he called in, "Yurmalio, I demand that you come out and release the food you have hoarded within!"

There was no answer but the hungry whining of the pups. So Gordaval shouted again, louder this time. Still there was no answer. Finally, Gordaval shouted so loud he thought his lungs would burst. But he heard a groan and then an answer.

"Who disturbs my sleep now?" inquired the voice from within the den.

"It is I, Gordaval, hunter for the people. We are hungry and you have taken all the food for yourself. We demand that you give some of it up so that we may live, too."

"Go away. I've got enough disturbance from these mewling whelps. I don't need your shouts added to it," responded Yurmalio.

Though Gordaval continued making demands for some time, Yurmalio staunchly refused to come out or to give up any food.

Gordaval returned emptyhanded to the people and they were greatly worried that he had found no food. But Gordaval had a plan. He went first to Ralaska and borrowed a torch from her. Then he went to the Goat Mother and borrowed a cheese from her. He went next to Orlantio and asked for a sack of wind. Though, Orlantio was reluctant, he did give up an old, smelly windbag that he had no more use for. Finally, Gordaval took all the rope which the people had and made a large net, tied with strange knots. With these items, he returned to the woods.

When he reached the den of Yurmalio, Gordaval hung the net up over the front door. Gordaval then hunted around the hill until he found the back door to the den. He gathered up all the brush and branches nearby and stuffed these into the back door. Taking up the torch of Ralaska, he then set the brush afire. Finally, he took out the cheese and placed it before the front door.

With everything in place, Gordaval took the old, smelly windbag to the back door and released it. Though it was but a poor wind that Orlantio had given him, the wind was sufficient for Gordaval's task. It blew smoke from the burning brush right into the den of Yurmalio and set Yurmalio to coughing. Yurmalio gathered up his pups and fled out the front door. But as they left, the pups spied the cheese and demanded to eat. Yurmalio was hungry, too, and they all stopped to eat it. But Yurmalio's luck was just his own. Gordaval pulled a rope and the net dropped onto Yurmalio and his pups. Yurmalio could not undo the knots that Gordaval had tied. So Gordaval gathered up Yurmalio and his pups and carried them off to the people. There the people beat Yurmalio until he had disgorged all the food he had gathered. When there was plenty again for all to eat, Yurmalio and his pups were released.

Since then Gordaval has always received a choice piece whenever he brings food to the people. And the fox children of Yurmalio ever slink around the edges of the villages, waiting to steal back the food they had to give up.

©1994 by Harald Smith

The Great Glamour Sit-Down: a Death in the Family by Mark Galeotti

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest and various other places May 12, 2003)

(Editor's note: This is a very nice background piece for the The Great Glamour Sit-Down LARP).

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest and various other places May 12, 2003)

The word was out of the streets, here whispered in shadowed corners, there shouted across a crowded tavern. For most it was just another piece of gossip in Glamour, the grinding rumour mill at the heart of the Empire. But for others, it was important, a matter, one could say, of life or death.

Important enough suddenly to close off the back room at an infamous Vanchite restaurant, and as the door opened to let another meticulously dressed 'trader' into that sanctum, a heavy voice rasped out "Vito, bring us some wine. Not the stuff you serve da customers."

Indeed, important enough to close Ho Kak's Happy Chop House in Kraloritown altogether. When some three-quarters-drunk patron rattled the door, oblivious to the sign, he was confronted by the contorted face of Ho Kak himself. "We closed! Go 'way!"

"But I just wanted some-"

"Is off! Go 'way!"

And the surprisingly solid door slammed shut.

In the barracks of the Sable Regiment, whose motto of 'Firm Protectors' still raised sour grins among the merchants forced to pay them off, there was an unexpected 'officers' conference.' From the slumside soup kitchens to the rough gin-shops of the southside dock quarter, sharp-edged and hungry-souled people were gathering to discuss the news. After all, everyone had just heard:

"There's going to be a funeral."

* * *

The news had soon enough made its way to the ears of the army of informants and agents on the streets of the city, there to keep the Emperor's peace and fight crime when they could. In the crowded office at the top of the headquarters of the Glamour Vigilance, three tired-looking men were sitting round an incongruously splendid table whose top was a delicate mosaic depicting the whole city, on top of which rested a variety of carved pieces, of agate, jade, slate, marble and turquoise. One of them, a

judex by his toga, reached out a manicured hand and took the largest piece off the table, a solid gold cube. The magistrate looked at his comrades, excitement and trepidation in his voice.

"There's going to be a funeral. And then there'll be a war!"

* * *

The man they called the Hand of Lanbril - truth to tell, he had forgotten his real name himself - twitched aside the elegant drapes in the underground chamber and watched as, one by one, the godfathers of the Glamour underworld paid their respects to the body of the Old Man, as he lay in his open casket. More than one surreptitiously cast magics or, while kissing his cold cheek, pricked him with a needle, just to make sure the tyrant who had lorded it over the city's gangs for years was truly dead.

The Hand's mouth twisted as he saw these men and women, who a week ago would have sacrificed their sons to see the Old Man dead, going through the motions of mourning. Not that he disapproved; quite the opposite, as the foremost representative of Lanbril the Faceless Thief, he regarded such callous hypocrisy as truest homage to his god. But he also knew that they were all mustering their forces for a turf war to see who would become the new Old Man. He, though, could see the larger picture. A turf war like that would only help the authorities, who even now were preparing to use it to smash the underworld, playing faction against faction until none were left. He stepped back, as Lanbril's Angel of Enforcement began to form from the shadows of the side-chamber. He would not allow the work of decades to be thrown away.

"There is going to be a funeral. But there is to be no war - instead, there will be a Contest."

©2003 by Mark Galeotti

Heroic Hearts by John Hughes

(As originally appeared in the HeroWars Digest February 17, 2003)

Glorantha meets manga/anime! Mildly rude in content.

Kareth, the Sartarite Sword Master, looked deeply into Kallyr's dark eyes. For some reason, he looked far less geeky to the girl than he had ever looked before.

"Noble swordsman," Kallyr stammered, "why are you looking at me like that? What's going on?"

"Because I have something to say. I love you, Kallyr."

Kallyr looked back stunned. "No, no you can't -"

"Please listen to me! I've been thinking about you and only you ever since I came to Pavis. You're the most perfect girl, the most perfect person I've ever met. And I...."

Suddenly a male voice from the most distant sky interrupted them. "Hey! Liberator! What in the highest heaven do you think you're doing with Kallyr?"

They turned to see a blonde-haired god, Kallyr's lover, facing down at them from the sky. Midnight fury was in his eyes as he glared at Kareth.

"Polaris!" Kallyr exclaimed. "What are you doing?"

"Kallyr, this guy can give you nothing but pain." He then turned his full attention to the sword master. "And if you hurt her, Kareth, I'll kick your ass from here to Vithela and back!"

Kallyr giggled. "Sorry Kareth, but who's gonna argue with a god? As a lover he's just divine. And you'll never guess why they call him the pole star. Besides, I'm a queen, you know! You'd have to offer me all Sartar as bridegift before I'd even think of being your shield girl."

Polaris lifted Kallyr heavenwards on a ray of midnight blue. Gazing upwards, Kareth ground his teeth in frustrated fury. "All of Sartar! Well I'll show her..."

©2003 by John Hughes

Hill of Gold in Southern Saird by Pam Carlson

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest June 04, 1996)

A campaign account that describes a hero quest.

I am Volaria, a scholar of Lankhor Mhy from Nochet. I am trapped in this dismal wilderness with a motley bunch of warriors from all over the known world. We have settled in the Sairdite village of Enduraga; for all we know, nowhere else in the world is intact. This is the story of what I saw during Sacred Time in 1120, the year of the Dragonkill.

The afternoon blew in cold and dreary. Freezing sleet assaulted our village. We were busy butchering the Long Nosed Hairy Tusk Monster that we had barely managed to kill. (Don't mention it to Botho - he'll rave for hours about the fight.) A woman from our sister village of Narund came running in, begging for help from our healers. (Most of the people in Narund had moved in with us during the winter.) As I had more experience with healing than food preparation, I volunteered. Yaril DogBrother was out hunting, and Khorvash of Alkoth was busy building something mysterious. To see me safely through the wilderness, I took Boltho of the Orgovaltes, Merkel of Imther, and Ettiko, a savage but curiously charming little Pentan who claimed to worship You, Karg's Aunt.

We rode along the path to Narund as evening fell. The weather improved not a bit. Finally, as night fell, we took shelter in an abandoned stead. We had just made a cosy fire when something scratched and whined at the door. Ettiko carefully opened the door, ready to face something terrible. A little dog scampered in - the kind kept to chase off rats and foxes. The dog seemed anxious. It kept wanting in and out. Suddenly, it grabbed my healing bag and ran off into the darkness!

We all chased the little dog into the night. I swear it would allow itself to be seen just often enough for us to follow it. After an hour or two, it stopped raining and just grew colder. Finally, Ettiko spotted the dog on the top of a small hill, next to a little house. The dog dropped the bag and ran inside.

We all dashed to the top of the hill. Once there, the little house seemed different. It was a finely built, open topped circular building, with openings to the north, south, east, and west. Inside it, on a column carved with runes I have never seen, sat a red, burning crystal. Outside of the building, about six cubits away, stood a large, carefully stacked pile of wood. Boltho looked curious; Merkhel looked pale, and Ettiko was staring at the wood. The air changed, and magic pervaded everything. Suddenly, Boltho boasted a fine suit of iron chain and Merkhel wore shining golden plate. The sides of the hill, now much bigger, were green and lush, with large, heavily veined gold-rocks littering the sides. Merkhel looked even more worried.

Ettiko reached for the crystal, as if to remove it. As he did, the most horrific troll I have ever seen charged into the building. A terrible battle ensued. Ettiko had been nearly killed by the Tusk Monster two days before, and was still too wounded fight. Instead, he kept trying to ignite the wood outside with burning arrows. Botho and Merkhel needed help, so I laid in with my axe. I have had some dealings with trolls before, and can read a little of their expressions. This one seemed surprised!

I despise the florid battle-poetry of the warrior scalds, so I will be brief. We won. Merkhel nearly died, and Boltho was sorely wounded. The Troll disappeared as he died. Ettiko, quiet as usual, took the red crystal over to the pile of wood, which was still unlight. He carefully held it to the wood. The pyre quickly burst into an impossibly bright flame, which steadily warmed the hilltop. Merkhel returned the crystal to the column. Boltho still looked confused.

It was then we noticed Ettiko's horse had wings. Ettiko whooped and weakly climbed on, flying his horse into the night. Slowly, the sky in the east grew brighter. Yelm seemed larger and brighter than he had the morning before. We were all mesmerized by the rising disk. Even Ettiko landed to watch the rays of light pour over the valley below. Once Yelm had completely risen above the Gates of Dawn, we were released.

We were again on a soggy little hill in the wilds of Saird, next to a decrepit herder's shelter. The shack was empty. Merkhel and Boltho stood in their sodden old clothes, but their wounds were real. The stack of wood smoldered nearby. Ettiko still sat his horse, once again merely a beast of the earth. I retrieved my bag. The dog had gone. There was, however, a lovely warm wind blowing in from the south - a wind that smelled of spring.

At Narund we found that no one was ill; the woman who supposedly fetched us had died that winter. Ettiko says that the the little dog must have been SnowFox in disguise, come for him so he could be a part of the Signal for the Sun Path. Usually, on the first night of the new year, the shamans of You, Karg's Aunt light the Signal across all Pent from east to west, to show the sun the new path. But this year the dragons ate so many, they must have needed even a mangled warrior to help.

Since that day, Ettiko swears his horse runs a little faster than she did before.

Because so many rituals were lost with the men in the Dragonkill, the boys of Endugara learned a new Spring Ritual. Even a hundred years later, Enduragan warriors go to FoxDog Hill to slay the Dark and perform the ritual of Helmal, Orlanth, and YukaZaga. (And a nearby clan of trolls has lost fire for their Zorak Zorani.)

(Bonus question: Why did Ettiko's horse have wings?)

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Hindall's Raid by Andrew Solovay

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest July 21, 2004)

A "How we should behave" story for Orlanthi.

Hindall looked at his fields. "I have rich pasture and I am a good herder," he said. "But I do not have enough cattle. When the Dark Men attacked, I fought as the warthane ordered me, and left my herds unguarded. The trolls plundered them, and I have lost much. If I do not increase my herd, the chief will take some of my pastures from me."

His shadowcat purred gravely. "I have walked the tula of the Leaping Frog Clan. They have more cattle than the land can feed. The cattle are thin and weak from hunger. The men do not guard their herds well. They dishonor Uralda with their inattention."

"Let us ride out at once!" said Hindall. "If they dishonor Uralda by leaving herds unguarded, I can honor her and enrich myself by taking some cattle. On my pastures the cows will grow strong again."

"If you die raiding, your wife must raise your children alone," said the cat. "She cannot command you, but you should seek her blessing."

Hindall went to his wife. "The roof is strong, the garden is tended, and I have seen to our needs. Our home can spare me for a brief time. I would raid the Leaping Frog lands, and make our children wealthier. I ask your blessing."

His wife said, "We do not live alone, but in a clan. If you are captured, our chief must ransom you. You should ask his blessing as well. If he blesses you, so will I." And she clothed him with the Three-Skin Cloak, to warm him when he slept in the woods. Hindall went to his chief. "I have provided for my wife. I have always come when you mustered me, and I have tended our shrines. I would raid the Leaping Frog lands, and make our clan wealthier. I ask your blessing."

The chief said, "We do not live alone, but in a tribe. If you kill while raiding, a feud will begin and the king will have to make peace. You should ask his blessing as well. If he blesses you, so will I." And the chief mounted him on the horse Surefoot, to travel swiftly in the starlit night.

Hindall went to his king. "I have served wife, chief, king and god. I have done my duty to all. I would raid the Leaping Frog clan. I can tend the cattle better than they can, so the tribe will be wealthier, and Uralda better pleased with us."

The king said, "I am king over both clans. But Leaping Frog has neglected its duties, and your raid is lawful. Whether you succeed or fail, they will learn to watch their herds better." And the chief blessed him, and lent him Finovan's sword, which is named Searing Bolt.

Hindall rode that night to the tula of Leaping Frog. He reached their lands in the gray before dawn, and knew that he should not risk a raid in daylight. He made a nest for himself in a hollow, and slept.

He was awoken by his alynx's growls. Scouting, he saw that a broo in a nearby clearing had clubbed a wild boar unconscious, and was taking his foul pleasure with it. "If I fight it, I may be heard, and my raid will fail," said Hindall. "But if I stay here, the boar may sire a monster who might cause any manner of harm. I should not think of my herds when the Predark threatens." Hindall fought and killed the broo with Searing Bolt, and he cut the boar's throat. He buried the bodies with the proper ritual to keep the taint from spreading. He carved the runes of warning into a tree by the grave, so the earth priestesses would know there was work to do. He was not heard, and he returned to his hollow and slept.

That night, Hindall crept onto the tula. With his shadowcat he rounded up several fine cows. "I will guard you as your honor demands," Hindall said. "I will give you good pastures. No Leaping Frog blood is on my hands. Will you come with me?" And the cattle went with him.

As he left the tula, he found a boy of the Leaping Frog Clan who was keeping watch. Hindall struck through the boy's spear with the Searing Bolt, and held him helpless. "What shall I do with you?" asked Hindall. "Shall I release you?"

"I am pledged to guard my clan's herds," said the boy. "If you release me, I will raise the alarm, and we will recapture our herds and hold you for ransom."

"Shall I kill you?" asked Hindall.

"My father will avenge my death, and there will be blood-feud between our clans," said the boy.

"Shall I bind you and leave you here?" asked Hindall.

"Wolves roam these lands," said the boy. "Leave me here helpless, and they will eat me and I will not be burned or buried. Orlanth will curse your lands and mine for this impiety."

"Then you will be my guest," said Hindall. "I will tie your hands and take you to my tula. You may then go free with a gift, and be peace between our clans." And so he brought the boy safely to his home.

Learn, child. This is the Hindall who went on to found our own clan. This was a wise man and a good one. He knew that land is good, cattle are better, peace better still, and honor is best of all.

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The History of Black Fang : as told by a man of Adari by Sandy Petersen

The origin myth for the Black Fang cult of Pavis.

Black Fang is not his real name. We do not know his real name . No good person knows it. He is one of the bad things that came from the city of Pavis, before the trolls came. (note: This would have in the late Second Age). Pavis was strong then, the strongest. The old khan Arrowsmith of Pavis died, and his three sons contended for the khanship. The city people split into three bands. Each band wanted one of the sons to be the khan. The three sons were Bax O Ran Arrowsmith, Baanx li Arrowsmith, and BaxUmeni Arrowsmith. Bax O Ran became the new khan, for more city people followed him than the other two. When Bax Umeni saw that he could not be khan, he united with Bax O Ran's band. But Baanx li and his band were wroth. Baanx li told his braves to fight and take the khanship. The other people took him. They slew him on the Long Wall for his rebellion. Many people saw his entrails. (note: refers to an Old Pavis practice; after an execution, the victim's organs were laid outside the city's west wall to be eaten by crows and vultures. Beast Riders, seeing this, assumed that the execution itself must be awesomely cruel, as the man was parceled out along the length of the wall.)

Baanx li's band saw that Baanx li was slain. They sent a man with a knife. He killed Bax O Ran on his judgment stool. The murderer escaped so swiftly that no man could follow him. When the murderer returned to his band all took the Oath. The Oath was that none would tell that the murderer had killed Bax O Ran. The murderer's old name was made secret. He was called Black Fang after that. Then Black Fang and his band went among the other city people so they could not be found. But as many as were found were slain on the Long Wall.

So Bax Umeni became khan Arrowsmith. Things went as before. But this was late in the time of the Arrowsmiths. The power of Pavis withered slowly.

Two years after Bax Umeni was khan, the Beast Riders assailed Pavis. A troop of Greenfeather Sables guised themselves as traders. They smuggled hatchets and stabbing darts into the city. They killed the soft city soldiers and opened the Bad Gate (note: the Hippogriff Gate, so-called by many nomads because of the hippogriff-horse similarities.) The Beasts came into the city. The fight was long, and the Beasts held the temple of Pavis itself for much of a day. Bax Umeni was struck against the wall and slain. Then the Beasts were thrust out.

The city people once more fell into contention. Their khan Arrowsmith was dead again. They named Gher Aman as the new khan. Black Fang lay in wait to kill Gher Aman, as he had killed Bax O Ran. Black Fang was upheld by his band and the Oath. Black Fang was prevented, by one of Gher Aman's servants. Gher Amansent forth his men to capture Black Fang and his band.

But Black Fang took his band and fled to the hills north of Pavis. Thus Gher Aman could not find him.

For years Black Fang was in secret. Families traveling alone vanished. Caravans to Pavis were plundered. Oases were burned. All said it was Black Fang's wickedness. Perhaps some sins were not Black Fang's, but were of trolls, or morocanth, or other evil folk. The truth of BlackFang 's power was not known. Then

Chesoram, the latest khan of Pavis, was killed by stealth on his judgment stool. In that year, his son, who became khan in his stead, was also killed by stealth. Then secret murders became common. Robbery and other city evils became common. All men knew that the assassins and plunderers were Black Fang's men. Now there were many of his band, even amongst the city people. But even more dwelt among the Beast Riders. And they dwelt among us all unknown to us. And they were called the Oathband, or Oath, of Black Fang. They killed Chesoram and his son, and could not be found.

Then we saw that Black Fang's robbers and murderers did not kill only city people, but even the Beast Rider khans and wise men were killed by them. So had the city infected all. When the Beast Riders saw this, they used all means to wipe out the Oathband from amongst their tribes. Even the morocanth helped. But the city people of Pavis were loath to destroy the folk of the Oath. Many city people were of the Oath's portion. Many feared the Oathband's wrath. Many wished for Black Fang's favor.

The folk of the Oath had secret signs. They had secret words. They had secret oaths beyond their great Oath. Whatsoever a brother or sister of the Oath did, that person would not be injured by another of the Oath. Hence they did murder, and steal, and kidnap, with little hindrance. When a person of the Oath betrayed the secrets, he was hunted and slain.

In two hands of years, the Oathband was lost from among the Animal Riders. But it was strongest in Pavis. At the last, the Oathband of Black Fang became the owners of Pavis. The khan of Pavis obeyed the Oath. The High Priest and all the other Priests obeyed the Oath. So had the city become an abomination.

Now the Oathband owned the foul riches of Pavis. Now the Oathband began to fight itself. The khan of Pavis, who was of the Oath, was murdered by his brother, also of the Oath, who sought the khan's place. The people began to fight one another. There were killings and feuds all through the city and the land around. And it was the Oathband who carried on this war.

The Gods saw the evil of the land. They smote the land so it was dry. The ground did not yield up grass. The beasts did not calve. The Beast Riders fled to the East. The people of Pavis perished by thousands. The wealth of the city departed. In the famine, the Oathband dwindled and its secrets were hid up in the ground. Then the city was taken by its enemies and destroyed.

After, the trolls came to the city and sealed it up. So came Pavis to be as it is today. But Black Fang's secrets were not lost to mankind. After Pavis was Opened, the Oathband made its presence known. The Oathband grows stronger each year. The people do not remember how the Oathband of Black Fang destroyed old Pavis. But the Oath remembers. They say the old words. They make the old promises. They are the old abominations come again. And who knows what man or woman is of the Oath?

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Hooafting and Stenya by David Dunham

Author's notes: "In my Glorantha this is a myth from First Age Slontos, preserved by the people from that region who emigrated to Umathela. (I particularly like their view of cities.) It's probably known by at least some of the Wenelians."

Long ago there stood a city called Gundgund. Its streets were narrow and twisted. A man could easily become lost there and never find his way out! In Gundgund lived a woman named Lady Stenya, whose beauty was unsurpassed. Also in the city was a great treasure, a magical three-legged table. When one tapped on it and commanded it to bring food, it would bring whatever was desired. Unlike most tables, the top of this one was made of leather.

King Hooafting's wife had died. One of his young warriors, Tynuquo, proposed that he marry Stenya. Hooafting said, "She won't go with me." Tynuquo replied, "A man doesn't let the drinking horn pass him by. She will go with you, Hooafting."

They set off and came to Stenya's home in the city. They were made welcome, and Tynuquo told their hostess, "Hooafting has no wife. So we have come to court you." Hooafting said, "Come away with me, Stenya!"

"I will not marry you, Hooafting."

"What is wrong with me, Stenya?"

"We are of different folk, you and I. Our kind never marry. We could never have children."

"Many white sheep stand among our herds. Black give birth to white. White give birth to black."

"Your old hat is in tatters, your old cloak has been dragged through the underbrush. Your shirt is a boar skin. How could I ever marry you?"

"I will wear my finest at our wedding."

Stenya replied, "How could I every marry the likes of him, Tynuquo? You bring before me a white-bearded old man."

Now a frown came over Hooafting. "I'll make you a swineherd's wife, or you can shave off my mustache, you witch!"

Then Hooafting returned home. He sent out messengers, and called together a great meeting of all the Entruli. When everyone had assembled he asked, "Who is absent?"

"Argwan of the Ueneli did not heed your call," said Wusar the Venerable, who was famed as a seer. "Without Argwan the Mighty, Gundgund City will not be yours."

Hooafting sent a young warrior. "Argwan, you must come. The Entruli have been insulted."

Argwan answered, "If so, then I will come. But first you must tell me the number of my pigs."

Alas, the youth could not count so high, so he returned to the assembly. The army stood ready to set forth. When they heard the bad news, they didn't know what to do. Among them was Yermi, a trader from the Eerili, who offered to fetch Argwan. He was dispatched.

"Greetings, Argwan! May your hogs be fruitful! I bid you join the Entruli."

"Listen well, trader. You must tell me their number, if you are to be a swineherd."

"Mother pigs-nine, tuskers-ten, buff-eleven, shaggy ones-twelve, half-greys-eighteen, their mothers-thirty, and their fathers-thirty. Another thirty behind each of these. Leading each sow is a piglet. Thousands upon thousands, they stand in the valleys."

"Yes, that is the size of my brood. If I leave, you must care for them. You must not lose a single one!" Argwan saddled his boar Wayekwacha, and set off for the place where the Entruli stood assembled.

[adapted from "Setenaya and Argwana," Nart Sagas p.34]

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Hon Hoolbiktu and the Magic Men by Sandy Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest May 31, 1995)

This is one of Sandy's Pamatlean tales. It deals with how the hero Hon Hoolbiktu dealt with the six legged empire.

Long long ago when the Six Legged Empire spread roads and gardens like cancers over the land, Hon Hoolbiktu {here the storyteller stops and waits for the traditional applause and hooting that accompanys the listeners' recognition of Hon's name}.

Well, anyway Hon Hoolbiktu worked as a slave in the gardens of the Empire. One day he killed the overseer and ran away. But the Empire had magic men who were very mighty indeed, and they could see the future, all the way up to now, and even further. No I won't tell you what they saw, because it was unlawful. The magic men saw that Hon Hoolbiktu would destroy their empire one day and kill all of them. They didn't care about their empire, but they didn't want to die, so they made the Second Seeking Ntajagar.

{The Seeking Ntajagar is a sacred hunting beast. Only five can be summoned over the entire lifetime of the universe. The First was in the Godtime, one of Pamalt's helpers. At this point, the storyteller pauses again for the audience to disclaim its distaste and contempt for the godless Six Leggers who were so selfish as to bring the universe's close that much nearer.}

Hon Hoolbiktu was good at hiding. He was taught by the Wartsnoot itself {a Pamatelan beast famed at concealment}. The way Hon hid himself was this: He put himself in an egg, the egg inside a joybird, the joybird in a cave, the cave on a volcano, the volcano on an island, the island inside a sea monster, and the sea monster at the bottom of the ocean. {seven layers of hiding} But no one could hide from the

Second Seeking Ntajagar, and it found him before the sun set and brought him back to the Six Legger magic men, who showed him their legs and navels and told Hon Hoolbiktu he must not destroy the Empire. Well, this was the first Hon Hoolbiktu had ever heard he was supposed to destroy the Empire. "How can I do such a great deed?" he wondered. The magic men threatened him.

"Do not take the Spear of Fire.

"Do not rouse the people's ire.

"Do not seek yourself spirit allies.

"Do not try to find out our lies."

Hon Hoolbiktu said, "I will do all these things, and more." Then the magic men did a great magic. They showed him their Dooms -- the Dooms of civilized men. First they brought Plague. She was dark, many armed, with a huge mouth, but no eyes, nose, ears, or tongue. {because there is no way to communicate with her} Hon Hoolbiktu soon was covered with boils, but he said, "This is no danger to us. We do not live in diseased termite mounds like you." {The nearest comparison to cities that the Doraddi have.} "When there is sickness, we can walk across the free plains away from it and be safe. We eat clean plants and animals, caught and tended by our own hands. You can make one of us sick, but we do not all get sick together, and so plague does not frighten us."

Second they brought Starvation. She was skinny as a stick, with hot blazing breath and huge swollen stomach. {The breath probably symbolizes Sikkanos, the bad wind, and drought.} Hon Hoolbiktu's stomach cleaved to his backbone and his muscles became weak, but he said, "This is no danger to us. We do not depend on other people for our food like you. When there is no food, we can travel to a place where there is food. We can gather together and share. {This is a dig at the class differences inherent in civilized society.} We can get hungry, and sometimes a whole family can starve, but we do not all starve, and so starvation does not frighten us."

Then the magic men knew they must bring their most terrifying Dooms, so they brought War. She was tall and strong with teeth like arrowheads and blood smeared all up and down her and dead men's penises hung round her waist. {Because mostly men die in war.} Hon Hoolbiktu's knees smote together and he shook with fear, but he said, "This is no danger to us. We do not fight for years. We do not have land to protect or have taken away. We float across the plains like locusts in the grass. We can fight each other, and kill each other, and slay whole oases full of people, but we do not all fight in giant gangs, and so war does not frighten us."

Then the magic men brought their last and worst Doom, Death. {Death is, as is traditional, not described, for she is different for every man.} Hon Hoolbiktu stood up boldly and said, "This is no danger to us. We die, you die, all men and women and children die. Even gods and spirits die. But you are afraid to die because you have never lived, and so we can turn this weapon against you and so even Death does not frighten us." And then the magic men put their Dooms away, and they saw that they had revealed their secrets to Hon Hoolbiktu, and then they used their most powerful magic on him. "Hon Hoolbiktu, serve us and we will lift the four Dooms from off your spirit."

But Hon Hoolbiktu said, "I will never serve you." and he left. Then he took the spear, and the people's anger, and his spirit allies, and his knowledge of the Six Legged Empire's lies, and brought sickness, famine, warfare, and death to all the human termite mounds and roads and gardens of the Empire. But to the end of his life Hon Hoolbiktu suffered from boils, and he was always hungry, and he was a coward. Except that he was not afraid of death itself, not ever.

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How Cheese Was Made by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest July 1, 1994)

(This is a tale commonly told amongst the Valusi and Zarkon marls about the origin of cheese.)

In the days of darkness before Khelmal came amongst men, the foods of the world began to disappear and men went hungry. The animals that still lived grew afraid--some like the badgers and foxes dug holes in the ground to hide, others like the goats and sheep retreated higher into the mountains.

The goats took secret trails into the mountains hoping to hide from men. But Alaczar the Toad (who had always disliked the goats ever since they ate his giant turnip) came after them. He kept leaping into the air to see where they had gone and pointing out their trail to the men that followed. There came a point when the herd of goats could go no further and the hungry men still followed them. Then Alaczar gloated for he knew it would be the end of the goats.

A man called up to the goats on their ridge. "Send us down one of your kind so that we may live and we will leave the rest of you alone."

The goats considered this and decided that a sacrifice of one was a reasonable bargain if they were to stay alive. So one goat was sent off down the mountain to the hungry men. The men sacrificed the goat and ate it.

Of course, it was not long until the men were hungry again and another man called up to the goats on their ridge. "Send us down one of your kind so that we may live. We will certainly leave the rest of you alone."

The goats were quite alarmed at this, but after careful consideration they decided to sacrifice one more of their kind. So another goat was sent down the mountain to the hungry men. The men sacrificed the goat and ate it.

Well, men are always insatiable given a chance, and it was not long again until the men grew hungry. They called up to the goats asking for yet another sacrifice.

Now this time, Grand Goat, the greatest billy of the herd offered to go himself, for surely he was large enough to satisfy all the men.

But Mother Goat would hear none of that. "Wait," she said. "Even you will not satisfy their lust for flesh. But I am full to bursting with milk. I can spare some for these men so they don't go hungry and yet the milk will be replenished when they are ready for more."

The goats thought this was a good idea. Grand Goat called down to the men and offered this proposal. At first the men were reluctant for they had come to like the taste of goat meat. But the wisest amongst them recognized their plight and agreed to try the milk, with the condition that if they did not like it then Grand Goat would come as a sacrifice. A pitcher was sent up to collect the milk and Mother Goat promptly filled it.

Now Alaczar was upset about this since he wanted the men to eat all the goats. So he thought to play a trick so they would be eaten anyway. After Mother Goat had finished filling the pitcher, Alaczar snuck up to the vessal. Carefully, so that no one would see him, Alaczar cast his magics and soured the entire pitcher of milk until it curdled. Alaczar was so happy and pleased by what he did that he bounded off up the ridge so he could see the goat's expressions when the hungry men asked to eat Grand Goat.

When the pitcher had reached the men, they lifted it up to see what was inside. There they found a mix of curds and whey. Not knowing what to do, they found a bowl and poured off the whey into it. They then took the curds and pressed them together into a ball which they could then evenly divide amongst themselves. So they ate the pressed curds and the bellies of the men were filled. They were so pleased that they called up to the goats and thanked them for the meal.

Alaczar was so angry that his trick had failed that he dashed down into the camp of the men. "Don't you know that that milk was sour?" he exclaimed in outrage. "You aren't supposed to like it at all!"

But the men had liked the cheese. And they wanted more. So their leader came over to Alaczar and said, "You must be another gift from the goats." He grabbed Alaczar so that the trickster could not escape and then gave him to the men to eat.

And that is how the goats survived and men first made cheese.

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How Elmal Brought the Last Light (a tale told in Vanch or Scyllilla) by Pam Carlson

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest October 24, 1996)

(Author's note: Here's my Elmal story. It would probably be from somewhere in Southern Peloria, maybe even Vanch. Ernalda may have a different name there, but y'all get the idea.)

Long ago, when the Great Darnkess was at its blackest, Ernalda Earthmother was held prisoner in the Hellcourt of the Evil Emperor. Because he cared for no one but himself, the Emperor held all land goddesses as his concubines. Although the Emperor was no stranger to base lust, he gave the goddesses no love or respect. They were miserable.

One horrible day, Serpent slithered down from the Surface. She carried messages from the people above. The people were cold and starving, and they begged Ernalda to return. Ernalda ached to help them, but she knew she could not escape. Instead, she went to the Emperor and conceived with him a son. The godling's name was Elmal. His mother raised him to be generous, compassionate, and clever.

Even the Emperor was proud of his son. He taught Elmal to ride and shoot, and gave him his own Sky Steed, which could fly to the stars. Then the Emperor took Elmal to an ancient treasure room of his former palace, a place called the Hill of Gold. The Emperor proudly showed his son the riches he had hoarded: gold and ivory, silver and jade. Then the Emperor showed his son the things he had spitefully taken from the Surface after he had been slain: the the Heart of Fire, the Arrows of Light, and another treasure, which even Elmal was denied. But Elmal, ever keen of eye, saw the treasure even inside its heavy adamant box; the Ray of Truth! The Emperor had stolen Truth and then locked it away so that he could ignore it.

When Elmal returned to the Hellcourt, Ernalda told him of the sufferings of the people above. She told Elmal to go above and to return light and fire to the desperate people. Elmal was a good son, and loathed to disobey his father. But he could still hear the Ray of Truth calling to him, begging to be set free. Finally, the misery in his mother's eyes convinced him.

Elmal mounted his Sky Steed and flew to the stars. He circled around, eventually finding the Hill of Gold. Because the top was too small for his steed to land, they landed at the foot and started to climb to the top. Suddenly, the Darkwind lept out of a shadow and viciously attacked Elmal and his mount. Elmal stabbed the creature with his spear and drove it off, but the monster had crippled his Sky Steed badly. Elmal was forced to continue alone.

As Elmal climbed the huge hill, his feet kept slipping on the piles of golden coins. He often fell and cut himself on the sharp edges of the jewels. As the hill got steeper, Elmal went even slower. Until now, Elmal had never noticed how cold the Darkness was. He began to shiver. He looked back down the Hill to see how far he had come. Not very far.

Elmal turned back into his climb, but found his way blocked by a tall, pale, beautiful woman. She smiled invitingly at Elmal, and opened her furs to take him in. Elmal gazed on her lovely body. He grew sleepy, remembering the warmth and pleasures he had shared with the goddesses in his father's court. But just as he prepared to embrace her, Elmal saw that this was no Earth Goddess; there was nothing but Cold and Death in that body. Instead, he shoved the Demon aside and ran up the hill as fast as he could - anything to get warm.

After running as far as he could, Elmal grew very tired. He stopped to rest. He sank to his knees among the piles of rings which the Emperor had been given, but had never given away. As he gasped for breath, Elmal noticed that one of the rings was changing. It began to writhe and squirm, and crawled toward his knee. Suddenly the maggot opened its jaws - which were bigger than the maggot itself! Then another ring turned, and another... As Elmal jumped to his feet, the whole pile of rings had become a writhing mass maggots, biting at his legs and feet. Elmal stabbed them with his spear, but the maggots writhed past the spear, unaffected. Elmal pushed down on them with his shield, and was able to jump ahead a

little. He staggered up the hill, swiping at the maggots with his shield, and stomping them with his feet. But Elmal was sorely wounded.

Finally, he reached the top of the hill. The doors to the room were locked, but Elmal had learned the Words of Passage from his father. He spoke them and entered. Elmal looked around, and spied the adamant box. He tried to open it, but it was locked tight. The box was too heavy for Elmal to lift. He despaired. "Will I never free Truth?" he wailed.

From inside the box, a voice, quiet and deep, so slight that even Elmal could barely hear it, said: "How would you use me?" Elmal looked at the box in surprise. He could only speak the first thoughts in his mind. "I would free you into the world, to share with all the peoples of the Earth and Sky, the Sea and the Storm." The box opened. A bright light filled the room, and the Ray of Truth shot out of the box and into Elmal's hand! Elmal gave a victory cry, and he seized the Heart of Fire and the Arrows of Light.

Elmal's trip down the hill was much faster. The maggots cringed back from the Ray of Truth. The Heart of Fire kept him warm, so the Lady of Winter dared not approach him. But waiting for at the bottom of the Hill was a powerful, evil god, one chained in the service of the Emperor. The cruel god roared that he would tear Elmal limb from limb for stealing from the Emperor's hoard.

Dodging a blow from a huge mace that flickered with dark magic, Elmal compassionately offered to unchain the god and free him. But the cruel god had no interest in freedom. Elmal generously offered to share his treasures with the people, but the cruel god had no interest in people. Elmal cleverly proposed a test, but the cruel god had no interest in honor. The cruel god knew no reason, and roared into the fight. Elmal was still wounded from his fight with the maggots, and he was hampered by the heavy firepot. Afraid above all else that Truth would be lost again, Elmal threw the pot containing the Heart of Fire in the face of the cruel god. The terrible god staggered back, aflame.

Elmal ran to his Sky Steed, who could still run. He rode off as fast as he could with the Arrows of Light and the Ray of Truth, to share with all the peoples of the world.

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How Lhankor Mhy Became Curious by Pete McAveney

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest March 31, 2003)

(Author's note: "This is another prequel to "Lhankor Mhy and the Cage," told from a human viewpoint. The grey sages have recorded this version on the scrolls, but keep it in the restricted section, as it is not their cult's version of the story.)

Trickster used to pay frequent visits to Lhankor Mhy's library, and sometimes he met the bearded one while he was there. One time when he was in the library Trickster's hand got caught in a book when Lhankor Mhy slammed it closed and sat on it. Trickster thought about gnawing it off and running away, but he was quite fond of that hand, and he knew it would be difficult to get it back. The old greybeard agreed to return it if Trickster would swear to follow some rules. He could not steal any of the books or

scrolls, nor eat them, nor could he correct what was written, nor could he sing the words aloud, nor could he blow his nose in them, nor could he even touch any of them. In return the old sage would answer one question per visit. Once it was answered Trickster would have to go away.

This new game sounded like fun, so Trickster agreed. He immediately blurted out his first question: "Why do you spend all your time collecting these bits of knowledge from others, instead of finding them yourself?" Lhankor Mhy answered, "I must collect them so that they are not lost." He was not satisfied with his own answer, though. After Trickster left he searched through his entire library, every last scroll, looking for a better answer.

Eventually Trickster showed up again carrying a chunk of rock. "Why is this rock grey?" he asked. Lhankor Mhy consulted with his father's Mostali, who used strange instruments to illuminate the rock with many colors and made incomprehensible charts on paper. This took a long, long time. While he was waiting Trickster grew hungry - so hungry that he ate his own shoes, the Mostali charts, and eventually the rock itself. That interrupted the Mostali and made Lhankor Mhy grumble, so Trickster smiled and backed out the door before anything bad could happen.

Later on Trickster returned after taking a nice long swim in the sea. He arrived soaked with water from head to the last toe wedged in his squishy galoshes. As he walked his feet made a sound like 'squee squee squee!' and he left a trail of wet footprints behind him. Walking up to the bearded sage he asked, "Why is the ocean blue?" Lhankor Mhy rubbed his chin and started to tell the stories of the Water Tribe, starting at the beginning. He was not sure which myth explained the color, but he was sure he would remember it if he told all the tales in the traditional sequence. This took quite a while and Trickster grew bored. After sitting for too long he stood up and stretched, up as far as he could, until his hands reached the arches of the ceiling far above. Then he stretched out one foot, all the way to the opposite wall. It went 'squish' and left a wet footprint on the marble surface. The sage grew irritated at his inattention but did not stop telling the story for fear of losing his place. Trickster tried lifting his other foot and stretching it out to another wall where it left a muddy mark. Soon he was running up the walls and across the ceiling, leaping from stack to stack and dashing across the edges of the shelves. He came too fast around a corner, though, and crashed into a cabinet - the cabinet holding Lhankor Mhy's new index to the library. Small paper cards flew everywhere. Lhankor Mhy was now frowning with anger; he was resolved to beat the trickster as soon as he finished the story. Rushing through the words he tried to reach the end before Trickster could cause any more damage. Sheepishly Eurmäl apologized. Gathering up the cards, he tried to fix the index by re-filing them. He finished this as quickly as he could and ran out of the library. Looking upon his soiled walls Lhankor Mhy realized he would need to be better prepared next time if he were to get rid of Trickster before he could cause more trouble.

After a long interlude the door of the library swung open to reveal Eurmäl holding a clump of sod. Before he could open his mouth Lhankor Mhy interjected, "Your pattern reveals your next question. You will ask why the grass is green. I already know this answer - it is because green is Ernälä's favorite color, and the grasses seek to please her." Surprised, Trickster dropped the sod and danced a jig around it, circling three times. He then grabbed Lhankor Mhy by the beard and kissed him - a big, long, wet kiss on the lips - before the Sage picked him up and tossed him through the door.

Eventually Eurmäl returned to ask one more question. He arrived at the library clutching a box to his chest. Looking around carefully to the east, and then scanning the horizon to the west, he crouched down to set his eye level with the lid of the box. Opening it just a bit, he peered in, and then slammed it shut. With a suspicious look he lifted the box up to Lhankor Mhy's height and lifted the lid cautiously. "Hmn," he reacted, "I wonder why the shadows hide in the corners of the box?"

Trickster leapt with glee and did cartwheels down the road, yelling "I won! I won!"

©2003 by Pete McAveney

How Lhankor Mhy Disposed of the Annoying Eurmäl by Giorgio Merigo

It happened once that Lhankor Mhy was at his Marble desk of Rainbow Silver, studying and concentrating on a difficult dilemma.

As he used to do whenever Elmal shone his bright rays in a beautiful day, he left all the windows of the room opened to the enthralling landscapes.

Through one of them, a black raven entered and set himself on a glass amphora croaking his happiness and curiosity, but the everknowing Sage saw behind the shape that Eurmäl took camouflaging himself, and smiled as he often did whenever "that annoying Trickster" was around.

Shaking his head vigorously or we should say beak, Eurmäl began questioning the Lore Master to discover what he was studying, but the topic was too serious and important and complicate to let the Joker know, and in fact he was studying a prophecy talking of a red woman of immense power.

At first Lhankor Mhy tried to ignore the repeated question and even the presence of the Trickster, but high was also the power of the god of troubles and jokes and when the ink pot rolled over on the scroll he was reading, Lhankor Mhy started and looked truly annoyed. He waved a hand over the scroll and the ink disappeared, then he turned softly and stared at the black raven understanding that he would never take leave unless satisfied of his curiosity first, so Lhankor Mhy explained to him how he heard about a prophecy talking about non-orlanthi humans on Glorantha.

The raven-Eurmäl inquired then about the scroll the Grey Sage was studying and Lhankor Mhy told him that it was related to a prophecy revealed in an ancient aeon before he himself was born.

But seeing that Lhankor Mhy was becoming impatient and annoyed, and having a good feeling about this, Eurmäl was all the more persuaded to go on asking questions whose answers he really didn't care about.

Eventually, Lhankor Mhy stopped trying to study and to keep focused, and looked at the raven as he tried to grip it with his hands, but with a sudden jump, the bird left the glass amphora flying higher

where it could not be taken, and all the way up laughing and croaking and joking and bothering the ever patient Grey one.

Lhankor Mhy then asked him if he would really know all the detail of his research and Eurmäl accepted, lured himself in a trick worthy of his.

The Sage then opened himself to Eurmäl: he opened the hands and his eyes, the mouth and his mind, and suddenly, with words, with gestures, with emphatic thoughts, he shared a good part of his knowledge to the poor Trickster, forced to stay still for a long long period, trying vainly to understand and learn what he had been told but not taught.

So Lhankor Mhy went on studying and worrying of an era where Orlanth would risk to fall because of a red doom, so tricked Trickster became part of the furniture of the room until slowly at first and then faster, he regained his wits and he realized that his friend Lhankor Mhy the Joker's joker had already left.

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How Yelmäl got his Wife by Jeff Richards

(As originally appeared in the World of Gloratha list on April 4th, 2008).

Here's a written version of that same tale I heard from a Locaeming godtalker when I was in Wilmskirk more than a decade ago:

In the Green Age, the Emperor demanded that Ernalda join him at the Palace of Gold: "It is my wish, and as I have been made Emperor, my wishes must be obeyed." Ernalda did not agree with the Emperor, but she went at the request of her kin. "I am the peacemaker, and this is how peace can be made."

However, once Ernalda arrived, the Emperor feared her and would have little to do with her. He treated Ernalda - Queen of the Universe - as a slave, and banished her to far corner of the Palace. The Emperor insisted on obedience, and had little interest in fair peace. When Ernalda encouraged Orlanth to cast down the Emperor. When Orlanth killed the Emperor, Ernalda left with Orlanth and became his wife.

Although Orlanth and Ernalda had many lovers, the two Great Gods were always connected most deeply with each other. The sons of the Emperor never acknowledged that Ernalda left the Emperor voluntarily and swore to take her back, in chains and shackles if necessary. Orlanth killed many of the Emperor's heirs and sons, but when Orlanth and his Thunder Brothers wer away, Yelmäl assembled an army and marched on the Storm Village. He told the gods and goddesses that he would destroy them all, unless they gave him Ernalda: "It is my wish, and as I am the Son of the Emperor, my wishes must be obeyed."

Once again, Ernalda's kinsmen insisted that she accompany him to the Hill of Gold. Once again, Ernalda thought otherwise, but agreed at the request of her kin. "I am the peacemaker, and this is how peace can be made." Yelmäl guarded Ernalda and kept all gods away from her.

When Orlanth returned, he raged and a mighty storm descended upon the Hill of Gold. Yelmario tried to keep Orlanth from rejoining his wife, but Yelmario failed. Orlanth defeated Yelmario and took his spear and armor, which he later gave to his loyal thane, Elmal. Ernalda returned to the Storm Village with much celebration.

When Monrogh formed the Sun Dome Templars and rediscovered Yelmario, the kings and chiefs of Sartar were worried. Monrogh's tribe had no women and had no true kin - there was nothing to keep the Sun Tribe from violating Sartar's Laws except war. A big council was held, and it was agreed that the tribes would give Monrogh and his followers wives, to keep the peace. The priestesses of Ernalda agreed: ""We are the peacemakers, and this is how peace can be made." Enough women agreed to marry men of the Sun Tribe that peace could be made between the Sun Tribe and the tribes Sartar. However, the Yelmarios know that their women are foreigners, and so fear their wives and guard them from all other men - especially their Orlanthi kinsmen.

Note: I recalled this story after I came across a Lunar scroll containing a very similar story set in Mirin's Cross (called Domanand in the manuscript) and dated from the Second Age. However, in that story the role of Yelmario is given to a solar god called Tharkantus, who I had not heard of before.

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How Orlanth Bested Opanbobos. Or How Orlanthi learned how to curl by Alison Place

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest December 7, 2003)

As all know, many years ago Orlanth sought the wisdom of Lhankor Mhy on how to defeat Opanbobos the Great Thrower. Orlanth was told to take up the Talking Flint, which cut out his heart. So great was his power that Orlanth did not die, but instead used heart and flint together to make Great Weighty, the Thunderstone, and defeated Opanbobos at his own game.

Now, the great secret that you must now learn is that Great Weighty was not just or only a slingstone, however powerful those may be, but also a magic curling stone. For look again, the rune is of a curling stone, and the handle by which one throws it!

Orlanth and Opanbobos were the skips of the greatest curling teams ever. They were rivals of long standing, and each had boasted to his own friends that the other was no match. So the challenge that Orlanth set for Opanbobos was to best him in a game of curling.

Opanbobos had a mighty throw, and if ever a rock remained in sight, he could hit it out or shatter it, no matter how heavy the stone was. But he was unsubtle, and could only throw straight and hard. A rock guarded behind another was a rock he could not reach unless he threw so hard that one were driven back on the other, and both went out. However, that would not always happen.

Orlanth, now Orlanth was a cunning man, and knew that there is more than one path to every place. He would pretend that he was throwing at a completely different rock, but then his stone would curve gently on the ice and sneak up on Opanbobos' rocks from the side, even from behind! Great Weighty would growl down the ice and smite his opponents' rocks full hard. No hit of Opanbobos could shatter Orlanth's heart. But so great was the skill of both men and their teams that neither could take a decisive lead.

In the final end, the teams were tied, but Orlanth had the hammer coming home. Opanbobos' team had been very lucky, and had managed to hide a rock right in the eye of the storm and then guarded it so well that Orlanth could not reach it. Oh, how he tried! He called for draws, he called for takeouts, but nothing could get through the forest of guards that Opanbobos put up. At last, Orlanth was down to his last rock, Great Weighty. He looked at the shot from all angles, and all lines, but the only way that Opanbobos had left into that rock was straight down the ice, through a tiny, narrow port only a rock's width across. But Great Weighty was made of a part of Orlanth himself, and embodied the curling, curving air rune itself. It **couldn't** go straight! Opanbobos started to taunt Orlanth, crowing about how easy it would be for HIM to throw that rock.

Ernalda saw Orlanth's dilemma. She knew that sometimes the best path to one's heart's desire **is** the straight path. She thought of a way to help her beloved. From her own heart she brought the stalks of her precious grain, and bound them to staffs. She told her husband to throw as hard as he could and to command his sons to sweep back and forth in front of the stone for all they were worth. Each time the brooms hit the ice, they made the sound of Ernalda's own heartbeat. Great Weighty, made from Orlanth's own heart, followed his wife's beating heart straight through the port to strike hard and true.

Ever since then, the greatest of the bonspiels has been the Tournament of Hearts.

©2003 by Alison Place

How Orlanth Met Heler by Sven 'Erik' Sieurin

Well, somewhen in Godtime the sons of Umath went cattle-raiding against the Sea tribe. It was young Orlanth's first raid, and the rest of the family had not that much respect for him. However, he followed his brothers carrying their gear.

Anyway, they went to the pastures of the Sea tribe and sent the young'un to scout out the place. Orlanth tiptoed ahead and saw that there was but a single herdsman there. He bumped the herdsman on the head, and proudly dragged the down-and-out watergod back to his brothers, who to his surprise weren't impressed at all. Humakt thought it unfair to attack a man from behind. Vadrus and Raglagnar chided him for not cutting the guy's throat at was only proper. Kolat sternly advised him to obey his elders next time and not do anything they hadn't told him. Urox got gloomy because the fight was already over and no fun was left. Then the brothers continued on to the pasture.

When the shepherd had disappeared violently, the sheep had scattered, but the elder brothers rounded up most of them. To move properly, they loaded off all their wargear and made poor Orlanth carry it, so he didn't capture any cattle, and in the end he settled for dragging his captive home. His elder brothers laughed at him, because it was obvious the guy was just a poor cottar, and no ransom would thus be expected and no honor was gained by conquering him.

Anyway, when they returned home Orlanth went to his father in the hall and complained that it was not fair that he didn't get his share of the raid. He hadn't captured any cattle himself, but had certainly helped. In the end Humakt acknowledged that his scouting had been of some use and gave him a single sheep. The rest was kept by the brothers who had taken them.

However, the brothers did not know how to treat the strange new cattle. They did not know anything about how to shear them or what they should eat, and when Raglagnar angrily slaughtered his share, he destroyed most of the meat since he did not know how to butcher it properly. Thus they did not boast of the raid, and hoped it would be forgotten.

Orlanth had something of kingship in him already. "I have a thrall who knows this cattle," he said "He can take care of it for me." So he simply let Heler take care of the single sheep for him, and since he knew what to do, it was the only sheep which prospered. Finally Umath ordered his other sons to render their sheep unto their younger brother, since he was obviously the only one who could take care of them, and it was a waste of the tribe's resources otherwise. Orlanth set Heler free for helping him, but Heler had received such good treatment that he stayed.

He learnt from his master how to herd the sheep but never how to milk them (since Orlanth considered that women's work), and thus the Storm-king cannot call for rain, the milk of the cloud-sheep which nourish the earth, without Heler's direct aid.

And Orlanth vowed that if he ever became chieftain, he would make fair rules for the division of the spoils of war, and so he did, and those rules are still followed by good Orlanthi everywhere.

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How Orlantio Turned the Waters by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest November 18, 1994)

(This is an Imtherian tale, probably derived from the era of Jannisor, when the Imtherian allies thought to satirize the haughty ways of the Dara Happans.)

There was a time when Orlantio was just a jester, not yet consumed by anger and hate. In those days, Orlantio frequented the Halls of Yelem for he admired the fine marbled columns and jeweled thrones which caused his thoughts to soar; he enjoyed the excellent foods and delicate nectars which eased his hungers; but most of all he loved and desired the fair maidens and nymphs who danced for Yelem.

One day while Orlantio was chasing after Yuterpe, the singing nymph, through the courtyards, a herald arrived seeking Yelem. This herald paused to ask Orlantio where he could find the radiant god.

"Do I look like I have time to chat?" said Orlantio while rushing past. "Try someone that away."

The poor herald could not make out what direction Orlantio pointed, so he continued on into a splendid courtyard of gold. There two gods robed in feathers of gold and silver sat moving stones back and forth across a board. The herald paused to ask the two where he could find the radiant god.

"Do we look like we have time to chat?" said the first.

"Try someone in the throne room," added the second while pointing.

The poor herald continued on into the throne room where 100 thrones sat in a circle, each of different stone, each facing the great central dais. Here indeed sat Yelem surrounded by his celestial choir singing praises of the radiant emperor. The herald paused to ask one of the choir to announce him.

"Do I look like I have time to speak?" sang the chorister.

So the poor herald walked up before the mighty emperor and said in a meek and humble voice, "My Lord, I bring tidings. A foe has risen to face you, to challenge your rule."

At the words of the herald, Yelem looked down. Around him the choir stopped, confused. Outside, all paused to hear the words of Yelem, for they knew that he prepared to speak. All that is but Orlantio, who chased after Melante, the laughing nymph, and whose shouts of "Ha, Ha!" and "Come my dear come!" broke the celestial silence.

Yelem finally spoke, though, his words resounding like a mighty bell. "Who claims to name himself my foe? Who demands to challenge my divine rule? Is this just?"

The herald, cowed, looked meekly up into the radiance of Yelem and took strength in the majesty of the splendid emperor. "He names himself Oslir, my Lord. He commands a power that I do not know, though it knows me surely. I looked upon his power, my Lord, and I saw myself within. Oslir names this power water, my Lord, and says that he shall quench you with it."

Yelem spoke again. "Does he now? We shall see if he can bear the justice of the world." Music filled the halls of heaven then as Yelem rose and his mantle cascaded to the floor in a harmony of chimes. Yelem looked upon his court. "I go now to meet this foe. May all know and sing of my decision. May all know and prepare to sing of my victory."

Yelem left the throne room and entered his weapons room. He called upon his sons Khelmal and Basmal, Buseriat and Shargat, and tall Murazar to arm him with his torch and spear, with his orb and sceptre, with his crown and sandals. Khelmal placed the Torch upon his hand. Basmal placed the spear upon his back. Buseriat gave him the orb and Shargat gave him the sceptre. Murazar brought forth the crown, but stopped before Yelem and spoke, "My father Lord, I bring the crown which you have asked for, but I cannot find the sandals which you seek."

Yelem looked upon his son and judged, "I cannot fault you for what you have tried to do. The sandals shall be found again."

And indeed they were, for then it was that first Idome, the silver angel, flew by and then Orlantio, wearing the winged sandals of Yelem and shouting "Ha, ha! You shall not escape my feet!"

Yelem shook his head and looked upon Murazar. "No, my son, you can see yourself that you are not at fault. I shall go without them."

Bearing his divine powers, Yelem walked down the gilded path to meet this foe. When Yelem reached the place where Oslir waited, Yelem spoke. "My herald names you as my foe. Return now to your bed or suffer my justice."

Oslir coiled himself up on his iridescent scales. With unblinking eyes he stared back into the eyes of Yelem, never flinching from their fiery gaze. "I am here to claim your throne," the mighty serpent hissed. "You cannot stop my power for the water is unquenchable."

Yelem was not angered at this impudence, though, for he was just and wise. But he would not be usurped from his rightful place. So he took his torch and brought its fires down upon Oslir's head. Oslir raised his lips and spat at the torch and the torch guttered out. Where the forces met, a cloud formed and spread, threatening to engulf the majesty of Yelem.

"Damn cloud!" cried Orlantio, for Sirope, the gentle cherub, had disappeared within its growing form. Orlantio stopped and drew his breath until his cheeks bulged wide and blew. He blew so hard that the fog was torn away. "There she is!" shouted Orlantio as the cherub squealed and the chase was on again leaving Yelem and Oslir to their battle.

Yelem took up his spear of light and brought its brilliance down upon Oslir. Oslir drew up his mirrored scales and turned the spear aside. Where the forces met, a bridge of many lights formed and stretched, threatening to pierce the majesty of Yelem.

"Damn bridge!" cried Orlantio, for Niobe, the graceful dancer, had dashed up the bridge to escape his grasp. Orlantio leapt upon the bridge with a mighty jump. He jumped and trod upon the bridge so hard that the bridge broke apart beneath him. "I have you now!" shouted Orlantio as the dancer twisted away. The chase was on again leaving Yelem and Oslir to their battle.

Yelem finally held his sceptre and his orb high and brought their authority and command down upon Oslir. But Oslir broke into a thousand shards of water, so that only a few fell before the blows of Yelem. The rest, like sparkling fish, leapt up, higher and higher, escaping the power of Yelem. Yelem shook his head, for he knew he could not defeat this foe. Oslir laughed. With heavy heart Yelem accepted his defeat. He reached to take the crown from his head.

"Not this time you don't" cried Orlantio. With grey net in hand he sought Virose, the silver star, who had dashed amidst the form of Oslir. Orlantio raced round and round, fast as the wind, his net trailing behind. Running tighter and tighter, he gathered all the shards of Oslir, each and every one, until he

caught Virose in the center. "At last, you're mine!" Clutching the star nymph to himself, Orlantio tossed the net aside. Held within the net, Oslir fell as rain from the sky back to earth, never to reach high into heaven again.

Yelem stood still, his crown upon his head, and accepted the justice of the world. With praises ringing all around, Yelem returned once again to his splendid throne and his majesty spread again across the world. He sent the herald out to proclaim the victory over Oslir and to accept the surrender of all the watery gods.

©1994 by Harald Smith

Humakt fights a Hydra by David Ainsworth

(This originally appeared on the World of Glorantha group.)

("Author's notes: "I needed to introduce Heroquesting to my players in a way which wouldn't break the campaign if their trip went poorly, and I wanted everyone to be involved in some way (which meant a heroquest involving only one or two active cults wasn't going to work). I also wanted a range of challenges involved in the quest, so they could get a feel for their options and have a sense of relative difficulty.")

This is a story about Humakt.

Long ago, Humakt wandered the land, training warriors, fighting battles, hunting undead.

One day, he came across a home not too far from Orlanth's stead. The house had been devastated. The roof was torn off, two walls collapsed, and everything inside smashed. The broken body of a woman groaned near the doorway. Humakt approached to learn who had done this deed, and the woman called to him. "Great Humakt, you are a warrior. My family has been killed by a terrible creature, a great snake-like thing filled with poison. Please, swear to me you will avenge them."

Humakt decided that the woman's request was just. "I shall kill the beast who did this to your family, so that it can do no more harm." Then Humakt saw that the woman's body was not just twisted and broken, but bloated with the creature's poison. She moaned in agony. But in those days death was newer, and it was a harder thing to die.

Humakt showed his mercy that day by ending the woman's suffering. He gave her the gift of Death.

Humakt found it easy to track this beast by its trail. He needed no hunter to help him. He came upon the snake-thing quickly, and swiftly struck off its head. But in seconds, two heads grew to replace it. With swift sure strokes, Humakt chopped off these heads too, while blocking their bites. In seconds, four heads writhed around the warrior. Humakt stepped back and tried to force the thing to Die, but its foul vitality foiled his attempt. "This thing is Chaos," Humakt thought. "I will need help to kill it."

Humakt returned to the stead and sought out Storm Bull. "I need your help to fulfill my oath, Storm Bull."

"Why do I care about your oaths?"

"My oath is to slay a thing of Chaos, Storm Bull."

"Chaos? Where?" And so Storm Bull joined him.

They attacked the thing together. Humakt hoped that Storm Bull could help him kill the Chaos-thing, since it was Chaos. But the Bull went Berserk and started to chop off heads with speed. In seconds, there were nearly a dozen. "This will not work," said Humakt. "With every strike the thing grows more dangerous, not less." But Storm Bull would not stop attacking, so Humakt quelled his berserk rage and dragged Storm Bull off while he was exhausted. Storm Bull was angry until Humakt told him that they needed to learn how to kill this thing of Chaos from someone who knew.

They returned to the stead and sought out Lhankor Mhy. "Ah, that creature sounds like a Hydra. I heard a story once about a Hydra that grew new heads. Its attackers used fire to sear the stumps of the heads, and it could grow no new ones and soon died. I'm sure this creature must be the same."

But Humakt knew that not all enemies that looked the same could be killed the same way. He and Storm Bull forced Lhankor Mhy to come with them. That way, if he was wrong, he would be there to tell them some other way to kill the Hydra. The threat of dying would make him give them the best advice.

They picked their way across a field littered with heads that Storm Bull had cut off the creature. Storm Bull killed a thing that was trying to take one of the heads. Then they caught up to the Hydra. Storm Bull and Humakt made their weapons burn with fire, and went to work. Sure enough, when they cut off a head, it did not grow back immediately. Soon, the Hydra was reduced to a few heads. But they were glowing, and breathing flame on the two warriors.

Then Humakt saw heads start to burst forth from the burned stumps. Fire didn't stop them from growing back, it only slowed them a little.

"Any other ideas?"

Lhankor Mhy thought a bit, while Storm Bull and Humakt sweated to keep the Hydra at bay.

"Sometimes, a creature can survive losing a part of its body. But blows to the center of the body may kill such a creature. Try ignoring the heads and striking the body."

And so Storm Bull and Humakt hacked at the body, opening up wide wounds like mouths. But these wounds festered and new heads burst from them. Now the creature had more heads coming out of other parts of its body, not just the front. "This isn't working, Lhankor Mhy!"

"Hmm. Well, I can't think of any other stories that might help. I suppose how to kill this thing is something I do not know yet. Perhaps you should kill it first, Humakt, and then tell me what you did. Then I will know." And then he left, in something of a hurry.

Lhankor Mhy wasn't helpful. But he had agreed to help, and Humakt was going to hold him to that promise. Humakt and Storm Bull withdrew from the fight. They soon caught Lhankor Mhy. "If you don't know how to kill it, do you know who might?"

"I suppose we could always ask Orlanth for help."

So they returned to the stead and asked Orlanth for help. He told them, "What a few cannot do alone, many can do together." Orlanth gathered together all his warriors and made a speech. Together, they went out to fight the Hydra.

When they arrived, some Chaos things were cutting off heads from the Hydra so that it would grow more. Storm Bull killed them. Orlanth told all the warriors to work together. If they cut all the heads off at once and burned the stumps with fire, perhaps they could not grow back quickly enough for the thing to live. And so they struck the heads all off at once. And indeed, when they worked together, Humakt found that together they could make the Hydra dead.

And that is why, even though Humakt is no longer kin to Orlanth and the others, he still knows that it is important to have good warriors at your side. Because no matter how great a warrior you are, you cannot win all fights alone.

©David Ainsworth

The Hunter's Solitude by Sergi Díaz aka Kenrae

This is the story Rurik, an Odaylan devotee, told his son Hareth some time after he initiated into the same cult.

Both had just returned from a hunting trip. The hunt had gone pretty well for both, each of them alone in the woods, with only their respective alynxes as companions.

Hareth felt good. Since becoming an adult his life had been better and better. He liked to hunt and the life in the wilderness, the Hare Woods were the place where he felt more free and peaceful inside. With his alynx Jaheera as his only companion, both alone against the wild. Now he completely understood the sacrifice his father did for years in order to care for him, after his mother died in his own birth.

But he wasn't going to think about that now. He couldn't think about his past, not when he felt he was happy. In spite of having returned to the Clan. There he felt like he was out of his element, some kind of suffocation, as if the walls oppressed him. He didn't like the crowds.

Social relationships weren't his strong point, that's for sure. He felt comfortable with very few people.

These days a question formed in his mind. He knew he had to ask it to his father, and that seemed a good moment.

- "Father, why do we return to the Clan?" - He asked. "I mean, I understand this is the Orlanthi way of life, but we like the woods, the wilderness, living in the Lady of the Wild domains.

- "My son, I wondered when you would ask me that question." - He said. At the same time the two alynxes started to pay attention to him, as if they were understanding the conversation. "Let me tell you something that happened to Odayla a long time ago..."

Odayla was hunting a magnificent stag. Using his typical skills, he set a trap and attacked the prey from the most unexpected place. It fell to the ground without being aware that it was being hunted. After returning the stag's spirit to his mother so that it could be born again, he proceeded to eat the liver as a prize for a good hunt, and then he started to cut the meat and treat the fur.

That same day, while he was taking a break, a group of armed men on horse approached him. He made them the Hospitality Greeting, inviting them to the meat. But those strangers didn't know nothing about Hospitality, and in exchange for his invitation they looked at him with disdain and said:

- "These are the hunting lands of the Emperor. All of the animals inside are his property and can't be hunted without his permission."

- "But the wild animals don't belong to anyone!" - said Odayla. "Not even to the Lady of the Wild who take them in. They're free."

- "You dare to contradict the Emperor's orders? You'll come with us to pay for your two crimes!"

They were many and well armed, and Odayla was alone, so he had to pretend he followed them and scape when they got distracted some. They tried to follow him but their tracking skills were no match for Odayla. Unfortunately they pressed on. The next days were complicated, the warriors couldn't find him but the hunting became difficult. He couldn't sleep well since he knew that he was being tracked and had to keep an eye on his surroundings at all times, and many preys noted the warriors and fled so he couldn't properly hunt them. Some days after, a hungry Odayla met his brother Ormalaya who had just captured a prey. On seeing him Ormalaya said:

- Brother! It has been some time since I saw you. You look thin, come, let us share a meal.

Odayla hungrily ate his meal, always keeping an eye on his surroundings. His brother noticed his strange behaviour, and once they finished eating he said:

- Brother, I find you strange. You're always looking everywhere as if someone were tracking you. Besides, I've never seen you so hungry, and it puzzles me since your skills are even better than mine.

Odayla explained Ormalaya what had happened to him, and his life the week before. Then his brother replied him:

- But brother! Why haven't you asked for help? Come with me, we'll make a plan to ambush those warriors and finish them.

This way, sometime later the Fire Tribe warriors found Odayla again and chased him. But this time there was a surprise for them, the Thunder Brothers were waiting for him and they killed them all with ease.

This is how Odayla learnt that even the most solitary man needs help and company sometimes. A long time later, during the Great Darkness, he hadn't forgot that lesson and helped many desperate clans teaching them how to survive by themselves when they don't have lands to farm, and how to hide from Chaos monsters.

After some quiet seconds, Hareth nodded, understanding what his father had just told him.

- "Ok, this is enough." - said Rurik. "Come on, you must practice with your bow."

©Sergi Diaz

The Hunting of Tar'Shyr by Andrew Joelson

Many years ago, during the Zero Wane, the lands of our beloved Goddess were in turmoil. The evil Bull Shah had been repulsed, but his armies were not yet broken; only lying up and licking their wounds. Dread creatures wandered the countryside at will. The fell sorcerers who had summoned them to fight against our Divine Mistress had either been slain in battle, or loosed these demons intentionally, to ruin all the lands.

Having marshaled all our forces, and seen to the safety of our borders, Yanafal Tar'nils turned his attention to this sorry state of affairs. He and his companions rode all about the realm, cleansing it of such woes. Many tales can be told, many great deeds recalled; tonight I will tell you of the Hunting of Tar'Shyr.

Now it came to pass that Duke Yanafal and his comrades went forth not all together, but separately. The dire creatures they pursued were many, and yet such doughty warriors were they, that they felt certain of victory even singly. It was well known that the foul wizards of the Bull Shah feared to summon too strong a demon, lest they be swallowed up from their crooked toes to their craven hearts.

And so the Duke went his separate way, and came at last to the hamlet of EnShos. He had been following a rumor of trouble there, a demon that haunted the wild lands thereby. And so it proved true. The humble folk of the town knew him at once, for one of their own lads had marched under the Duke's personal banner for three years time. Then smiled the Duke, and hailed MenThaLus by name.

But the demon haunting the wilds was not a creature of wizardry gone awry. The townsfolk told the Duke that Tar'Shyr had been known in their father's father's day. It roamed at will, but seldom near their homes. Sometimes it was not even seen for years, but only its great tracks, or the wrack of a wildcat it had devoured. Occasionally a hunter went missing, but not often, for Tar'Shyr dwelt to the South, and few dared hunt that direction.

"Perhaps it is but a wild beast, of unusual size and vigor," suggested Duke Yanafal.

"No, no!" cried PelAnDro, chief of the hunters; "the spirits have told us no mere hunter can slay this creature. Only a great warrior might attempt it."

And they looked upon the Duke with hope in their eyes, for in the last two years had Tar'Shyr become much bolder. Now it hunted South and East and West, even stealing oxen from the village pens, and three grown men had gone missing.....

Yanafal Tar'nils smiled a little smile then, saying, "well then, new demon or old, I shall dispose of it for you." Whereat the people all were gladdened.

That evening Duke Yanafal went apart with PelAnDro, MenThaLus, and the village elders, and long they spoke what they knew of Tar'Shyr. The next morning all the people turned out, to witness the Arming of the Duke. MenThalus helped gird the Duke for War, for he alone of all the folk knew what it meant to arm for battle. The people sang and prayed for his victory, PelAnDro blessed his hunting. And so Duke Yanafal rode forth; armed, armored, and full of good cheer.

All the morning he quested into the South, over hills and through patches of forest. He quartered to the left, and then to the right, seeking some spoor of his quarry. At noon he paused by a stream to sup, and there he first saw tracks of Tar'Shyr.

After resting his horse, he set forth again. The tracks faded in and out, but led steadily to the south. The land grew hilly, and glad was the Duke of his stout warhorse, which happily leapt deep ravines. But alas, the land grew steadily more rough. At length even the Duke's mastery of the saddle was not enough, he must turn his steed about and send it back towards EnShos. Too fine a mount to suffer a broken leg in treacherous gullies and ravines. The sun was marching down towards the West, when Duke Yanafal came upon the forked canyon. And at the fork was he faced by an eager choice. From the left, faintly, came unearthly cries. To the right, were by far the freshest tracks he had encountered. He pondered for a moment, then strode off to the left. "A bird in the hand", he thought to himself.

Between narrow cliffs he walked, until the canyon widened out again. There he came upon the den of Tar'Shyr. It was in a cavern in the cliff side, from which the strange cries echoed out. The rocks before the entrance were strewn with bones.

Duke Yanafal came to the cave mouth and shouted a challenge. Immediately it was answered by a chorus of roars. Not one demon, four! But the cave mouth was narrow, and when the first of the creatures rushed forward, it blocked its fellows from the way.

Yanafal Tar'nils slew it there, in the cave mouth. Too small to make the tracks he had seen, these were Tar'Shyr's cubs. No wonder it was so much bolder now, it, no _she_ had young to

feed. The three remaining cubs pulled their sibling's corpse aside and the Duke swiftly engaged the second youngling.

He wished to finish with them before their mother returned from the right fork.

One by one he slew them, all four.

He took a drink of water from the stream nearby, and howled his loudest oath. Why hunt Tar'Shyr, when she would come to him?

A terrible roar echoed up the canyon, a fearfull mother racing to defend her brood. Tar'Shyr burst into the little valley, then ground to a halt.

She snuffed the air and mewed a most pitifull sound. Tar'Shyr knew the scent of her children's blood. She glared at the Duke, her breast heaved like a bellows, and with a second terrible roar, she pounced!

Long the Duke wove and dodged. Wound after wound he struck Tar'Shyr, but she felt them not. She raked long furrows in his greaves and left tooth marks everywhere. But in the end even her berserk fury could not sustain her any longer. She fell panting at the creek side, trying feebly to rise once more.

Yanafal Tar'nils looked down upon Tar'Shyr then, and shook his head sadly. "I am sorry to slay your cubs," said he, "but my children must come before yours."

The Quest:

1. The garnering of knowledge
2. The ritual arming
3. Tracking the creature
4. Horsemanship (give up the horse too soon, and you will be worn out, cling to the horse too long, and it will be lost)
5. Choose a fork.
6. Slay
7. Return to EnShos (in victory, but not in celebration)

Note that the Quest is known to be a difficult one, and must be performed from the shrine at EnShos. There are many details concerning what the Duke did, and how, up until he fought Tar'Shyr. That part was left purposefully vague by the Duke. It was his expressed desire to make his followers plot their own tactics for dealing with Tar'Shyr, even as he had done. Almost a fifth of the people who tread this path never return. Also note that the Quest has different forms, with different levels of difficulty.

Short Form

The Quester turns to the left, and proceeds to the cave mouth. He then slays the first cub. While it's brethren are pulling it out of the way, the Quester retires to EnShos. This is the most common form of the Quest, though occasionally a strong or lucky Quester will engage the second cub. Between each fight with one of the cubs, the Quester has the opportunity to withdraw, while the cave mouth is being cleared. Few Questors attempt to slay all four.

Long Form

The Quester turns to the right, and engages Tar'Shyr. Having bypassed the den, Tar'Shyr does not smell the blood of her young. She fights normally, not berserk/frenzied. The Quester hobbles back to Enshos, if he can. This is the form of the Quest that [Harlios, the Last IceBreaker](#) undertook. His strategy was to attack Tar'Shyr with round swings. He swung his blade around, and attacked continually from the right. He scored many long slashes upon her side, but couldn't seem to penetrate very deeply. The wounds oozed a sickly yellow ichor (of course). It was not long before Tar'Shyr began to sidle to her right (Harlios's left). Harlios spun on his heel and continued. Finally, after drawing her out, he took the first opportunity and stabbed straight in. The two-handed scimitar went in up the hilt, killing Tar'Shyr. But he couldn't get the blade back out, so he put his foot to her breast and heaved. The blade came out straight, etc.... as per the Last IceBreaker.

Ichor is now a two-handed straight sword. It is always True. The crystal in the pommel will always glow it's sickly yellow color when Harlios is holding it by the hilt or blade. It's power level only goes up from there. The wounds it deals demons are always edged in yellow, and always ooze that disgusting yellow ichor. Even if the creature is bleeding some other substance from other wounds, Ichor's wounds ooze putrid, viscous acid. The wound burns the demon, and the acid trailing down from the wound burns too.

Dang Near Impossible Form

The Quester slays all four cubs, then engages Tar'Shyr. This is the full Quest, a complete recreation of the original events. Jar-Eel is rumored to have done this.

©Andrew Joelson

An Imtherian Solstice Tale by Harald Smith

Editor's note: (As appeared in the Glorantha Digest December 22, 1994)

(This Imtherian tale is commonly told in the Darkseason myths)

Though you have heard many stories about the death of Yelem, those stories are wrong. Yelem did not die. This is the true story of Yelem's descent into Hell and why he travels there even now.

Yelem, as all know, ruled the whole of the Earth and Sky, bringing light and warmth to all corners of the

world. Above all, though, Yelem was known for his justice, for his ability to determine the truth and make fair judgments. One day, while Yelem sat upon his throne of justice hearing the petitions of his subjects, a pale and sorry creature came before the mighty god.

"Who are you?" asked Yelem, "and what is your petition."

"My lord, I am the soul of Man. While walking upon a gentle path, someone who named himself Death, greeted me. I stopped to talk as I do with any stranger, but this one brought out a weapon and struck me down. I went to rise again, but my body did not do so. This, my soul, is all that would rise. My petition, my lord, is that I may be whole again."

"This seems just, but I must hear all sides," replied Yelem. He called for his messengers to find first this figure named Death and then the body of Man, so that the petition could be granted.

Soon the courtiers returned. "My lord," they said, "we cannot find this figure Death. Those who know him say that he resides in the Underworld and is only subject to the rule of the Emperor of the Night. As for the body of Man, we cannot find it either, though a fine trail of dust and ash leads far west, even beyond the lair of Orlantio, Umath's child."

Yelem turned to the soul of Man. "It seems I cannot grant your petition. You must travel to the realm of the Emperor of the Night, who I do not know, and seek judgment there."

Thus, the weary soul of Man took the westward path, seeking its body and the Emperor of the Night.

Upon another day, while Yelem sat upon his throne of justice hearing the petitions of his subjects, an unknown figure hidden beneath a grey robe and hood came before the mighty god.

"Who are you?" asked Yelem, "and what is your petition."

"Lord, I am Maktal, keeper of Death. While walking upon a narrow bridge, someone who named himself Orlantio, greeted me. I stopped to talk as I do with any stranger and this Orlantio offered me a gift. He told me this is the custom of this land and so I took the gift. Then this Orlantio said that I must give him a gift in return as this is also a custom of this land. When I asked what this gift should be, he told me that I must give him Death. Though I was reluctant, I agreed for I did not wish to violate the custom of this land. When I had done so and he had departed, I examined his gift to me. Lo and behold, there was nothing there! This creature Orlantio is nothing more than a thief. My petition, lord, is that I may have Death returned to me and that this thief be punished."

"This seems just, but I must hear all sides," replied Yelem. He called for his messengers to find first Orlantio and then the item called Death, so that the petition could be granted.

Soon the courtiers returned. "My lord," they said, "we cannot find Orlantio as he has hidden himself from our sight. As for the item Death, we cannot find it either, though a trail of blood and bones, the trail of Death so people say, leads far west, even beyond the lair of Orlantio."

Yelem turned to Maktal. "It seems I cannot grant your petition. But since Orlantio cannot be found here and the trail of Death leads beyond the west, you must travel to the realm of the Emperor of the Night, who I do not know, and seek judgment there."

Thus, the grim and unseen Maktal took the westward path, seeking Death and the Emperor of the Night.

The days passed, but another day came that Yelem sat upon his throne of justice hearing the petitions of his subjects. On this day, a pale light, dim and barely seen before the presence and majesty of Yelem, came before the mighty god.

"Who are you?" asked Yelem, "and what is your petition."

"My lord, I am the soul of your own son, Basmal. While aiding my brother Khelmal, Orlantio struck me down with Death. I went to rise again, but my body did not do so. This, my soul, is all that would rise. My petition, my lord, is that Orlantio and his allies be punished so that I may be whole again."

"This seems just, but I must hear all sides," replied Yelem. He called for his messengers to find first Orlantio and then the body of Basmal, so that the petition could be granted.

Soon the courtiers returned. "My lord," they said, "we cannot find Orlantio nor his weapon of Death. Those who know him say that he now resides in the Underworld and is only subject to the rule of the Emperor of the Night. As for the body of Basmal, we cannot find it either, though a fiery trail of blood and gore leads far west, even beyond the lair of Orlantio."

Yelem turned to the soul of Basmal. "It seems I cannot grant your petition. You must travel to the realm of the Emperor of the Night, who I do not know, and seek judgment there."

Thus, the weeping soul of Basmal, son of Yelem, took the westward path, seeking its body and the Emperor of the Night.

After Basmal's soul was gone, Yelem sat upon his throne and thought. And after he had thought awhile he spoke to his courtiers. "I do not perceive that justice has been done. I have advised three to seek justice in the realm of the Emperor of the Night. These three have gone, but have not returned. And after each has gone, another has a grievance related to the first. Had justice been done, there would be no further grievances. Therefore, I must go myself westward and then into the realm of the Emperor of the Night to petition justice for my subjects."

Placing a son upon the throne of justice, Yelem gathered his courtiers to him and with great fanfare they travelled westward to the lair of Orlantio. This place was empty of all save a poor servant. When asked where his master was, the servant replied, "He said that he was going to the Western Gate."

So Yelem and his court travelled on to the Western Gate and found it open. Seeing no one around, Yelem paused. "This is the entrance to the realm of the Emperor of the Night, who I do not know. But if he is indeed an Emperor, than Divine Justice and Order should prevail within as it does in mine."

Laughter answered Yelem's musings. Yelem and his courtiers looked around but could see no one. Again laughter broke the silence. "Are you afraid to enter this realm? Come, Yelem, come and bring your justice to the Emperor of the Night. Don't you know that he and I are friends? You will see real justice done!"

Orlantio laughed again, for indeed it was he, though none could see his form beyond the Gate.

Yelem turned to his court then and told them that they must pass through the gate and enter the realm of the Emperor of the Night for only so could justice be achieved. But when all had passed, Orlantio appeared behind them. The trickster had used his wiles to throw his voice and deceive Yelem.

"I have you now, Yelem. You will trouble me no more with your rules and justice." And so speaking, Orlantio slammed the Western Gate shut behind Yelem and his court. Outside Orlantio locked the gate with strong winds and strange magics.

Yelem knew that they could not escape, but he did not believe the words of Orlantio. Turning to his court, he spoke, "We cannot return the way we came. We can only descend to the court of the Emperor of the Night. There we must seek justice, a justice that will encompass both our world above and his world below. Come, now, and follow me."

Thus did Yelem and his court pass into the Underworld to seek true justice for the world.

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Jar-Eel's Chariot Ride by Tim Ellis

(as originally appeared in the HeroQuest-Digest June 24, 2003)

Jar-Eel and Beatpot Aelwrin were cruising along in a chariot, over the hill country of Northern Sartar one evening when a cow ran in front of the chariot.

The driver tried to avoid it but couldn't - the cow was killed.

Jar-Eel, knowing how the Sartarites value their cattle, and keen not to give any excuse for a revolt against the empire told Beatpot to go up to the farmhouse and explain to the owners what happened, and offer reparation in her name.

About an hour later, the Beatpot staggered back to the chariot with his clothes in disarray. He was holding a flask of finest clearwine in one hand, a pouch of silver coins in the other and smiling happily.

"What happened?" asked Jar-Eel.

"Well," Beatpot replied, "the farmer gave me the wine, his wife gave me the purse, and their beautiful daughter made mad passionate love to me."

"By the Goddess, what did you tell them?" asked Jar-Eel.

Beatpot replied: "I'm Jar-Eel's Bodyguard and I just killed the cow".

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The Last Icebreaker by Andrew Joelson

Part I

Harlios stared discontentedly at his steed's ears. His mood was foul, but better than it had been for days. "Finally!", he thought, "Graclodont at last! Now I hope that the priestesses at the Great Temple aren't all over-proud Heartland Assholes; that's why I'm late as it is...."

Two scarlet-cloaked troopers marched ahead of Harlios, clearing a path for him and his band. Traffic thinned out suddenly, and then they were out of the market square. The horses, at least, were pleased. Cavalry trained, the din and press of the market was too much like unto a battlefield for their animal minds, and they had been getting snappish. One of the troopers (Lucidydes?) turned his head and grinned, "Just another half mile, sir. When we get to the temple, try asking for the priest Fellanden, Fellanden of Doblian. He doesn't usually welcome guests, but a man of your rank...."

Harlios stood scowling as the horses were lead away. The petty temple servant greeting him started to become flustered. Chiak sighed, and turned to the troopers. "Here, a libation to the Goddess," he told them, dropping a pair of coins in their hands.

"Our thanks, and may She send your master a better mood."

"Oh, he's normally quite cheerful. But we're a week late, and it's a sure bet he's going to be roasted for it. Good day to you."

Chiak turned back towards his friends just in time to follow them into the temple. Harlios gave a few words of prayer in the nave of Yanafal, and then they moved on. A courtyard, a hallway, an opening between buildings, and they arrived at the guest house. Their guide hastily left them to the house servants.

"Inform Hemarnna Eel-Airish of my arrival, and tell her that I shall attend upon her as soon as the dust of travel has been removed," said Harlios quietly. "Forgive me my frowns, they are not for you."

"I am sorry, sir, but the Priestess is engaged in the Ritual of Deezola's Tears. This will last long into the night.

I shall inform Hemarnna's secretary Bergion, and arrange an audience in the morning."

"My thanks, may the Goddess smile upon thee."

After the house servants had withdrawn, Rhondar asked, "how much trouble are we in?"

"Trouble? Not much. The relief column is an Imperial mandate; it is always strong enough for the task without

additions such as ourselves. The problem is that Inandana DaughtersBlood set out a week ago and we weren't here. If

Hemarnna is another stuck-up Silver Shadow Bastard, she'll say "as long as you are too late for the Kalikos expedition, you might as well do something useful". Then she'll try to draft us for some pet project too stupid or dangerous for the temple to authorize."

"But that's why we're late!" cried Hwarin. "Just go help sanctify this itty-bitty little shrine along your way north! Never mind about telling us that it's sitting on top of an old ruined...."

"Enough!" snapped Harlios. "We're getting as bad as these Heartland Assholes, arguing amongst ourselves all the time!" Then, in a lower voice, "You and your sister go find the women's baths; we men

will bathe as well. Maybe a two-hour soak will make us all friends again. The Goddess knows I'm in a black mood, I even forgot to thank those South Gate troopers."

"I took care of that," said Chiak. "If we've nothing else to do today, then a long bath and a sumptuous meal are in order. The Empire owes us that much, at least."

"At least," Harlios sighed. "Rotation of service to the provinces should be mandatory. Then these arrogant morons would see that there's more to the Lunar Empire than their blasted intrigues. The closer you get to Glamour the deeper the webs. I saw it all before, when I was at the College." He turned and went into his chamber.

Rhondar exchanged a knowing glance with Chiak. Harlios seldom spoke of his year in the Imperial Capitol, and never without a scowl or a curse. "Let's get out of this armor....."

Part II

Hemarnna Eel-Airish, High Priestess of Deezola, Counselor of Gracloodont and Hand of the Great Sister sat quietly at her desk.

"Is that all, Traveller Harlios?"

"Yes, High Priestess," Harlios answered. He stood before Hemarnna's desk at parade rest. His one ceremonial robe was plain and worn, compared even to the everyday robes of the Great Sister's servants. At least the guest staff had managed to remove the fold marks.

"Seal the record, Bergion, then leave us." Hemarnna's secretary quietly poured wax for his mistress, who stamped the parchment with her seal ring. He then bowed his way out.

"Sit down, Traveller Harlios. You may take Bergion's chair."

"Thank you, High Priestess."

There followed a short pause. "Why were you joining the relief column? You come well recommended, but I have seen such recommendations prove false. Sometimes they are a form of punishment."

"For hotheaded younger sons of Tripolis lords, perhaps. Soft, shallow youths who live upon their families' bounty, without any particular desire to exert themselves. I am made of sterner stuff."

"No one soft and shallow becomes a Traveller, but such may still be punished. Answer the question."

There was an awkward pause, then Harlios answered, "It has long been an ambition of mine. When I was much younger, I set it up as a marker on the road of my life. Call it a goal, against which I choose to measure myself."

"There! I've said it," he thought. "Sneer and be damned."

"I suppose you expect me to laugh at you, or make some cutting little remark now? Just another old Silver Shadow

Bastard, revelling in my family connections and lording it over anyone of lesser lineage? Yes, yes, yes," said Hemarnna

tiredly, "I've seen it all before. 'Heartland Assholes' I think is the other stock phrase; too busy with our intrigues to see which way the wind is blowing. Certainly too busy to pay any attention to the troubles in the provinces."

"Well let me explain something to you young man. There are two kinds of Silver Shadow Bastards. The first are exactly as you think them; largely (but not completely) useless. But then there is also my kind. Yes, I am up to my ears with intrigues. If I wasn't, I would soon loose this post. My family's influence helped put me here, and I am expected to use my own powers to help other, younger

members of my clan."

"But I am not blind, either. I see what is happening in Dragon Pass, in Aggar and Carmania. I do what I can with one hand; the other is reserved for keeping my head above water."

"You didn't like being called a Provincial Twit when you were in Glamour, did you? Or Grass Green? Well, one of the reasons you were named so, is that you Provincials seldom can see the way the world is. I would happily do without all the plots and schemes; many of us would. There is no rest for me; no Retreats or Long Leaves. Such would end in my being displaced. Don't tell me you haven't seen this in the Provincial courts? Or Border Commands?"

"Yes, ma'am. But in the Provinces people have the sense to put it aside at need. Someone who plots in the middle of a war usually ends up facing the headsman; scheming is a luxury no one can afford during an emergency."

"And so do we put aside all plots, when the Emperor puts down his Imperial Foot. In the meanwhile men will scheme; it is in their nature. When everyone walks down the street with a drawn dagger, you do the same."

"Do you wonder why I speak so bluntly, Harlios? Because you are the sort of fellow who becomes more and more suspicious, as the language becomes more honeyed. Very well, blunt speech for you. I am going to help you catch up with Inandana."

"Blunt speech? Well then, what is this going to cost me?"

"Little. I am not the sort to send you into a Quest without warning, or without what preparation I can provide. When I put the screws in, you will see it coming, and be unable to avoid it. That's how I got my nasty reputation. But once the screws are in, I'll back you to the hilt."

"Go on," said Harlios.

"You will leave here in five day's time. In the meanwhile, you will renew your Divine Magics, and learn something of the Kalikos Rituals. Also, a Char'un ritual, that will speed you on your way."

"But not my companions..."

"No, they will stay here and 'anchor' the ritual. You cannot possibly reach Inandana before her battle with Hend Valindsson. But after that, she will draw back to the Palace of Kalikos for the individual duels. Ah, you didn't know that, did you? Well, it's no great secret; it's just that nobody says much about it. I can get you to the Palace in time for the last duels. If the Hollri are in poor array, the rituals may end even as you arrive; but under such circumstances you are unlikely to have managed a duel in any event. As an unofficial part of the expedition, you have last claim."

"And while I am away, what use do you mean to put my friends to?"

"They will take up tasks that my staff normally fulfill here in the temple. Then my people will go perform certain acts, dangerous and secretive. I will risk my followers, not yours."

"They will labor for you in the mornings, but shall receive training and instruction in the afternoons."

"Certainly."

"The temple will assess no fees for this; as my friends will be in the temple's service."

"Certainly, as long as the instruction requested is not too unusual."

"This is too simple. You said blunt speech; where is the hidden sting?"

"There isn't one, Harlios. You have labored long and deserve a reward; even if you have picked a hard and dangerous one. Have your friends not labored also?"

"Then why not let them have a Leave?"

"Because I am a Silver Shadow Bastard, and must get something for my efforts. Even if it is not so great a thing.

Besides, I don't think you realize how long you will be away. The relief column will not return for two or three seasons.

Ah! another thing you did not know. Well, there are followers of Kalikos that never see the sun. They are busy with their rituals year-in, year-out. You and the other expedition members will take up some of their duties for a while, so that they may receive _some_ rest."

"I see."

"I don't think you really do, young Traveller. This is the sort of task I am happy to assist you in. It is the sort of deed you exist to perform. So was the clearing of that old ruin, shrine or no shrine."

"I was treated villainously! No, _we_ were treated villainously!"

"Yes, Harlios. But not because you were set the task. Rather, it was wrong to trick you into something for which you had no time, and send you off heedless of the dangers. That was underhanded. But would you have objected to the task two seasons ago? If you had been asked to do something well within your company's ability? "Please Traveller, we're so short-handed here. Can't you do this thing for us?'. I think not."

There followed a long silence.

Part III

Swiftly, surefoot
Striding steady,
Singing softly,
From the Sunrise to the Sunset

Harlios swayed to the rhythm of his steed. The grey stallion galloped on steadily, propelled by the Char'un magic.

More than a day had passed, and in some remote corner of his mind, the complaints of his body were beginning to register. Even his training for endurance during long ceremonies was being strained. Thirst and hunger were old distractions, mastered long ago. They were building, and would be suffered when he came out of his current ritual. But this was no seated trance, it was a long, slow chafing of legs and backside.

Twenty-eight straight hours, without stops for any reason. His mount charged on and on. Tireless. Sweatless. Knowing neither hunger or thirst. Trust the Char'un to know a way to speed a mounted messenger.....

The chanson spooled endlessly through his mind. He sang every third or forth stanza, joining Drel in maintaining the ritual. Between the verses, he looked out at his surroundings, though his steed needed little guidance. The grey knew a track when he saw one, even one with scarcely any ruts. Not much traffic north to the Palace of Kalikos; but enough to keep the trail from fading out.

Drel sang on. "He too, is tireless," thought Harlios. "Faithful ally, how much I have leaned on you over the years."

The spirit's voice droned on in his mind, but somehow warmer, briefly. Drel had heard his praise.

Harlios scanned his surroundings again. The surreal colors of the spirit realm surrounded him with their splendor. In the distance, slowly growing, a black aura on the horizon. Harlios pushed at his eyes, and for a few moments his vision was almost of the normal world. Still no sight of Rashtingall, the Black Rock

Gallop graceful,
Grasslands green,
Gambol gaily,
From the Gorse-land to the Ghost-realm

Even before the Sky Burn, the Black Rock had stood alone. Or so the Char'un said. The Place of Challenge. There where the first Kalikos had challenged Valind during the Godtime. Harlios eyed it carefully as he approached. It was not of Darkness, but rather, _glowed_ dark in some fell way. "Probably basalt," thought Harlios, then dismissed the idle thought from his mind.

It was necessary to perform the second of the Kalikos Rituals here. A call, a challenge against the strength of

Winter. But Harlios could not stop and front Rashtingall. To do so would break the Char'un spell that kept his steed moving. His friends in Gracodont would feel the link fail, and they would go to their well earned rest. Their efforts, working in shifts, supplied the grey's seemingly endless stamina. And Harlios had another full day's gallop to reach the empire's northernmost buttress.

Now came the hard part. Harlios would ride around the Black Rock in circles. Not too close, or he would become engaged in a duel with one of the sacred stone's many guardian spirits. Not too far, or the ritual challenge would gain no strength; might not be binding upon hollri. And that was the lesser of his worries.

In order to maintain the Char'un spell, Drel would continue singing the endless canticle. In order to fulfill the

Single Challenge, Harlios would cry out that ritual. Two linked minds, working two different ceremonies at once. Difficult, and dangerous to fail. "One of the few useful things I learned in Glamour," thought Harlios. "One of the reasons I am called a Traveller!"

Flying fetlocks,
Fleetfoot, fireheart,
Fairest favor
From Yu-Kargzant! fabled Sun!

As they closed upon the Place of Challenge, small red beacons became visible through the swirling spirits.

"Drel, the ritual markers are still up! The ones Inandana DaughtersBlood must have used! We will gallop around the Rock with their guidance. Fortune smiles upon us."

Harlios turned his mount, and began circling Rashtingall.

As he swung around the north face he almost veered away, who was hiding there? Wolf Spirits! Strong ones, attended by a pack of lesser such. Many blurred shadows indicated the presence of living creatures too. A real pack of wolves, and... a shaman?!

The stallion screamed and lunged forward, scraping up against one of the markers. The beacon flared and went out, as the grey screamed again, singed by disturbed spells. Between the hammer and the anvil, the wolves and Rashtingall.

"NO!" cried Harlios, as the grey surged forward. "I have no time for this!" But a hasty glance over his shoulder showed no signs of pursuit. He circled around and swung back. His mount fought him; and then the pack began to move...

Harlios swore vile oaths as he swung about again.

"Stop!" cried Drel, the Char'un spell wavering in its grasp. Harlios clamped down on his rage, and felt the spell stabilizing.

"Wolves are long distance hunters," he thought grimly, "used to running their prey into the ground. Well, let them

try! We'll lead them away for an hour's time and circle back. Nothing of flesh alone can match my stallion now. And the wolf spirits will stay with the shaman. We'll run him off his feet!"

"AIYA! Icebreaker! Char'un friend! We will make room for you!" boomed the shaman's voice, as the

wolves drew back to the west. The Ghost Wolves howled with their long tongues running out; wolf laughter. "We will not devour your beast," they cried. "Go! Drive back the Freezing Wind! Uzhim are our enemies too!"

Harlios turned in a long loop around the Black Rock, spiraling back in towards the ritual markers. Sweat ran down the stallion's neck; fear had done what hundreds of miles could not. He rolled his eyes, but steadied his pace. The pack was more than a hundred yards from Rashtingall. The wolves were loping in easy circles around the shaman, yipping, and showed no inclination to come closer

Dashing dreamlike,
 Valind! King of Winter!
Divine dancer,
 Frigid Lord, Northern Wind,
 Hear my challenge, as of old!
Daring, dauntless,
 Bide within thy frozen fastness,
 Built upon the Glacier's brow.
 Come no more unto the Southlands,
 Stay within thy rightful realm!
From the Dusk until the Daww....

The shimmering colors of the spirit realm faded. They became starker, less bright but more _real_. Impressing themselves directly into the mind, bypassing the eyes.

Time seemed to stretch and twist. The stallion slowed and halted in midstep. Harlios felt him become rigid, it was like sitting on a marble statue.

aaaaaawwwwwwwwwwwww.....

Drel's voice went on and on, never varying. Frozen in midword. Harlios had come into the Timeless Realm; the GodPlane.

Part IV

Hollri! Uzhim! Nameless Creatures!
That follow in thy liegelord's train
Turn about! Avert thy path!
Return unto thy custom'd haunts!
Is not the Glacier large enough?
The White Sea's northern shore?
Onward, to the Altinea
Sheltered by Himile's mantle

Harlios continued to sing the Ritual of Formal Challenge. His voice boomed and echoed, like a giant's roar across a vast canyon. But when he looked to the left side or the right, he was alone.

"Where is Kalikos?" he wondered. "I do but follow in the path she blazed. He felt the power of

Rashtingall behind him, magnifying his voice. He suddenly knew that whoever he might challenge, his foe would hear him and be forced to answer. His spine began to tingle...

Leave the Southlands to themselves
Disturb not their ordered seasons
Winter comes and has its turn
Seek not to prolong Dark Season!

Winds shall blow across the Southlands
Bearing mist and fog and snow
Valind need not strive unduly
For the south to feel his strength

The image of a man appeared suddenly before him, fading away in an instant. A small man, on a gigantic horse. The stallion gleamed with an inner light, obviously housing the rider's ally. The man wore a gold necklace, draped across his naked breast. A golden amulet hung there, so bright Harlios could not make out its shape. The man held his reins in one hand, and a glowing bow in the other. Silvery arrows gleamed from their quiver.

Shocked, Harlios began to stutter.

Honor n-now.....the other gods
In their....s-season, give them due
Nature treads eternal.....p-pathways
W-winter is enough for you....

"That was the first Kalikos!" gaped Harlios. "I'm not on the HeroPlane, I'm on the GodPlane! What _have_ I done?"

He stumbled in the ritual a final time, then paused to pull himself together.

Mortal Man! I see thee clearly
Come to challenge Winter's King
In thy hubris, over-vaunting
You shall learn your proper place

Inandana DaughtersBlood
Came this way not long ago
Nevermore shall she return
To the Southlands, whence she came

Thinking to engage my weak son
Beaten down by losses many
Instead she found my kinsman's thane
Argrath! King of Dragon Pass!

"OH NO!!" cried Harlios; but only in his mind. His mouth was sealed.

Orlanth's Champion! Bold and Fearless!
Dear my brother, to lend such aid
He has thrown off Lunar fetters
Now my time has also come

A wave appeared on the horizon, like long grasses rippling in the wind. But these waves glinted and glittered; Valind's forces on the march. Behind them a dreadful sight began to form, a whirlwind spinning slowly. Larger and larger it swelled, as it became more solid, more visible to mortal eye.

Inandana has escaped me
Her spirit fled the Realm of Gods
From her howls I'll eke no vengeance
All her comrades joined her rout

Strong and generous is Argrath
So with Hend, my battered son
Went to Kalikos for battle
To vent his fury, not all spent

Long they sieged the glowing Palace
Kalikos no weakling foe
Till at last the walls were breached
And red slaughter then unfolded

Harlios tried to speak, but was unable. The strength of Rashtingall held him fast. He had challenged, and stopped.
Only for a moment, but it was enough. Valind was answering his call and he could not interrupt. He only hoped that when Valind paused, he could finish the Formal Challenge; else he would face an ancient, angry god.

But the battle was still grim fought
Retreating slowly, inch by inch
IceBreaker strong with doom'd fury
Heedless of her streaming wounds

Blow by blow she slew my hollri
Uhzim fell dead by the score
Finally came forth Orlanth's favor'd
Gesturing his comrades back

Engaged he then in final combat
She who thought to tame the wind
Argrath dueled with Kalikos
And struck her down! the scarlet trull!

"Drel!" called Harlios in his mind, as the whirlwind slowed and began to take on man-like proportions.

aaaaaaaaawwwwwwwwwww.....

"Fool," he thought, "Drel is frozen in Timelessness. That would be protection in the Realm of Heroes; few there could muster the power needed to affect one so heavily under the Stasis Rune. But Valind is more than strong enough. Drel is a sitting trollkin; he will be crushed without even knowing what happened."

Then Winter's host knew deep bloodfrenzy
Fighting on with doubl'd strength
Sacked that fine and gleaming Palace
Dyed the walls a crimson hue
But alas! in their fell fury
Slew all things with such dispatch
That not a one was taken prisoner

The misty figure of a man towered over the advancing host. Broadly built, with icicles in the place of hair and beard.

Another form hovered behind, almost shapeless, compellingly Dark. Harlios wrenched his eyes from Himile before they could focus better, fearful that his mind would break. Valind leaned forward, reaching out with one arm. An arm that seemed to grow longer and longer, the grasping hand ever larger....

Who shall pay for long trespasses?
Who shall I vent my rage upon?
Tormenting until the end of all things
When Chaos finally conquers all?
You have challenged VALIND, fool!
You shall serve for this grim task

As Valind's hand descended Harlios felt cold winds swirl round him. He knew that he would never finish the Formal

Challenge, only the power of the Black Rock kept him from freezing as it was. When Valind finished his counter- challenge, he would seize the tiny mortal. His great hand loomed ever closer. Harlios cast madly back into his memories, seeking a day he had long sought to forget. The Class of Inner Light. A whimsical name for courses in philosophy and other obscure lores intended to bring on Illumination. He sought the Riddle of the Feathered Cloud; his one great humiliation.

Even if you wriggle forth
From 'neath my grasp, with Chaos wiles
Thou shalt not escape this Doom
As my own prey now I mark thee

Thou shalt ever be pursued
Aye, even into mortal realms
Now I rieve thee of thy Callings
And I name thee,

LAST ICEBREAKER!!

His limbs went numb instantly, as he heard Lady Jarvenesh speak again. His mind exploded into grey streamers, he felt his body spasm in pain.

Then nothingness.

Part V

"Harlios, wake up"

"Drel...."

Harlios opened his eyes, and saw a strange shimmer in the air above him. Brownish-red it flickered, like the underside of a dome. It seemed to be anchored by gleaming red wooden posts, strangely twisted looking. Not physically twisted, but internally, somehow. The Ritual Markers!

He sat up slowly, wooly-headed. But he felt marvelous, overflowing with vitality. His surroundings began to register; he was inside a warded area, naked. His clothes and gear were stacked off to one side, and the shaman was watching him....

"I thank you, Wolf Brother, for your healing." said Harlios. The shaman sat quietly, side by side with his ally

or fetch, or whatever shamans called such things. He looked like translucent glass, lit up from within. The wolf spirit

appeared similar, but had little in the way of defined boundaries. Harlios pushed at his eyes, but his vision did

not shift. "Either I am still in the Realms of Legends, or my eyes have been affected by what happened with Valind," he

thought. "Or perhaps it was the sight of Himile."

"How are you called, Char-un Friend?" asked the shaman.

"I am..... I am....."

"I am Harlios!" he cried out in his mind, but the words would not pass his throat.

"Harlios the Traveller!"

"Harlios, Priest of the Seven Mothers!"

"Harlios, Lord of Yanafal Tar'nils!"

"Harlios of Fer Caron!"

"Harlios, son of Telavel!"

"Harlios Halt-of-Foot!"

"Harlios Putrid-Blade!"

But not even the last two hated callings would emerge from his mouth. The Doom of Valind would not permit. Slowly, reluctantly he said, "I am the Last IceBreaker."

"Then you must be the one I was expecting," said the shaman.

"Forgive me, but I cannot seem to recall your name."

"The King of Winter has stolen my Callings.... Why were you expecting me?"

"Hear my story...."

"I gathered my brothers, and all my sisters too, and brought them to the Place of Challenge. I do this once every four or five years, that they may see the Black Rock, and watch IceBreakers in their rituals. So I came here even as Inandana DaughtersBlood arrived. She asked me to keep the pack away from her beasts, but otherwise welcomed me warmly. She had a cask of salted meat broke open for my

kith, and a great trough of water placed to slake our thirst. Inandana asked nothing of us, but said that if we would support her Formal Challenge, she would be grateful. That we gladly did. Uzhim are no weakling enemies, and no wolf can slay a hollri."

"We howled and bayed, as Inandana circled the Rashtingall seven times, shouting out her challenge. The Black Rock hummed it's approval. The ritual markers glowed brightly, and many spirit brothers joined the pack."

"The next day, before the caravan got underway, a red-haired woman approached me. Her eyebrows too were red-dyed. Yasmin, Priestess of Etyries is my name she said. Will you exchange favors with me?"

"Perhaps, what is it you want?" I asked.

"I want you stay in the vicinity of the Black Rock, and maintain the ritual markers," she said. "Lord... (well, it must be you, IceBreaker) was expected to be with us, but he is not. I had thought that he may yet turn up, racing to overtake our slow wagons."

"I do not know you marker's spells," I said.

"I will show you that. And in exchange, I will give a Blessing of Etyries, a Finding of the Way. When all seems lost, and there is no path that leads to safety, call forth this Blessing. The way shall be clearly seen."

"I will do as you ask. I will not stay here always, but will range about and return. Lord IceBreaker is....your mate?" "No. I doubt he ever thinks of me. But I was with him at the College, in the Class of Inner Light. He did not understand what Lady Jarvenesh was teaching, and ended by leaving under considerable embarrassment. But we had exchanged favors while there, each to help the other in difficult Quests. He aided me much, but left before I could repay him. I would repay him now, if I may."

"And so I was here to witness your arrival. But I see that you have failed in some terrible way. First you slowed, then you stopped. You glowed from within. Then all at once, you were rhymed with frost. Your horse was frozen into a solid block. It took two days for it to thaw enough to eat."

"You ate my horse?!"

"It was dead, and my pack was hungry."

".....you have done much for me. I will not begrudge your pack a meal. But the healing was not part of your bargain, was it?"

"I have met Etyries folk before. Always it is something for something. But some deeds should be done because it is right, regardless of favors or debts. I have healed you because you are an IceBreaker. If you have failed this year, then there is always the next."

"No. There is no next year for me, I am Doomed. I remember Yasmin as a friend, but it helps nothing. All who went with Inandana are dead. Kalikos and all her folk are dead as well. The Host of Winter is marching south, and will slay or freeze everything in their path. Take your pack and flee to the south."

"This is bad to hear," the shaman said slowly. "Can nothing be done?"

"I will do what I can, but this will be the worst winter in generations. Longer, darker, colder. Even the great river by Graclodont will freeze. Now I will ask a favor....."

"My strength is much spent, but I will help you as I can."

Harlios moved over towards his gear. He thrust his armor aside and pulled out his two curved blades.

"Take this to the Temple of the Great Sister," he said, partially unsheathing his iron scimitar. "Give it to Chiak.

Tell him all I have told you."

"I will not enter a stink hole."

"Mmmmm, well you need not. Camp on the plain a few miles away and thrust this into the ground." Harlios held forth the shorter blade.

"It is a claw! What mighty beast did you slay, to have such a thing?"

"A wyvern. Once the base of the claw was carved into a hilt, it served well enough as a short sword. I used it in my left hand, and the scimitar in my right. Rub your hand lightly down its edge, leave a trickle of blood behind. Then focus your magic on it for a little. Chiak will feel it, and come to you. He is one of the others that helped kill the creature, and he has such a claw too. All who did swore mighty oaths upon the claws, and we two added more to them as well."

"Go south yourself, and deliver the claw with your own hand."

"You will throw away your life to no purpose," said the shaman, as Harlios began to dress.

"I cannot. I am too deeply caught up in the challenge and the rituals. If I attempt to flee, my feet will not move, my breath will fail me. I will use my two-hander, and kill as many as I can. Winter's strength has grown in proportion to its victories. My efforts will only produce a minor setback, but that is all I can do."

"Uzhim are cruel to prisoners."

"Uzhim are the least of my worries."

"I will not take your message."

Harlios turned slowly, and asked, "Why not? You said that you would help me if you could."

"My pack goes to the west. We will forage on the verge of the elf woods. The lands south of the river are not fit for wolves to roam in. Men cluster so thick there, they are like herds."

"The winter will kill half your pack, or more," warned Harlios.

"The strong will survive. That is the Way of the Wolf."

Part VI

Harlios sat on his saddle blanket, with all his worldly goods spread about him. To all appearances, he was performing an unnecessarily rigorous inventory of his property.

"Well Drel, a largish leather sack," he said aloud. He kneaded it gently with his fingers. "Filled with almost as much mass as my closed fist. Small lumps of powder. Perhaps this is the ritual salt."

"Let me feel." Harlios withdrew slightly, letting his ally share his senses. He closed his eyes as he flexed the sack again.

"Not coins..."

"Drel, we already found the coins. What did Hwarin think I was going to do with fifty Lunars and four Wheels? Everything I could have needed would have been supplied, if I had caught up with Inandana."

"Maybe she thought you might gamble with the others. Besides, a little loose silver and gold can be useful if you start doing extra rituals you weren't expecting."

"I suppose. Can this be something besides salt?"

"I don't know what, but I was paying my respects to Deezola when you packed. Your guess is much

better than mine."

Harlios fumbled with the tie strings for some time before the knots came loose. "If someone told me a tale like this in

Glamour, I would have laughed. I can't _see_! It's ridiculous!"

His eyes were still fixed someplace halfway between the GodPlane and the Spirit Realm. Mundane objects like leather

sacks were invisible to him. He had only been able to tell the living wolves from their spirit brothers by the cloudy outlines the flesh and blood had possessed.

"Any tool that you have used in any of your rituals glows with an inner light," answered Drel. "It's mystical nature is

obvious. Anything 'normal' that you have carried for a while is overlaid with your aura. These things all have a vaguely

greenish patina, so that their shapes are recognizable. It's only the new items that are a problem; this could be much worse."

"That's not very helpful. When I emptied my saddlebags I couldn't even see them. At least the saddle is one that I had used for some time."

Harlios sighed, "I no longer need any of this stuff except the ritual salt." He carefully twitched his thumb and forefinger into the sack's mouth.

"Doesn't feel like rock salt, its in small, long lumps like beads. Well, here goes." Harlios stuck one in his mouth.

His tongue exploded with a terrific blast of ginger.

"Ptah!" Harlios spit out the offending lump. His mouth watered and his tongue itched. "What in Seven Hells?"

"Heh," came from Drel. "Heh heh heh. Ha ha HA ha!" he laughed. "They all know how much you like ginger, so they stuck some ginger extract in the saddlebags, enough to flavor all your dinners for three seasons! Ho ho ho, you ingrate, you."

The stunned look on Harlios' face gave way to a smile, as he began to laugh too.

Part VII

Harlios stood by one of the ritual markers, looking at Rashtingall. "It doesn't make sense," he thought. "What is

it? How could it come to be? Can it be a relic of Kargan Tor and the Celestial Court?"

He sighed, then stooped and lifted his saddle. He turned it over in his hands until he was holding it by one stirrup.

He stepped back two paces, then started to spin. Faster and faster, till a mighty heave sent the saddle flying off towards the Black Rock. He saw it's vague greenish outline, heard it thump against the ground. Then he stooped for his saddlebags. Again he spun, again he let fly. The bags stood out against the dark glow of Rashtingall, conspicuous by their very blankness. Another thump.

"Any man foolish enough to challenge the guardian spirits here for my old gear will be poorly repaid for his efforts," he thought.

"But what about your swords? Your iron scimitar, earned in Aggar? The wyvern's claw?" asked Drel.

"That is another matter. Watch."

Harlios picked up his scimitar and slid it from its sheath. He idly tossed the sheath towards the Black Rock, then

spoke, "Rashtingall, Place of Challenge, accept my humble tribute. An enchanted arm, worthy to be

contested over." He swung the sword back over his shoulder, and threw. The scimitar seemed to fly from his hand. It spun through the air and clanked as it rebounded from the Black Rock, to lie at its base.

"Harlios, didn't it seem to pick up speed, rather than slow?"

He did not answer. Instead he lofted the claw slowly, underhand. It too whacked up against the base of Rashtingall.

A vague humming sound was to be heard, almost a low drone.

"Rashtingall is pleased," thought Harlios, as he bowed and turned away.

"Now Drel, it is time to say good-bye."

"I am Doomed; Valind means to torture me until the end of the world. If you are with me when I am taken, you will share this fate. How could a man do such a thing to so faithful a friend?"

Harlios felt a warm glow from his ally, steadily growing stronger.

"Here now, did you think I would forget about you?"

"No, my friend, I am merely savoring our comradeship for the final time. Later there will be no opportunity."

"Good, then that's settled."

"No, I am staying. I'll just be too busy for sentimentality."

"Drel....."

"Harlios, don't you realize that I too am bound up in the rituals? I can no more flee than you. Valind will net himself

two victims if your plan doesn't work."

".....what makes you think I have a plan?"

"When you were speaking to the shaman, suddenly I felt your heart shift. Fear and dread seemed to recede, thrust aside by a sense of Fate."

"I do not mean to be tortured forever. But I can only choose the lesser of two evils, and perhaps you will not agree with my choice."

Harlios walked back towards his saddle blanket. "The idea came to me when I was considering how to last the longest against whatever Heng Valindsson throws at me. Uzhim Ice Lords, and Hollri, at the very least. Their magics will be Fear and Cold and Darkness. Fear is a Lunar weapon as well; I can deal with that. But Cold and Darkness? Both of the Kalikos's turned to Solar Powers to defeat them; Light, Fire, Heat."

"First I thought to set the Challenge Ground as a square, and cordon off an adjoining area for my fire elemental. Light and heat, yes? Most of my foes would be glad to stay in my shadow, to keep me between themselves and elemental fire. But sooner or later a particularly powerful one would press me away, and place _me_ in the shadow. Swelling up with Cold and Darkness, this foe would numb and blind me. That would be the end."

"So I considered how to prevent such a thing. The answer is to draw the elemental into my own frame. Then no Darkness can blind me, no Cold can chill me."

"But Harlios, the elemental will destroy you from within. It will burn away your flesh in short order."

"Then the trick is, obviously, to give it some other sort of fuel."

Part VIII

Harlios sat on his saddle blanket. He looked disconsolately at his last worldly possessions. His two-handed sword (straight!), five Yanafal Tar'nils ritual dueling markers set out in a ring. Inside the ring (so

it would not get lost again) a bag of purified salt for use in the coming rituals. And a large, squat candle, made of the finest beeswax. It was red, dyed that way by the Danfive Xaron cult which had supplied it. He had never asked what sort of dye had been used. His first guess, blood, was discarded as too obvious, insufficiently gruesome.....

"Is this all?" he thought. "Here at the end of my life, this is all that is left to me?" He thought wistfully of his iron scimitar, his wyvern's claw. How proud he had been of them. But he had barely touched them, except for practice, for more than two years. Not since he had acquired Ichor, his putrid blade. And now they had been discarded, like so much dross.

"Who will mourn for me?" he thought. "Chiak and Rhondar, Hwarin and Allessa. Maybe. If they even remember me, now that my Callings have been stolen. They will go on and find a new master, or mistress. Will they settle down finally, or are they set in the wandering life I have led? Will they have families? children? I have three children, and have never seen them."

He tried to picture the women who had born his seed. He remembered their names, but their faces were a blur. Willing young initiates, provided by the Empire. Ample bedmates, enthusiastic even. Honored to bear a child to a man of proven superiority; let not that worthy bloodline die! One after becoming a Priest of the Seven Mothers. One after becoming a Lord of Yanafal Tar'nils. And one during his stay at Glamour, while training as a Traveller and Journeyer. Two sons and a daughter, he had heard. But he had never seen.....

"What have I accomplished?" Harlios wondered. "Other than to get myself Doomed? Five broo here, a vampire there, a #@\$ shrine dedicated! Two hundred years from now, who will know? My name is written down in records here and there, what of it? The Empire is a great tent, held up by many poles. And Argrath is slowly walking around the outside, kicking the poles down, one by one. There isn't going to _be_ an Empire in two hundred years! And nobody in the Heartlands seems to care!"

"Is this what Illumination does to you? I'm glad I failed! Deeper mystic insight, PHAUGH! Six times they made me repeat that blasted riddle, so that they could figure out what was happening. 'Well, it seems to be a convulsion of the mind and spirit, as well as the body.' 'It draws your spirit back into your frame, even if projecting outwards in a ritual.' 'It appears to be something you have done during one of your quests, blocking you from moving in this direction....' For _that_ I had needed the advice of five Illuminated Masters?"

"Oh, what difference does it make? I am about to depart the cycles of Life and Death. And no one will ever know that I couldn't even die properly, with Inandana DaughtersBlood. I am going to vanish on this nameless, barren plain; never to be seen again. I will be forgotten; how can it be otherwise when Valind has stolen my Callings. Who will know? Who _can_ know?"

"Yanafal will know."

"The Seven Mothers will know!"

"VALIND WILL KNOW! He will remember the Last IceBreaker! Let him waste his breath cursing me forever, uselessly!"

"My life is not wasted! Who cares if no one remembers me in two hundred years? I never sought glory. I did what was right! Who cares if I killed five broo near Falling Waters? The people who dwell there care! Five broo that will not trouble them again, killing the folk, breeding more broo! I am a Provincial! I understand that the people of the Empire count! In how many towns, in how many lands, is the world a better place because I have lived? That is enough! It is all I ever wanted!"

Harlios sat on the saddle blanket. His jaw was clenched so hard his teeth hurt. His arm was outstretched, fist closed tight around a faltering spirit. It was like no spirit he had ever seen before.

It was not like a Shade, the Color of Fear.

It was not like a Lune, the Color of Madness.

It was the Color of Despair.

"How dare you!" he roared. "How come you against me? Did I not make sacrifice to Rashtingall? Offer up my most beloved possessions? I kept a respectful distance! And this is my reward?"

"Distance means nothing, if you will stay for any length of time. And what of your sacrifices? Did you not

call on the Power of Rashtingall? To give thanks for the strength you have called upon is only proper! This is the

Place of Challenge, did you think to evade it?"

"Did you challenge Inandana?"

"She came forward of her own, late that night. She passed her challenge easily."

"And the Wolf Brother?"

"He faced his challenge long ago, as part of his training. His old master brought him here for that express purpose."

"Rrrrrrr. Drel?"

"I too...have been challenged...but in a more traditional way..." Drel answered wearily.

"Drel! How badly are you hurt? How long will you be recovering?"

"Half a day...to recover what I can... Some of my hurts are lasting...."

"@#&%*\$!!!"

Harlios mastered his temper, even as he squeezed the wailing spirit in his fist. Immaterial, it was nonetheless caught between his fingers. Capture was the price of it's failure, and it writhed helplessly within the tightening grip

"We will fix this, Drel," he thought in an ugly tone. "Come, join me in a little ceremony, old and familiar."

Yanafal, the captain wise

Did gather then his comrades 'round

The battle fought, and victory won

To share out the victor's bounty

His left foot burned, as if he had stepped in acid. Always, it was the same. Deathday, sunrise to sunset.

And when he performed a Yanafali ritual.

Let each claim his rightful due
A fair share of the spoils of war
Are we all not brothers here?
Equal members of this band?

Drel's voice joined him, raggedly at first. But his tone steadied. Power, raw magic, began to flow up Harlios's arm. Ripped out of the captured, screaming spirit, up his arm and into Drel. Restoring Drel's lost

strength, washing away all signs of injury.

Drel stopped, and Harlios followed suit. "Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes," said Drel. "I am restored. No more is necessary."

"Drink your fill, as deeply as you desire."

"I have, now you drink."

They sang the final canticle, but Harlios did nothing, but to open his fist. He released the pitiful fragment of Despair, which was all that was left of his challenger. Howling it fled back into the glow of Rashtingall. The Black Rock hummed; could it be, that the hum was slightly stronger now?"

Part IX

"Ready, Drel?"

"Any time, my friend. But isn't it too soon? What if we perform the rituals, and the Host of Winter doesn't turn up for days? We will die first."

"Don't worry about it. We are going to plunge back into the HeroPlane. Otherwise, any victories we win over

the Host won't sap Winter's force. Time means little in that place; when we finish the final challenge and turn about, they will be there."

Harlios bent down and picked up the leather sack of ritual salt. With his other hand, he picked up four of the

ritual dueling markers. He scanned the horizon. "As long as they don't come too soon," he thought, "but that seems unlikely."

He began a chant of Duke Ram and Warrior, preparing the sacred Dueling Grounds. He left foot began to burn again, the same acidic pain. He limped slightly, but otherwise ignored it. He had had two years to practice his ignoring.

Drel joined him softly, singing a counterpoint. Occasionally they traded off parts, asking questions, and answering. Harlios poured salt, and planted the stakes, one by one. He marked out a rough rectangle, ten feet by fifteen

Enough room to maneuver, not enough to run and circle. Soon the dueling grounds were complete. As Harlios

finished, he varied the ritual slightly. He called on the powers of the Black Rock, too. He called for certain terms of engagement, well within the normal bounds of a Yanafal Tar'nils duel. "Let them fight me on _my_ terms," he thought. "As binding on me as on them. But I have sculpted the terrain a little, and that is to my advantage. They have numbers, after all."

He walked back over to the blanket; his foot stopped burning the moment he left the Dueling

Grounds. He sat down and started pulling off his left boot.

"What _are_ you doing?" inquired Drel. "You know that it isn't a physical wound."

"I know, but I thought it might look different, what with my sight being shifted half onto the God-Plane." He bent

his leg and turned his foot. It was a sickly yellow color, from one end to the other. It looked like he had stepped into a puddle of paint.

"No different," thought Harlios, as he drew back to let Drel see.

"What were you expecting?"

"I don't know, but suddenly I was curious." He pulled the boot back on. He stood up, and grasped his sword, the last ritual stake, and the candle.

Harlios moved to the center of the sacred Arena, his foot burning again as he passed the boundary. He knelt and held the sword far up its scabbard, like a pole. He placed the candle a foot in front of him, and held the last ritual marker in his left hand. A brief exertion of will, and the candle began to burn. The flame was an eerie sight to his shifted vision, made up of many different shades of red; no yellows, oranges or blues....

He looked down at the ritual marker, a wooden stake seven inches long. Another one of his innovations. Yanafali dueling markers were normally ash, carved with the runes of Life and Death and Truth. The runes were carved deeply, then filled in with silver gilding. Then the stakes would be sealed in heavy coats of clear varnish. Not his stakes.... His were ash, but uncarved. Instead, they were wrapped around with small, thin scrolls. He and his comrades had limned spells and runes upon the scrolls. Each had written one, using his own blood. The scrolls had been wrapped about the stakes, then lacquered into place. A dark lacquer had been used; smoothed, sanded, then applied again, in many coats. It was impossible to see or feel the scroll when holding the stake. But Harlios could feel its aura. He had been saving this little surprise for some time, but few ventured to challenge a Traveller, or accept such a challenge when offered.

Harlios summoned his fire elemental. It burst into flame, and he immediately began compressing its form. Soon it was a small ball of preternaturally bright fire hovering about the candle's wick, (that was the candle's purpose). It burned honest red and yellow before his eyes.

He thrust his left hand forward; the top of the dueling stake went into the salamander. He chanted slow, dreadful words, with Drel echoing in his mind. The elemental flashed up the stake like fire up a rope. Hwarin's stake! He sensed her aura as the marker was consumed.

Pain filled his body, as the salamander passed into it. His frame was burning from within.

"No!" he cried. "You shall not feed on flesh or blood! Down ye pain! Down into my discolored foot, where burning sensations belong!"

Drel moaned on, slow as a dirge. Harlios rejoined the chant, and the pain receded. It flowed out of

his arms, down

his breast, into his left leg. Down and down, until his left foot burned again, this time as of fire.

Harlios panted with pain, dropping his sword. He pulled off his iron helm and dabbed at his eyes. Tears ran down his face, like little traitors. His cheeks felt scorched...

He grasped his sword again, and slowly stood. His foot burned of acid _and_ of fire.

"How long can you endure this, Harlios?"

"It is twice as bad as I am used to, but no matter. There is no damage to flesh or bone or tendon, nor ever was. I limp because I feel pain, and try to favor my leg. Walking, running, or propped up on a pillow like a gouty old man; the pain never varies. I will master this."

He clenched his jaw and stamped his foot. Twice, thrice, harder! There was no jolt of pain; the agony remained constant. He started to walk about the Dueling Grounds. First he hobbled, but his gait grew steady. He had thought of leaving the Sacred Arena, while he grew used to the burning of Fire. But he discarded the idea. "I have to do this sooner or later," he thought. "And besides, I have my pride; I will not weaken now."

"And who will see your manliness?" chuckled Drel. "_I_ am not so easily impressed."

"Ha ha ha," laughed Harlios. "Wasted hubris, is it? Well, let it go. I have done harder things. Strange, though. I am so near the final ending, but I feel neither dread nor hesitation. Something in me yearns forward. 'Let it be done!' it seems to cry. Is this Fate? Is this the voice of She Who Waits?"

Harlios held his sword before him, carried slantwise in its sheath. He began the final ritual challenge. Drel sang with him, as ever. He called his enemies to come and do honorable combat. He named his patron, Yanafal, as his witness. Drel called on Rashtingall to witness also. Their voices seemed to boom and carry to all four horizons. The world around them shifted, as they passed bodily onto the HeroPlane. But for Harlios it was a relief. Here, his vision seemed very much as it ever was. They called on the Seven Mothers, and other friendly gods. They called on Kalikos, though that name seemed not to carry far. At last they called on the Winter King, to come and fight; or else to skulk back north in shame.

The ringing of their voices died away, and Harlios turned. Drawn up on the plain seemed an endless army, the Host of Winter. Uzhim and Hollri looked to make up the bulk of the force, but there were many nameless things.....

Near the edge of the Dueling Grounds stood the only apparent man. Tall and gaunt, his shoulders were stooped and his arms and breast criss-crossed by countless scars. His hair and beard glittered. But his back was straight as the Daughter's Road, and there was a hard, bitter look in his eyes, like boreal ice. He had the look of a man long held prisoner, who had at last tasted freedom. One who had tasted of blood, and wanted more.

"Hend Valindsson, I salute you."

Part X

"Last IceBreaker, I am glad that you are here," said Hend Valindsson. "You have saved us the trouble of hunting you down."

"I remain true to my purpose; to lessen the strength of Winter."

"Haw haw haw!" laughed Hend. The laughter was taken up by Winter's Host. It boomed and echoed for several minutes, and gradually died away.

"After our great victories over Inandana DaughtersBlood and Kalikos that will prove a difficult task," replied HEND. "You would have to rout half of this Host to produce a measurable result. Still, I am not beyond admiring the courage of an enemy; Last IceBreaker, I salute you!"

There was a long silence, then a troll began pounding a drum from the midst of the Host. The uzhim began to howl a short chant, over and over. "We salute you, Last IceBreaker!" The hollri chittered like insects, but their meaning was the same; "We salute you, Last IceBreaker!" Harlios knew no Dark Tongue, let alone whatever passed for speech amongst the ice demons. But on the HeroPlane, meanings were plainly understood...

Valind's son raised his hand, and the cries died away. "A pity that we took no other prisoners. I might then have been tempted to offer you mercy, if you would forswear your goddess and bend your knee to my father. As it is, I am under strict orders to bring you to him, as undamaged as possible"

"Of what value is the fealty of a turncoat? Pass it by, and come to grips with me. However little I may slow your forces and weaken them, that I mean to do. Here within this sacred Arena, we shall meet in single combat. No spells may be cast, excepting those cast upon your own self. No attacks, no summonings, no deceptions. This is a trial of strength and skill at arms. Will you join me, HEND Valindsson?"

"I do not accept your terms, Last IceBreaker. Neither do I accept your challenge. Here are your first opponents, and your last." HEND gestured, and four snow trolls stepped forward. Each carried what looked like a leg bone of some large creature. The knob of each club was wrapped in several layers of leather. "They will pound you flat, but hurt you not. With this padding, you shall be little more than bruised when your senseless body is cast before Winter's King."

Harlios backed away, shifting his right hand to the hilt of his sword. "You misunderstand. The Terms of Engagement are not a request, they are firmly bound into our Ritual Combat." The crystal mounted in Ichor's pommel began to glow an all too familiar yellow when Harlios touched the hilt. It's sickly light cast his face into stark relief, shadowed by his helm. "I carry a weapon no padded club can match. And I wear armor of iron; be ye warned!"

The trollish laughter died suddenly; though they had never seen iron, the Ice Lords had heard old legends of it. The Hurt Metal, invented by the dwarves to burn the flesh of Uz. HEND gestured them forward. They spat in their palms and took firm grips upon their mauls. The bone weapons began to waver slightly, surrounded by dark auras. All four stepped forward, as they began to spread out. They came up to the boundary of the Dueling Grounds, then slowed, then stopped. All four stood stock still, frozen in place.

"You see?" said Harlios. "More than one at a time is not permitted."

HEND scowled and held out his arm. As he closed his fist, a wind sprang up. A north wind, a cold wind, growing steadily in strength. HEND clenched his fist till the knuckles gleamed, the wind grew into a howling fury. But Harlios was unmoved, he felt no wind within the Dueling Grounds, no northern chill. Neither did the motionless trolls.

HEND strained until his arm began to waver. Blood dribbled slowly down the side of his chin, from where he had bit his lip. It froze there, as his hair whipped and clinked in the gale. But to no avail. He stopped, and lowered his arm. The hum of the Black Rock cut through the moans of the dying wind.

"You first," said Harlios, pointing to the right-most Uzhim. The troll began to move forward again. Finding himself unaccompanied, he stopped and looked back at his motionless comrades. He jerked around to the sound of metal leaving it's scabbard.

Harlios stood in the middle of the Arena. He had loosed his grip on the four foot sheath, and it slid from the blade with a whisper of oil and leather. The sword was slim and straight, sharp on both edges, tapering to a keen tip. It was also putrid yellow. Yellow as the glowing pommel, held in place by the talons of a fanciful silver claw. Yellow as the stain on the sole of his left foot. It was an ugly sight.

The Ice Lord thrust his hand out, roaring a spell. Then he faltered, as he saw no sign of a result. "I

warned you," Harlios said, bringing his sword up to a guard position. "Shall we begin?"

The troll bit into the leather, swathed about his club's head. But he could not pull the leather free. "Swore an Oath,

did you? A broken Oath is an offence against the gods; particularly Yanafal Tar'nils, who is a god of Truth and Honor. Also there is Rashtingall, which enforces any Oath sworn as part of a Challenge."

The uzhim swept forward, wavering darkly as his allied spirit wove spells around him. Drel was busy too. A hail of blows were met and parried. Harlios spent little effort on attack at first, preferring to observe a maul in combat. He wove a tight defense, and slashed out occasionally.

Then he launched a heavy blow, with the expected results. The Ice Lord parried with his maul, and a splinter of bone was chipped away. Harlios struck again and again, blows easily parried, notching the bone club. The maul's aura began to falter as the damage mounted.

Finally, the troll realized what Harlios was doing. With a great bellow, he threw the bone and charged barehanded.

Having ducked the club, Harlios could not evade the uzhim; he yanked his left arm up from the sword even as he was overborn. His right arm was pinned to his side, but his left remained free; up and over the troll's shoulder. He grabbed his foe's head and pulled forward. His vambrace pushed from the back, as the troll's face pressed up against his helm's side.

The uzhim shrieked with pain even before they hit the ground. The iron armor burned the troll's head from face and

back. Harlios gagged on the smell of burning flesh, heard the dreadful hissing sounds. The troll's body was protected by the furs he wore, but his hands were burning too, where they met on the back of his iron breastplate.

Screaming with pain, the troll rolled away. The wounds stopped burning one by one, as magical healing put them out; but they were not healed. Harlios stood up and hefted Ichor. Then he stepped forward and made an end.

Harlios stood and watched as troll blood soaked into the grass. He looked at his vambrace, then knelt and rubbed it over the ground at his feet. It came away blackened, but clean. He took off his helm and rubbed it clean as well. Then he spoke.

"Rashtingall, I make a sacrifice to you, and ask a favor. I give unto you the arms and armor of my foe. I give to you even his body, which is of some value to his comrades. All I ask is that the Sacred Arena be cleansed for the next combat. Pray, let it be so."

The Ice Lord's body twitched and began to roll towards the Black Rock. The club skipped up and tumbled end-for-end, fetching up by the wyvern's claw. Harlios looked at the grass where his opponent had lain. It was darker in color, but not slick underfoot.

"My thanks, Rashtingall," said Harlios, bowing.

"My thanks," whispered Drel's voice in the back of his mind.

Harlios moved back to the center of the Dueling Ground. A little sore from the fall, but otherwise unhurt, he was ready to begin again.

"You next," he said, pointing at one of the three remaining foes. The troll began to move forward. Finding himself alone, he stopped and looked back at his two statue-like friends. The Ice Lord turned and thrust his hand out, roaring a spell.

"Here we go again," thought Harlios.

Part XI

Harlios stood near the center of the Dueling Grounds, scowling as he watched the last of the Ice Lords fade into Rashtingall's aura. "Pathetic," he thought. "Thick furs are no more a match for my enchanted armor than bone clubs are for Ichor. I have defeated four Champions of Winter, and what will come of it? It was too easy; it cannot count for much against the strength of Winter. Does HEND know, through some divine means, that I have a limited time to fight?"

"No, he cannot know," came Drel's response. "If he did he would make some excuse, and simply wait for us to collapse."

"Would he? This is the Place of Challenge, he cannot refuse to join in combat, or to send one of his minions."

"Don't forget, he seemed to have picked your foes before the Host arrived. What would you have done against all four at once?"

"Mmmmmmm, probably slashed, then tried to burn their faces with my vambraces when the flankers charged. And used up Yanafal's blessings at an alarming rate. But where is our next opponent?"

Harlios turned and walked towards HEND Valindsson. He limped again, now that he had time and attention to spare the pain. Behind HEND a group of hollri were chittering in a circle, waving their claws in seemingly random patterns.

"My next opponents?"

"You will not find them so easily defeated," said HEND with a scowl. "The uzhim plied tactics suited for a group together. The hollri know better. They are sharing their strength now, each one giving a part of their strength to their Jarl. He will defeat you."

"Jarl?" asked Harlios. "The word is unfamiliar. I presume that the Jarl is the most powerful member of the group?"

"A Jarl is one who has distinguished himself in the past, and been gifted by Himile. Such gifts are not limited to powerful magics; they often result in superior strength, hardiness, or wisdom. But now it is your turn to answer a question. How is it your limp seems to come and go?"

"It is not a physical injury; it is the price I paid for my sword."

"A straight sword? Is that not blasphemous to Lunar thinking?"

"It was not straight when I began my quest."

"What? Surely you will not tell me that you have survived a meeting with my uncle, Humakt?"

Harlios jerked in surprise, and burst out laughing. Drel echoed his mirth, unheard by HEND. "Har har har, do you take me for a child of the gods? Only one with divine blood could, ho ho, even consider such a rash course. He he he, it was a quest of Yanafal Tar'nils, of course." Harlios stopped, and took a deep breath.

"The fact that I acquired an arm of considerable potency, and suffered a hurt that could not be soothed was not lost on my superiors. But that the blade is straight is mere happenstance. I thrust it, point first, into my enemy. It went in, right up to the hilt. Disgusting yellow slime oozed out of the wound. Unable to draw the blade free, I put my foot to the creature's breast, and drew my sword out. But it came out straight, like a candle drawn from a chandler's vat. And what passed for blood in the beast burned like the spittle of dragon-snails."

"If you wish to know more, HEND Valindsson, you must convert to the worship of Duke Yanafal."

A great cry erupted from the circle of hollri as the Jarl came forward. Its eyes glittered white and blue.

"I have heard all that is needful. The weapon's virtues will function only for its proper master. Well enough, it shall be hung as a trophy on the Wall of the Vanquished. And if it takes to 'biting' any who dare to touch it, so much the better. None shall think to make off with it. But tell me one last thing, has it a name?"

"Ichor," sighed Harlios. Then he stepped back as the Jarl approached.

Part XII

The Jarl stalked to the far end of the Dueling Grounds, then stepped three feet in. He stopped and chittered a weird cry. Harlios could not understand it; a hollri word that had no human translation. It stood still, its eyes glittering.

"Here it comes," Harlios told Drel. They watched together; the pair of extra eyes graven into the iron helm were quite functional on the HeroPlane. Drel could see clearly without impeding his friend. The air around the Jarl darkened, and the temperature in the Arena plummeted. Frost appeared on the grass near the hollri, as the creature vanished in the ever increasing pool of darkness it was creating. The Jarl cast no spell; it was extending its own aura.

Harlios felt the cold air, the hair on his arms stood up. Fully a third of the Dueling Grounds were covered in shadow, and the darkness crept forward. But though the darkness increased, the form of the Jarl became clear again. The goose bumps on his limbs relaxed; the air seemed pleasantly cool. His left foot burned of fire and acid, but these were only symptoms. The acid was in his sword, and the fire was in his veins. His frame contained a salamander and had required only a moment to adjust to the changes in his surroundings.

Still the Jarl put forth its power, to no purpose.

"It's going to be a very surprised-looking hollri in about a minute," snickered Drel. "Go and kill it."

He brought his sword up to guard and strode forward. A cry of dismay came from the Jarl's followers, who were no more blinded by Darkness than their master. The cold failed and the shadows fled away, as the Jarl realized that it was wasting its strength. It too strode forward, crouching with its clawed arms extended. Long, sharp spines projected from its limbs. Longer than its followers, Harlios noted, but apparently no sharper.....

The two circled and feinted, measuring each other. The ice demon jabbed with its claws, Harlios slashed with his sword.

"Get the Healing ready, this is going to be a tough one."

"And you complained about the uzhim being too easy," Drel replied.

"Drel, it's faster than I am. Not by much, but faster. Ichor gives me greater reach, but is difficult to stab with. It's mostly suited to slashing and wholesale cleaving. And we don't know how strong the Jarl is. At least the spines tend to sweep back along the arms, it'll have trouble trying to gouge me with them."

Harlios set his jaw and picked up the pace. The Jarl matched him, its claws stabbing relentlessly. The spines spun

back and forth as the hollri twisted its arms. The sword was flicked aside again and again.

Harlios drew Ichor further back, for a long hard sweep. He braced himself against the blow he knew was coming. He flinched as the Jarl struck him hard in the ribs; one, at least, was broken. Then his sword came around, and caught the retreating limb solidly. It rebounded from the ice demon's arm with the 'clang' of a bell.

The Jarl's arm exploded with a musical crash. The air was filled with the ringing of chimes, as fragments of hollri collided with each other and fell to the ground.

Shocked, both enemies stood still for a moment. Harlios leapt forward, thrusting his sword straight out. The Jarl danced back, but the tip of Ichor clinked into its breast. Which promptly burst into a thousand singing shards.....

"Did you _see_?" demanded Drel. "Just for a moment, before the demon shattered, a putrid

wound! A small, shallow cut, yellow around the edges."

"I saw! It is the same as when we fought the demon riders. Ichor would not penetrate, it would leave only a shallow

gash. But the gash was yellow on the edges, and it oozed yellow slime. The same wounds we dealt Tar'shlyr! Ichor is

always True against a mundane foe, but it's full powers are reserved for killing demons! Sir Ethilrist lost four riders that

day, and we are going to slay countless hollri. Or..."

"Or perhaps a northern wind...."

"Let the Sacred Arena be cleared," intoned Harlios.

The shards of the Jarl began to slide towards Rashtingall, it's remaining intact limbs born away upon a tinkling wave. The frightened murmurs of the snow trolls were drowned out by the squeaks and clicks of the hollri. The ice demons were drowned out in their turn by Valind's Son, who swore in rage. Lighting flashed overhead, punctuating HEND's fury.

"Will you join me, HEND Valindsson?" called Harlios, his soft voice cutting across all other sounds. The Host of Winter fell silent.

"No!" roared HEND. "I cannot! The Jarl's band have all sworn to follow him, even unto the Endless Fires of the South! You must deal with them first!"

"Come here!" he cried. The hollri circled about the furious godling. "Hear me! You have no hope against that sword. Do not try. Go in there and charge him! Stab him with your spines! Claw him with your talons, bite him, rend him if you can! You will each get one chance, and one chance only. Make it count!"

"We die for you!" cried the hollri. "We avenge our Jarl!"

Part XIII

The hollri lay face down on the sward, it's right arm twitching feebly. A streak of jagged splinters winking through

the tall grass was all that remained of it's left arm. Two more nearby streaks marked the loss of it's legs. The Last IceBreaker stood nearby, leaning over his sword. The hammering of his heart was gradually slowing, his ragged breathing grew more regular. The ice demons had been true to their vows; each had charged like a frothing uroxi as soon as they saw their predecessor go down. Drel's healing powers had repaired what wounds they managed to inflict, but Harlios had been pushed to the point of exhaustion. This was the third hollri he had maimed, hoping to gain a brief respite. But the others had died of their wounds. Finally, a few moment's worth of rest.

Harlios straightened up. He shook his left leg uselessly, the pain seemed to be creeping slowly upwards. He limped in a slow circle. His mended ribs still tingled, trails of blood ran down his limbs. Fresh droplets trickled slowly from minor nicks, too small to warrant healing.

He looked over towards HEND Valindsson, and saw a many-jointed creature holding out pieces of icy armor. It looked like a cross between a huge centipede and Yara Aranis. HEND donned his harness while a nine-foot hollri held his spear. Harlios glanced away, the spear hurt his eyes to look at.

"Harlios," called Drel softly. "What is happening to your leg?"

"Fire seems to be clawing it's way upward."

"Is this the end, then?"

"I can't quite seem to catch my breath, no matter how long I rest. Yes, I think it's almost over. Shall we say farewell to the Son of Winter?"

"No," countered Drel. "I'd rather cut his nose off. We still have a fair reservoir of magic left. Do we

not have time for one last fight? Imagine what your sword would do to him."

"I don't think so. And besides, it occurs to me that Ichor would probably not be at full strength against him. He is not a demon after all. He is the child of a storm god, and some nameless darkness spirit."

Harlios paused, saying "I begin to feel weary, Drel. Empty and hollow. Let it end." Ichor rose and fell. Harlios murmured under his breath and turned away as Rashtingall cleared the Dueling Grounds. He limped slowly towards Hend, his limp growing into a lurch along the way.

Hend looked up as he approached. "Your limp seems much worse; I think you have little strength left. That will make my task simpler. Do not think that I pity you any longer. That foul sword was much more than anyone expected. Trying to bring you before my father alive has become a luxury I can ill afford. Prepare to die."

"Stay a moment. Tell me of your spear."

Hend hesitated, then continued to arm himself. "It is the spear my Uncle Vadrus won from some nameless thane of Chaos. Valind gave me leave to carry it, as my symbol of authority over all the host." He held out his left arm, and the centipede-thing circled it with its ridged tongue. Saliva ran down and froze in place around Hend's arm. The creature slobbered it's way from wrist to elbow. Then it began again. Layer after layer froze in place, yet when Hend flexed his fingers, it rippled like flesh.

"Superior to any enchanted vambrace," he said. "If I had faced Kalikos with such arms and armor, it might have gone differently all those years ago."

"Tell me one more thing before we begin. Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why raid the Southlands? To raise such a great host, the domains of Valind and Himile must be vast, and strangely fertile. At least, fertile to such as follow you. What can you gain from the South? Lands most of these creatures could not endure?"

"Vengeance!" snarled Hend.

"That I understand, from the sight of your scars. But surely you know that you could have been killed long ago? All the defeats you have suffered were meant to fend off winter raiders. If you had left the Southlands in peace, neither Kalikos would have come against you."

"Raiding my enemies is my birthright, bred into my very bones!"

"I feared it would be so," sighed Harlios. "This is the way captured Orlanthi have spoken to me, in Dragon Pass. Every year a cattle raid; but what for? The neighboring clans just raid right back, and retake their herd. Sometimes they get more than they lost, too. The cattle go back and forth, raid after raid, year after year. The only predictable result is the deaths. The cattle don't care what hillside they graze on! The only things that grow from this are hatred, and graveyards. If the clans would only leave each other alone, they would all prosper."

"I remember when Storm ruled all the world!" roared Hend. "Those days shall come again! We raid to maintain our strength! To teach our enemies the meaning of fear! And so we..... What is happening to your eyes?"

Harlios met his gaze unblinking. "I don't know, what is it you see?"

"They begin to glow and flicker."

"Ah. That means we will vanish from your ken shortly, and leave you empty-handed," Harlios replied. "I would laugh at you, but it hurts too much."

"There is no escape for you. You have no strength to alter the Will of the Winterking."

"Hah! we have spent all our strength. There is none left; that was the whole point."

"I don't know what ruse you are attempting, but I will put an end to it shortly," spat Hend. He glanced down at his arm, the armor was frozen about a quarter of an inch thick.

"It is too late for that, Hend Valindsson. Have you not wondered how I resisted the Jarl's aura?"

"Tell me, then"

"I swallowed a salamander. That is what you see behind my eyes."

"Impossible! It would have burned you away from within. Had you enough Fire magics to ward off that end, you would not have needed to swallow it. Tell me no more lies!"

"Heh, heh, ha," laughed Harlios, mirthlessly. "We have fed it on our souls."

Hend's eyes grew wide as fire began to flicker out of his enemy's scratches. Little rivulets of flame licked down armored limbs where blood had trailed but moments before.

"See the candle gutter and flare, before it goes out! Valind has claimed my Callings; but he shall never claim my soul! There shall be nothing left of it, all burned away! I defy Valind to the end!"

"I am the Last IceBreaker!"

"Remember me well, for I am unbeaten!"

"And now I claim my final victory; utter annihilation!"

"EMBRACE ME, OBLIVION!!!"

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The Legend of Scarbill by Stewart Stansfield

(As appeared in the HeroQuest RPG-Digest August 4, 2003)

Scarbill's Keywords c. 1613

Militant Leader of the Unified Creek Stream River Workers' Union & tireless foe of the oppressive Red Goddess 17 Evade Foe 17, Fisticuffs 1W, Hate Lunars 5W, Leadership 1W, Revolutionary Strategy 6

Scarbill was one of the premier revolutionary leaders of the oppressed Durulzian proletariat. The son of a boatduck, Scarbill followed in his father's footsteps and plied his trade on the Creek Stream River. He didn't earn much, and times were 'ard, but it was a simple life and folk were happy. Then the Lunars came. The conquest was quick, and the Red Goddess' plenipotentiaries raised the Pole Tax, so called as it exorbitantly taxed the Ducks for each barge pole (i.e. boat) they possessed.

Earning a pittance as it stood, the river-workers could hardly cope with this new oppression, and formed a workers' committee, under the charismatic Scarbill (he got his name following a rather vicious encounter with a giant otter). Scarbill caused numerous problems for the Lunars, who relied on steady river traffic for trade and logistical transport. They outlawed his union, and its meeting, and levied stiff penalties on those who defied the Goddess.

When Kallyr rose in rebellion, Scarbill called on the Duck river-workers to drop their poles, and go on strike. Many answered the call but some demurred, fearing the Lunar backlash and loss of income (for times were now even 'arder...). Scarbill's toughs picketed the jetties, and got into some rather nasty confrontations with the picket-runners. The latter usually got the worst of the affrays, and were soon called by the unsightly nature of their wounds: 'Scabs'.

Scarbill's boys faced off with the Lunars in the streets of Duck Point, and frightful clashes ensued. The soldiers obviously got the better of the Ducks, but the brave workers got a few good smacks in. Soon, most of the workers were arrested, and thrown in prison or executed* as a warning to all. The jetties were closed, river traffic was for a while no longer necessary, as the Lunars turned to the Grazelands

and then Heortland as an alternative trade route.

Scarbill escaped, and fled to the marshes and hills, to lead the downtrodden and teach all of his revolutionary strategy. Sadly, his efforts failed and he faded into obscurity. People forgot the part he had played, and found his strategy to be a little naive. He retired to a humble life, moping on past losses. Yet with the liberation of Sartar, Scarbill tried to forge a new career in politics, campaigning for the post of Townsthegn of Heartlypool, a small village in the wilds. Tragically, he lost out to the glib-tongued Mallardsson, a crony of Argrath.

After a suffering as the butt of a rather unmagnanimous victory speech by Mallardsson, the humiliated Scarbill quit tribal politics. His time had truly passed. He had hoped Argrath, a Sartarite patriot, would bring back the good old days but, again, Scarbill was too naive. Argrath's Sartar needed the jetties and small river traders no longer. This was a New Sartar, and larger, centralised ports handling cheap exports from afar replaced the old river trade.

Scarbill now lives in retirement, in his old bungalow by the Creek Stream River. From his window his rheumy eyes can just make out an old ramshackle, disused jetty that slumps on the reed-strewn, silted river bank. Unused and unloved, it is the symbol of a bygone age, much like Scarbill himself.

*the method used to execute ducks was rather gruesome... Termed the Foie Gras, the Lunars first pump the poor ducks full of corn and fat, until they're bloated. It's then a little like the 'drawing' bit from being hung, drawn and quartered, only the Lunars stick all manner of nasty implements down the ducks' throats, gouge into the liver, wiggle 'em about a bit, and draw out a sickly mixture which is apparently a luxury in Peloria. There's no accounting for taste...

©Stewart Stansfield

A Letter from a Loskalmi diplomat to Seshnela by Peter Metcalfe

(Editor's note: this is a companion piece to A letter from a Tanisoran diplomat to Loskalm).

...As the wizards chanted, the cathedral walls vanished and it was night time which surprised me. I asked about this later and was told that the Logical Sun was shining on our world and during our night, it shone here. Above me, there was this bright light that seemed to just float above me but was always out of my reach. I was told their Ecclesiarch could bring us in so close to the light that we could see its true shape. It was clear that none of my hosts actually had seen this for they began to argue whether it was a triangle or not before a wizard motioned them for silence. Despite its brightness, my companions were dark shadows even though they were less than five paces from me. The wizards robes could be seen in the gloom yet their faces were shrouded in darkness.

Then their dead came. The light that refused to brighten our faces shone on them clearly and even cast shadows. None would speak to me which my hosts warned me would happen. I tried to listen to them speaking to others but although I saw their lips move, I could not hear what was said. My hosts told me afterwards that they were asked after their living relatives and warned against the depravities of the Arkati, the Boristi and the Vadel. Were there no words against the Red Moon I asked? None, for they were not around then. If they had, they would have condemned the Ratsculi too.

I would have asked them why they went to this effort to prove to themselves the truth of Solace when they could just know Joy but I feared they would not have taken it well...

©Peter Metcalfe

A Letter from a Tanisoran diplomat to Loskalm by Peter Metcalfe

(Editor's note: this is a companion piece to A letter from a Loskalmi diplomat to Seshnela).

...Their chapels are but blank walls and the important rituals screened from our sight. The tedium alone was bad enough but the worst was their drooling as they experienced their joy. If Joy truly is Solace manifested within mortal hearts and minds then clearly God wants us to be pagans....

©Peter Metcalfe

Lhankor Mhy and the Cage by Pete McAveney

Editors Note : This is the Mostali side of the story of how Lhankor Mhy came to be trapped in a cube by the Stone People.

Maintenance Log for Unit 118NK0RMH, a class Y processing node

This node performs preventive maintenance upon the Machine by absorbing leaks of essence class Y. It then classifies, separates, and recycles those leaks, restoring them to their proper places in the Machine. It has been malfunctioning.

The scavenging controller has allowed the unit too much latitude, resulting in inappropriate absorption of raw materials not designated for recycling.

Manufacturing defects in the node are not possible; it is a first generation component, designed and assembled by Mostal. A defect in its programming must have been introduced through sabotage by an external agent. The defect is most likely viral in nature, creating further defects in programming, and is probably associated with the disorder rune. Defects of this nature have been classified under the moniker "Curiosity." The defect caused the intake of contaminated materials, which altered its programming to seek out more contaminated materials. The alterations include the original defect itself.

Repair on the unit was attempted. First a team of Gold and Silver mostali located the defective unit and specified the diagnostic procedure. This was repeated several times due to the ambulatory nature of the processor. That nature and its wide scope of operations necessitated the use of a special tool for the containment and isolation phase of the repair effort. A Complete Altitude-and-Girth Encincture (CAGE) was carefully placed around the node by the supporting B38 squad prior to the diagnostic effort. Unfortunately this tool suffered a failure due to manufacturing defect as detailed below.

Elemental forces associated with disorder acted in resistance to the diagnostic effort and most of the unit was assigned to neutralization and cleanup. Unfortunately presence of these forces triggered

another change in the unit's programming. It provided a set of new instructions to squad B38. Since the unit's instructions did not include a handler for the type of interrupt provided by the defective unit, the squad experienced an error condition and halted to await diagnosis and repair. This halt affected the latch of the CAGE unit, resulting in a breach of containment. All progress towards the repair was lost.

The viral nature of the defect creates further obstacles to repair. Any and all units in contact with the defective node may have been contaminated by "Curiosity" and must be retrained at a minimum. Optimal repair requires removal and recycling of the affected components. Fortunately squad B38 suffered severe disorder at the hands of the elemental forces leading to their disassembly. Great gains in efficiency have thus been realized by proceeding directly to the recycling phase! However complete repair requires removal and recycling of the following additional components:

1. The gold and silver mostali involved in specification and planning, including the unit composing this review.
2. All tools, programming, instructions, and other written material related to the repair, including this document.

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Live from the Inquisition : a Seshnegi tale by Hervé Carteau

(Author's notes: I picture the (yet nameless) main character as a young Rokari monk of the Inquisition, who comes to investigate a faraway village. He suspiciously looks like Johnny Depp in "Sleepy Hollow".)

Reverend and Learned Father,

I have arrived at the hamlet of Woippy three days ago. It is a community of about forty hearths located a few leagues only from the eastern edge of the accursed Kanthor forest, where beasts dwell.

The local dronari immediately recognized my exalted status as a Wizard of Rokar and offered proper respect and hospitality. I was given shelter in bailiff Hatto's house where he keeps a squad (I think it is proper horali term) of soldiers to fight off beasts from the accursed forest. While crude, it proved proper accommodation, but kept me separate from the local community you had sent me to investigate for heresy.

How often have I wished that the teachings of Rokar would allow us to disguise ourselves before the prying eyes of heretics, so we could observe what they seek to hide from the Inquisition's Justice. But Rokar's Message is clear and we must show our exalted caste before all. Because of the emergency of your request, I had no time to send some of our dronari agents ahead of me and had to lead my inquiries through questioning of the locals.

I had their headsman, one Bartram the Yeoman, gather them at the Church, which state of neglect should have warned me about what was to come. Bartram began the liturgy then gave me the chair, and I read how Malkion instructed Dronar about his duties. Then, by the Grace of the Book, I extended my Sight as you taught me. At first glance, nothing was amiss – the flock of Essences was pure and

untainted by pagan corruption. But many of the men seemed to struggle to remember their Prayers, and the “Victory over the Ice” Chant was weak and mangled. But before Confession could begin, Hatto burst into the church and shouted an alarm. It seemed like beastmen had been spotted close by and he quickly gathered a third of the men and left in haste, even though there was only one hour of day left.

Left by my devices, I wandered around the village alone and could feel the eyes of the local women following me. Rokar’s Teachings tells us Wizards not to risk corruption by talking to a female and I abstained, despite my suspicions. I noticed a crone walking away from the village towards the west, led by a young girl not ten winters old – again just before dusk. When I tried to follow, a weakness overcame me and I fell to my knees, shaking. I had to stagger back to my quarters to recover, and prepare to invoke the Powers of Inquisition to discover what evil lurked in this village...

Wracked by weakness, my muscles knotting, I knew had been bewitched and had to lift the pagan curse before pushing my investigation further. I opened my sacred book, the copy of the Rule of Law you yourself blessed, oh revered teacher, and spoke out the Runes of Malkion's Prayers, His most holy and first Gospel. This most excellent spells cleared my mind and allowed me to shake off the cantrip that had been cast at me : a most peculiar form of confusion reeking of pagantry. If someone, in this humble thorp, had the audacity - and the power - to befuddle a wizard of the Inquisition, however minor and young, serious steps had to be taken.

Rokar and Maldron taught us that Faith in the Word of God is all we need to set to our tasks, and I decided to show these backwood half-pagans what the Power of Rokar is. I walked to the Chapel, lit up the prepared Candle you had the foresight to arm me with and intoned the spell of Punishing Malkion's Enemy, using the very power reaped from the sorry congregation I had lectured earlier that day. Sainted Theoblanc teaches us that Power can be taken from many sources if it fulfills a Pure goal, the purest energy, that which stems from sincere prayers to Makan, is not always available. I began feeling the sleeping peasants stir and move - and also the still-wakeful ones, out there near the accursed forest. Now they felt the sting of Our Holy Inquisition's spells. But I had not realized how far they had fallen from Solace.

The Chapel was a sorry affair, and its Wards were puny. The thing I had involuntarily summoned burst in it without effort. It had a spectral sinuous body, so long I could not discern its end. It writhed and moved fast, its spectral scales glistening, its spectral fangs dropping with ichor, its spectral serpentine glaze befuddling me again. I could feel its power worming its way into my mind, trying to dissolve the Reason and Logic that are the key to our wizardry.

I recognized it as one of sehsna likita's minions, a guardian of the old pagan goddess which had ruled our land through her snaked-legged hybrids many centuries before. You had taught me, oh Revered Master, of the foul and putrid ways of this cult, the oldest form of pagan worship in our lands, how it time and again resurfaced, like a snake that comes out of the earth again at spring each year. But despite your wise teachings, the Power of my puny Reason failed me that night.

©Hervé Carteau

The Mok Siang by Sandy Petersen

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 31, 1995)

In olden days, so long ago that to doubt a tale from that time would be impious⁶⁹, a mandarin ruled an island. The mermen⁷⁰ murdered his fishers, spread disease to coastal villages, and whistled up storms and fog to plague his ships. But all these problems were known to him of old, and his folk were able to survive despite the plots and toils of the mermen.

One day, his fishers captured an enormous and most loathly mer-beast. They brought it before the mandarin and he questioned it. The mer-beast laughed and said that at last the island province was doomed. "What do you mean?" asked the mandarin. The mer-beast laughed and said that the underwater folk had at last placed upon the island the Mok Siang which, interpreted, is "the thing that destroys". The mandarin destroyed the monster, but its words remained.

Now the mandarin now sought to find and eliminate the Mok Siang. Fearing lest the Mok Siang lurked in the island's woods, he ordered the hunters, charcoal-burners, and woodcutters to comb the forests and swamps. Fearing lest the Mok Siang took refuge among the Eagle Women⁷¹, he ordered the mountaineers to force them away from their homes and slay them if need be. Fearing lest the Mok Siang dwelt in houses built by hands, he ordered the townspeople to watch for one another carefully and report. Fearing lest the Mok Siang drifted in the world of magic⁷² he caused his wise men to search the seven planes.

The Mok Siang's effects were soon found, though it was not. Evil beasts raided the farms. Famine swept across the island. Storms destroyed the fleets of white ships. Criminals and bandits spread throughout the populace. The only success were the Wise Men, who reported that they had discovered that the Mok Siang dwelt in the mandarin's palace.

The only newcomer to the mandarin's palace was his new son, born just the day before the mer-beast had been caught. Was that the Mok Siang? The mandarin did not have the courage to slay his son, but sent him away from the island in the last remaining boat. Then he waited hopefully for the terror to end. As he sat in his decaying palace, listening to the cries and screams of his people in pain and terror, a huge mer-beast, even larger and more loathly than the first, flopped into his empty palace.

"What is happening?" pleaded the mandarin, at wit's end.

"The Mok Siang has destroyed you." said the horror.

"I did all I could." explained the mandarin. "I sent my hunters, charcoal-burners, and woodcutters to seek the wilderness..."

⁶⁹ the Kralori have a sense of humor

⁷⁰ these would, of course, be Zabdamar.

⁷¹ probably Wind Children

⁷² the spirit plane?

"And so they did not hunt, make fuel, or cut wood. Evil beasts multiplied, the people could not cook, make furniture, or build homes."

"I drove away the Eagle Women," wailed the mandarin.

"And so they could not foresee the storms which wrecked your ships and cleaned your harbor."⁷³

"I had every man watch out for his neighbor," cried the mandarin.

"And so no man trusted another. Friendships were broken. And your judges were kept so busy dealing with accusations one against another, the criminals were left free to riot."

"I even sent away my own son," mourned the mandarin, lost in sorrows.

"And so you have no heir. Will civil strife add to worries?"

The mandarin stood up to his full stature, summoned the last vestiges of his glory⁷⁴, and glared at the monster. "I command you, thing of the deep. Tell me, where is the Mok Siang?"

"YOU are the Mok Siang."

©1995 by Sandy Petersen.

More Bad Humour by James Frusetta

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest RPG Digest July 9, 2003)

A Yelmalion, a Zorak Zorani, an Orlanthi and a Humakti are being carried by a sylph that suddenly gets hit by an arrow. "Argh!" says the Sylph, "I can only carry one of you now! Quick, three of you need to jump!"

The four look at each other for a moment, then the Zorak Zorani stands up.

"Hur," says the ZZite, "Squeaking cowards! If no one has the stomach to face death, I will jump first!" And off the ZZite jumps.

Affronted, the Yelmalion stands. "No one can meet death with the dignity of Yelmalion!" And off he jumps.

The Orlanthi stands up. "Orlanthi know how to face death." And he pushes the Humakti off.

⁷³ i.e. of visiting merchants, further ruining the economy. The implication is that the Eagle Women's foreknowledge normally allowed the ship captains to take steps to preserve their boats against bad weather.

⁷⁴ a magical aura that most mandarins can summon when acting in an official capacity, and which varies in power, energy, and color.

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Mostal the Invisible God by Neil Edmond

(As originally appeared on the World of Glorantha list on May 14th, 2008).

I found this piece of Genertelan communication recently. I've been unable to date it, but it shares several characteristics with the notesheets of Uwe Stout Brackets, a sage wandering Prax in the 1620s.

'Dear Friend

You will recall the map cases I bought from that baboon, the Argan Argari egg and larvae trader. The maps are not as I hoped (little chance of Ronancian superimpositions on these: Westerly caravan trails as best I can tell (but a striking depiction of Mastakos in the margin of one (which I may trade on if you've no objection))), but they are old. There were, in addition, several scraps of vellum (and one of a coarse hide which I've yet to identify (it may well be horse again, like last time, so I'll not get my hopes up)), one of which I thought might further your study. My translation follows (and the scrap is enclosed).

"...as Western Men are inferior to Dwarfes. As We all know, when Mostal told the Western Men to live like Dwarfes, they got it wrong right away and have got wronger ever since. They can't decide the best way to stay the same. They will not climb back into the machine, and their place must thus be taken."

I've never seen a dwarf write more than an invoice (and he was (of course) a free-thinking Flintnailer), but the steady, square text (and lack of flounce or flurry) suggest a dwarfish hand. Do the western wizards worship Mostal? Is he their Invisible God?

In thought lies hope,

U.'

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Negalla the Nest Maker by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest September 15, 2003)

Negalla was born in the Woven Nest, a bowl shaped in the manner of Reladiva, but pieced together by Aswata Greenweaver from the grasses and branches that decorated the land. Negalla was sister to Lagada Crow-mother and Hesvata the Magpie and the three shared the nest. But where her sisters preferred to fly and seek out the shining light, Negalla stayed near the nest, forever taking pieces apart and putting the pieces back together.

In those early days the Woven Nest was part of Reladiva's court and Negalla saw many beautiful things there, for this was the Golden Age. Sometimes when a god or goddess dropped something, Negalla would pick it up and pack it away in the nest. Thus when Sodruya dropped the Cloak of Feathered Leaves to try on the Cloak of Greening, Negalla took and wore the old one. And when Nealda cast the

Yellowhead Worms out of the earth after they ate her favorite rock, Negalla gathered them up to fill the spaces in the nest. Other times, Negalla would trade away something she picked up for something else as when she gave Erkalana the Gutstrings in exchange for the Song of Remembrance. On a few occasions, following her sisters, she would sneak into the homes of others and steal what she wanted.

When conflict and war came to Reladiva's Bowl, Negalla ventured further from the nest, often following the mighty warriors about. She picked up what was dropped (such as the Nine-banded Whip), what was broken (including the Leg of Uloclos), and what was left behind (even such esoteric items as the Tears of Honbestal and the Great Spit of Razan Bullhead). When the waters rose and filled the Bowl of Reladiva, Negalla sealed the nest with mud and blood. When storms drove the nest hither and yon upon the waters, she gathered the flotsam and jetsam, which drifted around, including the Lost Crown of Reladiva. She picked up people, spirits, and gods, including Tunoral, who were lost and had no place. This great nest or raft she named Vanch, the Patchwork Place. And within the great nest, Negalla and Tunoral became lovers and consorts and blessed their people with their gifts.

When the waters receded, Negalla's nest settled into the mud in the northeast corner of what was Reladiva's Bowl. Others came raiding the land, stealing treasures, and killing folk. Negalla reminded her folk that even the great nest could be raided and torn asunder, but still rebuilt, for there were always broken and lost things to rebuild with. After the Iron Ram broke the walls of the nest, Negalla show her folk the hard droppings left behind and how even these could form new walls. Negalla told her folk that what others sought were treasures no longer, but what they could add to the nest would be blessed and gain tenfold in value. Where the Ram Hoofs cut the Understone, there grew the Thorn Hedge, which would protect many folk for a time.

These ways were followed even when the Ice of Valkaral crushed the land and the Great Darkness of Night birthed monsters. The great nest was broken down and hidden. The dead and dying were stripped of all useful. Broken trees, rocks carried by glaciers, and sharp thorns protected the little nests that remained. Negalla even stole the shadows of the Esserberns and wrapped these around the little nests to hide them further. Lost spirits (such as the lovers

Hermilla and Bromior), masks of gods (such as the Scarf of Watery Essence), and ancient weapons were gathered to distract or fight the monsters. And when the Ice had gone and the Sun rose again, Negalla and her few straggling folk were there to greet the Dawn of Time.

©2003 by Harald Smith.

New Year in Karlorela by Peter Tracy

I had the good fortune to be in the Kralorelan Capitol for their new years celebrations and was quite enthralled by their parade ceremonies.

The major streets and thoroughfares of the grand city were lined by its scores and scores of residents. Banners of crimson and gold fluttered in the cool easterly breeze, lanterns hung from each doorpost and

street sign, and streamers from the lintels of each building in the street. I was almost knocked aside by a hoard of children, bearing poles with miniature lanterns, caged birds and crickets, most chewing candy in their other hand. I bought a cricket for luck myself from a bent old crone on one corner, she muttered some unintelligible blessing and laughed at my feeble Kraloreli.

I could hear the drumming in the streets. Loud and long. Heard well before the drummers themselves appeared, sounding like thunder in the distance. Streams of bird were breaking skyward in advance of the parade, frightened, I thought first, by the noise. Then the Lions came into view in a halo of golden light, roars blending with the thunderous drumming of the soldiers chasing them. Lions they were not, but that is how I have to describe them, but glimmering, big eyed, huge mouthed and not mortal. Something else.

I felt the roar of one approaching Lion from half a block away. I felt something pushing though me. I felt exhilarated, light headed and fine. I could 'feel' in the corners of my vision the fleeting sense of something dissipating, something breaking to tatters, and flock of released birds were swooping and diving to carry of these intangible shadows. Then the thunder burst loud in my ears. The streamers I noted before were bursting into flame. Each pretty knot was exploding like a lightning stuck pine, the streamers crackling like a pine fire, but loud as an avalanche next to my ear. At each crack, tiny spirits leapt and darted from the houses along the street, darting into the crowds and up into to sky. As the Lions chased down the street, I looked and saw the spirits fleeing their approach. Ah... the spirits were being carried off by the birds. Those to slow were consumed by the Lions roars and halo. All the malign and malicious house pests were fleeing before these divine beings, their beauty and power to much to bear.

I didn't notice the dragon until it was almost upon me.

You would know cousin how I like to talk, but I could not talk then... and find it hard to describe now. It had lovely deep brown eyes like your horse, but patterned like a cat, or something like, or a snake, or an owl, or mother, but the were not brown but a rich purple. It gaze, its countenance was human and something beyond, something ageless and to be feared, knowing and powerful, kind and utterly uncaring. It passed me by. All golden scaled fur, warm to touch like a lover, soft like an alynx and a grass snake at once. Burning and icy and soothing to touch. The crowds too had held out their hands, suddenly, deafeningly silent in the drumming.

How long it was I could not say, nor how long I stood. Before I realised it had passed and disappeared, and the crowds continued to dance and the children released their crickets to scamper and scatter their luck into the cracks and crevices of the local houses, and the thunder receded, and the Emperor was gone.

©2003 by Peter Tracy.

The Origin of the Okapi by Ian

(From the World of Glorantha list 2011/03/25)

In the many destructions and upheavals of the late Fourth Action, a population of Eskaval, the children of Menaken the Walker and Selenvath the Eluse, were driven out of Danmalastan. As was their nature, they went deeply into hiding, far from the turmoil of the Wars of Low Magic and the Death of Malkion.

In the Darkness, they were forced into pens by a clan of Ogres, who cut off their tails, one by one, to make soup. But the Eskaval used their hiding and escaping spells to flee. In a battle over the meagre lichen in the north, fought against spirit elk, they lost their shining antlers. Zzabur cast a mighty spell to bring any errant Ancient Animals back to the West, but the panicked Eskaval dug their golden hooves into the ground, and used their remaining hiding and escaping magic to resist. Even then, their tongues were pulled and stretched out to ludicrous lengths before the spell was broken. Their hooves now dull and brown, they ran south and east.

Without their Essential hiding magic, their numbers were greatly reduced by monsters and predators, but as the worlds got mixed up and heterogeneity via Chaos began to be the norm, they stole much hiding magic from spirit and god animals that had their own ways of staying safe. They became less and less like their majestic cousins who remained pure. They stole the hiding stripes from spirit-zebra, and some of the spirit-giraffe's lookout neck-magic. They took the silent cough of god-leopards and stillness from god-deer. Each stolen bit of magic marked the no-longer-Eskaval with its taint.

The ridiculous amalgam that entered into the Dawn is called the Okapi, and it is hunted by everyone. Their misfortune illustrates to us today that should one be tempted to seek succor from pagans and primitives, the price is always one's Essential nature, and loss of Solace, hunted by the false gods and hungry spirits of the world.

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The Origins of New Pelorian by Peter Metcalfe

In the days before Sheng, the Lunar Way was not easy as it is now for people did not fully understand its promises. Communicating the Words of the Goddess was the responsibility of Etyries, the Tongue of the Goddess. Her missionaries used their Reaching Unity power to make others aware of the Cosmic Unity and start them upon the Lunar Way. But this was difficult to do and so far fewer Lunars lived then than now.

When Sheng came, he slew all Lunars that he could find. The surviving Lunars, sick with fear, fled to the extremities of the Empire. While they awaited their inevitable deaths at Sheng's hands and kill them all, they preached the Goddess's words to all nearby so that her truths would not pass away. A multitude heard but a scant few understood.

The Pit of Despair was reached when their leader, the Great Sister, went out into the Pelandan fields and preached to the peasants. Spying a glyph over the door of their ramshackle temple, she spoke to them about how the glyphs were really the Goddess in disguise.

The peasants were amazed for they had never heard someone so great getting it so wrong. They hooted at her and jeered her supposed learning. Surprised and hurt, the Great Sister held her peace as the peasants revealed the true meaning of those glyphs. Her suppressed rage turned to wonder as she realized the glyphs were the last vestiges of Old Pelorian, the long lost Green Age language that everybody spoke.

When the Goddess said "We are All Us", she was speaking of the Oneness of the Green Age. But the Oneness had been lost to the world long ago leading to evils such as the Emperor, Famine, War and Death. The Goddess herself had taught that the awareness of the Oneness was the start of their liberation. But most were ignorant of the nature of the Oneness and this ignorance limited their understanding of the Lunar Way.

But Old Pelorian changed all this. As a Green Age Language, speaking it drew people closer to the Oneness in that distant age and helped them comprehend the Lunar Truths better.

With the help of JeSeven, an aged grammarian, Old Pelorian was painstakingly reconstructed from the glyphs. New words were created to describe concepts that did not exist in the Green Age yet those same words were chosen with care so they would not disturb the primal harmony of the old language.

New Pelorian was born.

At first, it sounds no different from other Pelorian languages but its refined cadences, its subtle nuances and its elegant syntax all dance upon the able speaker's consciousness to produce a most remarkable enlightenment.

The surviving Lunars, this time filled with hope, went out again to preach the Lunar Way in New Pelorian. Although the listeners spoke many languages, they could understand the Lunars. "How can this be?" they said in astonishment, "Their speech touches all of us as One, even though We are Many". Many, overcome by what they had experienced, went to the Lunars to learn more about the Goddess.

And so because an extinct language was brought back to life, a dying faith rose from its deathbed to cast an invincible evil man down.

But what of the Etyries worshippers now that New Pelorian has superseded their missionary purpose? Like other Lunar religions, the worship of Etyries is more popular than before, although her worshippers are now merchants. With the power of Reaching Unity, they can win the trust of suspicious foreigners and allay the suspicions of locals about the quality of their goods.

In the words of the Goddess, "There is no light without darkness, no summer without winter and no progress without decline."

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An Orlanthi Tale by Tim Ellis

(as originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest June 12, 2003)

An Issaries trader, on his way to the Jonstown market got stopped by a Lunar Soldier who started to question him about who he was what he was doing and where he was going, and in general began to throw his weight around to try to make the trader uncomfortable. Finally the soldier demanded to search the traders cart, and as he was doing that, he kept swatting at some flies that were buzzing around his head.

The trader said, "Having some problem with circle flies there, are ya?"

The soldier paused and said, 'Well yeah, if that's what they are. I never heard of circle flies.'

So the trader says. "Well, circle flies are common on farms. See, they're called circle flies because they're almost always found circling around the back end of a cow."

The Soldier says, "Oh," and goes back to searching the cart. Then after a minute he stops and says, "Hey, wait a minute, are you trying to call me a cow's arse?"

The trader says, "Oh no officer. I have too much respect for the Lunar Empire and it's officials and servants to even think about calling you a cow's arse."

The Soldier says, "Well that's a good thing", and starts to step away from the cart, and the pile of goods he has strewn across the road.

After a long pause the trader says, "Hard to fool them flies though."

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Pamalt's Problem by Sandy Petersen

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest June 06, 1997)

In the Days of the Darkness, Pamalt was still new to the chieftainship. Vangono and Sikkanos chafed under his rule. Vangono said to his followers, "I am better fit to rule than Pamalt. I am mighty. Look at my spear! I can kill the Chaos. I can kill the Dark. I could kill the Bad Man, too, if Pamalt would let me! If we fought, I would easily kill Pamalt. I should be Chief, not he!" And his followers shouted praise to Vangono and clashed spears on shields. Sikkanos grumbled quietly in the darkness and said, "If I were Chief, things would be different. I would sit in the biggest tent in the village, and I would have the best woman. I would make the Old Women listen to me. At the feasts, nobody would be allowed to eat until I had had my pick of the best pieces of meat." [Divvying up the meat is normally the task of the hunter's wife.] And Sikkanos made secret plans in his tent.

Pamalt knew their plots and spoke to his wife Faranar. She said, "You must stay Chief, my husband. If Vangono were Chief all men would fight all the time and nothing would get done. If Sikkanos were Chief, all women would be oppressed and unhappy forever." So Pamalt decided to stay Chief. One by one, he summoned each of Vangono's warriors to his tent. When each warrior stepped within, there was Pamalt in his majesty, wearing the Necklace, sitting by the Old Women and the Old Men. Noruma chanted magic rituals to make the world work. Cronisper prophesied truly. Faranar and Aleshmara spread a feast beyond belief. Pamalt said, "Whom should be chief?" Each awed warrior, ashamed to admit he had listened to Vangono, said, "Thou, O Pamalt." Pamalt then asked each warrior to tie their feather to Pamalt's stool. So did every warrior likewise. Some folk say that if all the warriors had come at once, they would have been braver, but they did not, and so they did not.

Then Pamalt summoned Sikkanos to his tent. Sikkanos blew acrid smoke, and strutted around the tent. HE was not abashed by Pamalt's wealth and power, but instead was made even more envious. Pamalt said nothing at all to Sikkanos. Instead, he asked Faranar, "Should Sikkanos be Chief?" "No, O my husband. You are handsome and tall." [As per typical Doraddi dry humor, a person isn't insulted directly -- instead, another person is praised.]

Pamalt asked Aleshmara if Sikkanos ought to be chief, and she said, "No, O my son. You are kind to my daughter." Pamalt asked Kuangoa, and she said, "No, O my nephew. You are rich and generous." Pamalt asked Sikasso, and she said, "No, O my nephew. You honor your parents." Pamalt asked Yanmorla, and she said, "No, O my nephew. You give much meat to the oases." Pamalt asked Duala, and she said, "No, O my father. I love you." [Duala's comment also has reference to Sikkanos' unrequited love for her -- the subject of other tales.] Pamalt asked Hondori Mal, and she said, "No, O my uncle. You are just and righteous." Pamalt asked Keraun, and she said, "No, O my cousin. You burn smoky fires." Pamalt asked Lokomal, and she said, "No, O my cousin. You do not waste meat." Pamalt asked Nyanka, and she said, "No, O my cousin. Your hands are soft and gentle." Pamalt asked Cronisper, and he said, "No, O my nephew. Your hearth is warm." Pamalt asked Lodril, and he said, "No, O my grandson." Pamalt asked Noruma, and he said, "No, O my nephew. You freed the spirits." Pamalt asked Rasout, and he said, "No, O my uncle. You do not hunt on the sacred days." Pamalt asked Jmijie, and he said, "No, O my cousin. You keep the path-sticks bright." Pamalt asked Bolongo, and he said, "No, O Pamalt." But Pamalt did not let him explain why.

Sikkanos was abashed in front of all the people. for not one said they would prefer Sikkanos to Pamalt. Sikkanos sat down in his place and wept. [EVERYONE has a place in Pamalt's tent. Except maybe Vivisibor.] Sikkanos cried aloud, "I cannot live here any more. Everyone knows my shame. I must leave and go far away and never come back." While Sikkanos was still weeping, Pamalt summoned Vangono to his tent. Vangono came in boldly, flourishing his spear and moa feathers. Pamalt said to Vangono, "Whom do you hate, of all people?" Vangono glared at Sikkanos, and said, "I hate Sikkanos more than all people, for he is without honor." Pamalt said, "Sikkanos is filled with woe, and wishes to leave us forever and forever. I will let him leave if YOU say he should go." And Vangono was glad and danced. Pamalt said, "Vangono, do _you_ wish to be Chief?" And Vangono stopped dancing and stared. Pamalt said, "Look at my stool." He saw that all his warriors' feathers were tied to Pamalt's stool. And Vangono knew. Vangono said, "I have more honor than Sikkanos. I, too, am shamed, yet I too, must go away forever."

[This is a typically sly Doraddi paradox. Sikkanos is embarrassed and wants to leave. Vangono, also embarrassed, only realizes he must leave because if even Sikkanos, the god without honor, is leaving, then obviously he should be at least as honorable.] Pamalt said, "Sikkanos is only to leave if YOU say. Should Sikkanos go?" Vangono looked at Sikkanos for many hours. At nightfall he spoke aloud, "I wish to stay more than I wish Sikkanos to go." So both Sikkanos and Vangono stayed in Pamalt's Necklace, and so Pamalt stayed Chief.

NOTE The people that call Pamalt "nephew", "cousin", or "uncle" are probably not actually related to him.

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A Pamaltelan Encounter by Sandy Petersen

(as originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest April 10, 1995)

(some apologies to C.A. Smith)

The world has many many things in it, more than you think. Think on it, now. [pause] All right. Enough. Too much thinking is harmful to the soul and belly. Some of the world's things are good, and some are bad. One of the things is the Bird of Gifts.

Ah, the name sounds good, does it? You want to meet her, do you? You can, you can. I did. The trouble is, that as with all good things, you must first deal with bad things. The Bird of Gifts nests in the Enmal Mountains, I think, and you must go very far south, in the burned land where the Promalti flare. Maybe even further into the Nargan Desert. I met the Bird very far south indeed. I had walked steadily south, because my heart told me that I must find the Enmal Mountains. I believed that that is where Duala lived. You remember Duala? I loved her awoken and asleep. When she died, the wise men said she was in the Enmal Mountains, and off I went, to find her. I studied and trained for years before I was ready for the travel. I prayed and sacrificed and prepared until I was older, but ready at last to go to Duala.

I walked through Zamokil, where live the Blue people with their polished stone knives and their cruel ways. There I almost fell in love with a Blue woman, but a dream of Duala saved me just in time. I walked past the Careech Caraban, where live the Truld, with their monstrous appetites and their soulless masters. There I almost died, but an early dawn saved me. I walked past the Black Land, where the Promalti rage endlessly, ever-seeking that which they can destroy. There I almost burned, but one of the Original People saved me, and so expiated fourscore years of his eons of selfishness.⁷⁵ Finally I came to an endless waste. Far far away, my eyes saw the purple Enmal Mountains. My journey was not over, but surely I had only days left before I should achieve my purpose. Duala!

⁷⁵ The Doraddi believe that not all the Original People drank water to become mortal and learn to breed. They think that some of them decided to stay immortal, at the cost of love and children. Rarely, one of the Original People is supposedly encountered. Their numbers dwindle over the centuries, as they have no new recruits. The reference here is to a common Doraddi superstition that the remaining Original People are all cursed, and must continually do good deeds in order to make up for past sins.

The night in this land at the edge of the edge of the world is dangerous. There are jackal folk, slime people, sparhogs, and similar foul beings. In the flat bleakness, I saw a flight of rock spinning up into the night, and climbed it, thinking that atop this strange stone formation I could defend myself against the night monsters. Atop the formation was a flat pile of stones, an altar. Atop the altar was a dried bunch of flowers. I was touched, for no flowers surely grew in the lands around for many miles. Someone must have brought the blossoms through tedium and danger to remember this unknown place. I reached within my blanket⁷⁶ and took out a dried redfruit, placing it on the altar with a sprinkle of water, an offering of my own. Then I went to sleep.

At dawn, the flutter of wings awoke me. I saw the Bird of Gifts, for what else could it be? It had come in answer to my offering, though I had made it with no thought of summoning the Bird. The Bird of Gifts was large. Not so great as the biggest Kresh wagons, but not so small as the smallest. Within its feathers were tucked all manner of gadgets and gewgaws, peeping out at me like wanton Blue women, tantalizing and teasing. I spoke with the Bird, and we engaged in the Meeting Contest. The Bird always chooses the Riddle Game, and I did, too. I could only answer one of the bird's riddles, and he answered all three of mine. Then, because he is the Bird of Gifts, he offered me the gift of my choosing. I asked for Duala. The Bird said nothing, did nothing. The Bird asked for another Riddle Game. I was not brave, did not dare question it. We played another Riddle Game and I answered another riddle. Then the bird plucked out a pair of wings and placed them on my back. "These will fly you to Duala", said the Bird.

Ecstatic, I left the Bird, and began to fly. I flew flew to the Enmals. Before I arrived, Old Man Wheelbarrow came walking through the air.⁷⁷ He stopped me and spoke to me. He asked me for a sign, and I knew the sign, from long years spent learning the lores. Old Man Wheelbarrow took me down to the mountaintop.

I did not see Pamalt. I did not see Pamalt's tent. I did not see any gods, unless Old Man Wheelbarrow is a god. I told Old Man Wheelbarrow that I wanted to see Duala, to take her back with me. And he pointed to the Place of Young Girls.

I ran to the Place of Young Girls and there, there was Duala! Other girls teemed everywhere, I vaguely recall, but only Duala was clear. I stood still and stared at her beauty. Her lips, her breasts, her breath, her hair. All was perfect. I stared for a long time. Suddenly the Bird was at my side. "It is time to return your Gift," she said, and the wings were gone. I did not care, but saw only Duala.

And then I saw more clearly. Her eyes did not sparkle, but were merely an ordinary black, with slightly yellowed whites. Her teeth were not even. Her breath smelled slightly of saltweed. One breast was a different shape than the other. Her upper arms had tiny pimples on them. Her legs were not slim, but

⁷⁶ The common Doraddi travel-equipment is a blanket or rug, rolled into a tube, bent into a doughnut shape, tied with leather thongs, and carried diagonally over one's shoulder. Useful belongings are rolled up inside the blanket. Thus, no separate bag, pouch, or knapsack is needed

⁷⁷ Wheelbarrows and other gardening tools are associated with the elderly and retired, in Doraddi Lore, doubtless because of the oasis people. The Doraddi wheelbarrow is built with its single wheel directly underneath the barrow's load, making it easy to lift and maneuver, unlike the Western style, with the wheel at the tip.

merely skinny. Her hips were a trifle bony, and her belly-button stuck out. This was not Duala, but a cheap imitation.

"The Bird of Gifts has deceived me!" I cried. "This cannot be Duala, but is a mandrake or other mockery!"⁷⁸ Then the Bird was at my side. "Ask her." said the Bird, and so I did. "I am that true Duala," the apparition said. "Whom you loved long ago." Her voice was not silvery, but just high-pitched.

I glared at the Bird. "That was not Duala's voice." I told it.

"This is all the Duala I can bring you." it said.

Sick at heart, I wished to go from there. The Bird said, "You have one gift remaining. Shall I take you hence?" I could only signal yes, and the Bird flew me to Jolar in a single night. Here it left me and I live here still.

Before it left, I questioned it. "Why could you not bring me to the real Duala?" The Bird said, "That was truly Duala. She had not changed. Only you had done so. I could bring you to Duala, but I could not bring back the eyes with which you saw her in your youth." So now I live as you see me. Give me a redfruit for the tale, please, sir.

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A Pentan Tale: The Doggy Bag's Tale by Pradal Pierre

(Author's Note: this tale is inspired from an ancient Mongolian story)

-Hey! Little Dung⁷⁹, where are you going?

-Gonna take a ride on the Pasture with Smelly Snake and Rotten Dog.

-Did you forget anything?

-No I didn't. Have got my bow and my quiver is full of arrows!

-And where's your Doggy Bag's Ongo⁸⁰?

-...

-Never go away without your Doggy Bag's, Little Dung! A bow and a full quiver are not too bad but bones are better against Sons of Kanvak⁸¹!

⁷⁸ The mandrake plant is known in Pamaltela. Reputedly, witches can use its root to manufacture artificial humans, among other uses.

⁷⁹ Little Dung: Pentans traditionally named their children with ridiculous and/or disgusting surnames to protect them from Evil Spirits.

⁸⁰ Ongo: a Shamanic Fetish protecting his/her owner. The Doggy Bag's Ongo description: a small horse leather bag in which the shaman puts some spirit enchanted horse bones.

-Why ? Smelly Snake and Rotten Dog always make fun of my Doggy Bag's Ongo!

-Well... Come on, Little Dung. Sit down. Close your eyes and prick up your ears. Wisely listen to my story! 'Cause this story is a tale of our Bone⁸²!

A long time ago, there was one of Kanvak's Sons named Grummml, living in the Darkness Mountains⁸³. Always starved, always hunting, always harassing our Darkhat⁸⁴... Always hungry and never tired... Grummml was a terrible and powerful Dozaki! And as all his brothers this Son of Kanvak was hunting Sons of Kargzant !

And finally, one day, he did not find anymore Men, so he hunted Little Dungs like you.

And finally, one day, he did not find anymore Little Dungs, so he hunted Yellow Dogs⁸⁵.

And finally, one day, he did not find anymore Yellow Dogs, so he ate Grass like a cow.(Spit!)

-Like a cow?! Burk !(Spit!)

-Shut up! He ate so much grass that finally our clan moved from the place. And finally one day, there was no longer grass left. So, Ungry Grummml started eating earth. He dug a hole and one day, he suddenly stopped digging this hole 'cause in the bottom of this hole he found a Big Nose⁸⁶ bone!

"Grummml!", he said before getting out of the hole.

He picked up the bone and looked around.

"Time to hide both my bone and I", he thought.

Near the hole there was a tumultuous river in the middle of which stood a small island.

"Grummml! Gonna make a good Shelter", he thought before going on the border of the raging stream.

"Grummml!", he thought again, "Don't want to wet my bone and I"

So, he took a look around and noticed a crushed tree laying down across the river.

So, he decided to go on across the tree.

As Grummml crossed the river with the Big Nose's Bone in his mouth, he looked down the water. Then, he suddenly stopped! Why? 'Cause he saw his own reflection in the water!

⁸¹ Sons of Kanvak: Dozaki, Uz, Dijijelm.

⁸² Bone: Family and by extension clan or tribe. "Be from the same Bone" is a typical Pentan expression meaning: "Share the same Blood". In other words, Pentans say: Boneline instead of Bloodline.

⁸³ Darkness Mountains: the mountains near Hellpit (Dozaki Realm).

⁸⁴ Darkhat: Extended family.

⁸⁵ Yellow Dog: Pent's small wild dog.

⁸⁶ Big Nose: Mammoth.

"Grummml!", he thought again, "there is another one... like me...Kanvak! He's carrying a bone too! Grummml! His bone is bigger than mine!"

After a moment of intense reflection, he thought: "Grummml! I'm going to crush this other Grummml and catch his bone!"

So Grummml jumped off the tree into the water, loosing his bone while screaming "GRUMMML!" and splashed around searching the other Dozaki

but never found him.

Furious, Grummml tried to reach the shore, but he failed and drowned himself.

Well, do you understand now why you always have to take your Doggy Bag's Ongo ? If a Karvan's Son tries to catch you, then simply throw away your Doggy Bag to the Dozaki and he will stop in order to eat the bones hidden in the bag. If there are more than one Darkness Demon, it works better 'cause they are so stupid that they will fight each other to catch the Doggy Bag ! Do you understand ?

-Yes, Mother.

-All right! So, take your Ongo and be proud to have such a good protection.

-Yes, Mother.

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The Reluctant Bride by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest November 28, 1994)

There was once a young woman of Wilara's Grove betrothed to a man of Red Apple. And on a sunny Fireday of Harmonyweek, the woman left her parents and went into the bridal cart. She and her parents travelled down the Red Road to join her new husband at his new cottage. The gifts were exchanged, the ceremony performed, and the new couple danced together and around their new hearth. At last, they were blessed by Imthus and Aidea and entered into the new cottage.

That night, the husband joined his bride in their bed, but she said to him, "It is not right that we do this tonight for we are both very tired and everything would be better if we were well rested." The husband considered this and agreed that they should wait until they were both rested.

The next morning, the husband joined his bride in their bed, but she said to him, "It is not right that we do this in the morning in Yelem's light, for surely he would judge us harshly if we did anything wrong." The husband considered this and agreed that they should wait until Yelem was gone from the sky.

That night, the husband joined his bride in their bed, but she said to him, "It is not right that we do this now, for I have been touched by Khalana and am purifying myself. Surely we should wait until Khalana

has cleansed me." The husband considered this, and though disappointed, agreed that they should wait until she was cleansed.

The next week, the husband joined his bride in their bed, but she said to him, "It is not right that we do this now, for it is Deathweek of Stormseason and surely any child born from such union would be cursed." The husband considered this, and though upset, agreed that they should wait until the following week.

The next week, the husband joined his bride in their bed, but she said to him, "It is not right that we do this now for this is a week of ceremonies and I must not be tired lest I endanger the rituals."

The husband stood up and said, "This is the fifth time you have refused me. You are like unto Orlantio, the fickle wind, who always wants to do as he will without consideration of others. You are like the apple at the top of the tree which looks delicious but can't be reached. Since you are like Orlantio, I will throw you afieled and give you to him, for you are surely not a bride to me."

And so the husband picked his bride up from the bed and took out her hair braid and cast her out of the house.

"Let the wind and the world know," said the husband after her, "that a child was produced from our union."

Note: In Imther, women wear hair braids, children do not. The husband's pulling out her hair braid signifies that she has been cast out as a child instead of as a woman. Further, Orlantio is considered a child in many respects and so is trickery. The woman's actions, by being compared to those of Orlantio, are considered childish.

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Rordyvor's Quills by Bryan Thexton

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest October 15, 2004)

Rordyvor three times thrice glorious was unsurpassed in his love for Yelm.

His first glory was his feathers. The outer feathers on his wings were of silver, the first rank of feathers projecting out the back of his wing were of gold, and his pin-feathers were of gleaming bronze. The feathers of his tail were tipped with rubies.

His second glory was how he would catch Yelm's ray and reflect them off of his wings and refract them through the jewels on his tail. He spent the good five ninths of each day on a high perch, creating glorious patterns of Yelm's benevolent glow.

His third glory was that he did all of this for the love of Yelm. His feathers were too heavy to let him fly, but he was willing to give this up to better bring attention to Yelm's glory. His work playing with the light was demanding, but with his mighty legs he made it look like dance.

For these first three glories alone we would remember fondly in our nest stories.

Rordyvor three times thrice glorious maintained his routine even when he saw disturbing portents. He knew what was to come, but met it with dignity and grace. Men of the east had grown arrogant and prideful, and taught that Yelm could be bargained with. They came through Rordyvor's nesting ground, and knocked him down from his high perch, and stole his golden feathers. Men of the west had become arrogant and prideful, and taught that Yelm's gifts could be taken and bought and sold. They came and snapped the rubies off of his tail feathers. Men of the south had grown prideful and arrogant, and taught that everybody could make their own law. They came and took his feathers of silver.

After this Rordyvor called to his followers, who crept forth from where they had hidden. "Why did you not help me when the men of the east took my golden feathers?" "Because my lord they came armed with long sticks, and would have stabbed us." "Why did you not help me when the men of the west came and took my ruby feather-tips?" "Because my lord they came armed with clubs and would have beaten us" "Why did you not help me when the men of the south came and took my silver feathers?" "Because my lord, they came armed with rocks, and would have stoned us."

Rordyvor sent them away, saying "Even the plump grouse will defend her nest against the sly fox. Begone cowards, but if you meet men of bravery send them to me. Most of his servants fled at that, but his choreographer Varmanor stayed saying "Lord, I erred, for I tried to think of the right choreography to stop them, but knew not the correct skills so hid. But upon my nest I will not lack courage again. Please let me stay and teach me what I must do." Then his most junior harpist, Durendalu, also stepped forward, saying "Lord, when the men of the east came I tried to play harsh music to drive them away, but they tore away half my harp and all but one of the string. Upon my nest I would defend you, if you would but teach me how."

Then Rordyvor said "Varmanor, I believe you, and will give you a new thing to choreograph. But pluck you now my pin feathers." Varmanor wept to do this, but did as instructed. He pulled them out, those along most of the wing with a shaft near his own height and broad brazen feather as long as his head. Those from near the wing tip had a shaft as long as his arm, with narrow feathers as long as his finger. Rordyvor said "Seize the shaft of the longer feathers, and when next men with sharp sticks approach, strike them and stab them with the sharp brazen feather, and choreograph your soldiers to do the same. Next seize the shaft of the short feather, and when next men with clubs approach, fling it at them to strike them down twice nine paces away, and choreograph your soldiers to do the same."

Then Rordyvor said "Durendalu for your bravery I shall show you how to use a new tool. Pluck you now my tail feathers." Durendalu wept to do this, but did as instructed. Each feather had a shaft as long as his forearm, with a finger's length of feather left along the shaft at one end, but not tapered to a point. Rordyvor said "Take the feather end and put it against the last string of your half-harp. When next men armed with stones appear, do you and the other soldiers armed likewise pull back on the string, then release it, flinging the point of the shaft into the stone armed from thrice nine paces away."

These were the next three of Rordyvor's glories, the broad bladed spears, the piercing javelins, and the long-shooting arrows that could be used to protect the nests ever since.

Then came Vaskaru the Falcon and his followers, driving before them the rest of Rordyvor's craven servants. Vaskaru said "Oh gloried Rordyvor, your craven servants told us of the indignities done to you." The Vaskaru saw Durendalu and Varmanor with some of Rordyvor's quill, and prepared to attack them.

Rordyvor intervened say "Nay, fierce Vaskaru, these are the start of my new army, and they shall show you how to use my quills to strike down the evil men who toppled me and who have turned from Yelm's true path. Varmanor will choreograph my new army, and Durendalu will be his first and most loyal soldier. But because you have never trembled or avoided danger, and were ready to instantly strike in my defense, I will make you and your men the striking arm of our new army.

Rordyvor then spoke of the evil portents he had seen, and instructed Durendalu and Varmanor in the making of new nests on high ground, with strong sides that would not easily be scaled.

Turning to his more craven servants, Rordyvor intoned "No more shall you soar near unto Yelm, instead you will serve those braver than yourselves, and learn to be fierce from them. Exerting his glorious will, he stripped their wings of their pin-feathers, like his were, and strengthened their legs, like his were, and gave them strength, like his. Indeed when he was done they looked not much different from him. Then did he bid Vaskaru's follower's mount on his transformed servants, assuring them that they would make fleet and loyal steeds. They did as he said, then with Vaskaru leading from Rordyvor's own back, they quickly went forth, tracking down the evil men from the east, the evil men from the west, and the evil men from the south, striking down a great many of them.

These were the last three of Rordyvor's glories, the creation of the infantry, the creation of strong nests, and the creation of the avilry.

When the great flood came and the evil men sought high spots to avoid it, the avilry slowed them, giving the people time to retreat into the high nests that had been prepared. When the evil men sought to storm those nests, Durendalu and Varmanor were ready, with others they had trained, and used Rordyvor's quills, and copies of them, to drive the evil men away to perish under the waves.

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Serve the World Machine. The World Machine is your Friend by Soren Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest in 1999).

The young dwarf peered cautiously out of the cave entrance. His first trip to the Outside and he marvelled at the sights. His weak eyes made out the blue sky, the yellow orb high above and a myriad of green. So many shades of green! His senses reeling, he staggered backwards, only to be pushed forward again by the dwarf behind him.

"Come on, you dullard", the older dwarf said. "Get a move on, we haven't got all daycycle. We've blown the horn, now just get out there and stand around for a bit".

The young dwarf nodded nervously and took a few steps forward. Squinting in the glare of the sun, he concentrated on his motion sense but quickly numbed it again as a multitude of different air currents and pressure variations assaulted him. He looked back at the cave entrance and saw the other dwarfs huddling inside, their weapons armed and ready.

"Move it, Ral!", yelled Bok, the team leader, "or the Council will hear of your reluctance".

Ral sighed and gripped his crossbow tightly. His iron armour clanking, he walked straight ahead until he was about 25 rods away from the cave. "That's far enough", came the shout from the cave, "now just stand there and wait. Think you can manage that?". The voice was thick with irony.

Ral muttered a horrible blasphemy under his breath and nodded. Realising that the others were too far away to see that, he shouted back "Yes sir, Mr. Team Leader, sir. I hear and obey". If possible, his voice was even thicker with sarcasm.

He looked back at the cave, but it was now a blur, almost lost in the green. He tried his motion sense again but was once more quickly forced to shut it down. Useless, quite useless.

He could hear the wind rustling in the big green things ("Trees", Vilmak had called them) and the chirping of the "birds" (some sort of relative of the cave bat, but with feathers, he recalled from the briefing). The Outsiders ate them, he had heard. Ral shuddered slightly, imagining his mouth full of burnt feathers and crunchy bones. He dipped into a pocket and fished out a Red, which he quickly swallowed. Then he stood still and waited...

His internal clock had only reached 309.2 beats when he saw motion to the left of him. Fighting to keep calm, he slowly turned to face the creature approaching him. Almost two rods in height and hideously thin and gangly, it slowly moved towards him. As it came closer, Ral could make out more details: the beardless face, the primitive clothes and weapons, the strange runes tattooed all over its body - and worst of all, the stench!

The creature stopped some distance away and gave the Red Moon sign of Peace and Trade. Ral kept one hand on the trigger of his crossbow and slowly returned the sign. A human, he guessed. Too bulky to be an Aldryami and too small for a troll.

The human said something to Ral. Pure gibberish, it sounded like gravel caught in heavy gear works. Fighting down the urge to put the thing out of its misery, Ral grinned and nodded. "You are one ugly beast. I should use your head to decorate my cubicle", he replied.

He glanced back towards the cave and could make out the other dwarfs slowly emerging, the sun glinting in their armour as they approached. In the back (as usual) came the squat outline of Bok, his face hidden by the scowling face mask all Iron dwarfs of this region affected.

Ral looked back at the human and saw it staring nervously at the group of dwarfs. "It is more afraid than I am", he thought. The human gave the peace sign again, this time directed to the other dwarfs. Ral noticed how its hand was shaking and his confidence rose. "This is going to be easy" he thought. "One small mission and my record will be cleared again".

The dwarfs spread out and formed a loose circle around Ral and the human. Bok waddled forward, one hand resting loosely on the gleaming pistol in his belt. He nodded curtly towards Ral and motioned him away. Ral nodded in acknowledgement and moved to his position in the circle of watchful dwarfs.

He could hear Bok talking to the human behind him. Obviously the old dwarf had met humans before because he seemed to know their guttural tongue. It didn't sound like Tradetalk to Ral, but then again, he was no linguist.

The talking went on for a long time. There was quite a lot of repeating of words and pantomiming. Ral looked to his right and saw Vilmak crouched down in the green, his rifle cocked and ready. The old veteran looked at ease as he scanned the surrounding scenery for unseen enemies. He noticed Ral looking at him and flashed him a gap-toothed grin and a 'thumbs up'.

That's when it all went horribly wrong...

There was a shout from the trees and suddenly the sky was swarming with arrows and sling stones. As he dived for cover, Ral could feel the slight telltale vibrations in the air that signalled spell use. He felt an arrow bounce off his shoulder plate and another embedded itself in the ground, only inches from his nose. Squinting desperately at the forest, he tried to make out the shapes in the distance. He aimed his crossbow at what he hoped was a human and squeezed the trigger. The bolt sped towards its target, humming madly with poison and magic. Ral heard a shout of pain and grinned as he cocked the crossbow again. Another arrow glanced off his armour and a sling stone made his head ring as it hit his helmet.

The other dwarfs were prone on the ground, pointing their guns at distant figures amongst the trees. "Why don't they shoot?", Ral wondered. He saw Fen shaking the Burner and working the lever without result.

Ral looked behind him and saw Bok standing over the bloody corpse of the human, his spiky fist dripping blood. An arrow had somehow penetrated Bok's defences and stuck out at a crazy angle from his helmet. The iron dwarf took a Mk III cluster grenade from his belt and hurled it towards the trees. Ral counted the 2.5 beats before it should have exploded, but nothing happened! A dud!

"Back to the complex!", came the shout from Bok. "Orderly retreat. Move it!".

Ral fired his crossbow in the general direction of the trees and stood up. Suddenly he felt like someone had punched him hard in the stomach. He looked down at the three arrows imbedded in his belly, two of them already fading away, leaving only the original. He touched it gingerly. "A multissile?", he thought groggily, "How primitive". And then darkness enveloped him.

The shock of the icy cold water flung in his face woke Ral up in an instant. He looked wildly around him. His arms and legs were tied down somehow and he could make out a circle of humans standing around him. One of them stood with a dripping bucket and was grinning evilly down at him. Ral tried to get up and felt a bolt of pain surging through him. His stomach felt as if it was on fire and his arms and legs were bleeding from where the SLI armour connectors had been torn off.

"Can you understand me, little one?", the one with the bucket said. It was speaking passable Tradetalk. Ral tried to clear his head and nodded slowly.

"Good", the human said, "what are you called?". It was a nasty-looking specimen, thought Ral, its greasy hair washed with lime, blue whorls adorning its lanky body and a stench that would offend a cave troll a key mile away. It was wearing a gold torc of decidedly inferior workmanship around its grimy neck.

Remembering the instructions from his briefing, Ral gave only his designation and number: "I am Mostali bronze worker, 3rd level maintenance technician, ident RL-271064-0631-RM". He gave an experimental tug on his restraints but they seemed solid.

His reply seemed to amuse the human. "Greetings, Mostali bronze worker. I am Corvic, chieftain of this tribe. We thought you dead as well, but it seems your God smiles at you."

"Where are my companions? Let me go at once or you'll soon regret it!" Ral's voice was taut with anger. "The entire Complex will come down on you like a thousand weight of bricks!"

"They are all dead, little one". Corvic smiled an odd smile. Ral had trouble reading the expression on the long human face. He supposed this one was a male. Most humans had male leaders, he had heard. "And I am sure your friends believe you to be dead too", Corvic continued.

Dead? Ral was stunned. Eight dwarfs, most of them hardened iron class soldiers, led by old Bok himself - dead? They had been carrying the latest in weapons and armour. Only Ral and Hadi, being lower level bronze class, carried crossbows. The others had used rifles and pistols. He shook his head in denial.

Corvic saw this and silently pointed to his right. Ral looked and saw to his horror a pile of small bodies, heaped on top of each other. Despite the terrible wounds, it was clear that they were dwarfs. Their armour and weapons were neatly stacked next to the dead bodies. Ral could feel the bile rising in his throat and he closed his eyes in sorrow.

"Look at me, dwarf!" Corvic had grabbed Ral's beard and turned his head around to face him again.

"Look at me! Ral snarled and spat at the human. Corvic roared with anger and took a step back. He drew a sword from his scabbard and kissed the blade before raising it high above his head. Ral prepared to finally meet his Maker.

Just then a harsh voice rang out, the words unintelligible to Ral. Corvic faltered and looked at the old human who had spoken. This one was bearded, Ral noted. The man was carrying a gnarled staff and wearing a faded grey robe.

Corvic turned to face the old man, his knuckles white from gripping the sword. A heated discussion ensued. Ral tried to follow it, but a fresh wave of pain washed over him and he blacked out.

As he woke again, Ral could feel that he was sitting down. He opened his eyes and looked blearily around. He was now inside a small wooden building, obviously built for human occupation. He found himself sitting in a chair, his hands tied together behind him but his feet freed from their bonds. He was wearing some sort of off white tunic and the pain in his belly and limbs had lessened somewhat. Before him was a large table and sitting behind it, the old bearded man, watching him intently.

"So you're finally awake. How are you feeling? The old man spoke good Tradetalk, his voice deep and not unkind.

Ral shook his head to clear it. How he could use a Blue! "I've been better", he replied. "Who are you?

"I am Tolwin, Lawspeaker of Lhankor Mhy", the old man said. Ral had heard of this God in Outsider Mythology class. Somehow related to hoary Mostal, and holder of the Law rune as well. Could be worse.

"My thanks for stopping that madman," Ral said. "You should flee, before the Gobblers come and devour you all".

"I don't think we need to fear your Gobblers", replied Tolwin. "You really don't understand what happened, do you?

Ral shook his head slowly. The old man stroked his beard and looked searchingly at Ral.

"Maybe it's for the best that you remain ignorant then. I have persuaded Corvic to offer you Hospitality. He cannot harm you now".

"What is going on? Tell me! Ral felt totally bewildered.

"You cannot go back to your home, young dwarf." Tolwin said after a long pause. "They want nothing to do with you or the others. For removing you, we get to keep your valuable iron armour and weapons. A very profitable deal, despite our losses"

"Wha.... but the Council?", stuttered Ral. "What are you saying?".

"The Council are the ones who sent you out here, remember?". The old man rose from his seat. "I suggest you leave here. There are others of your kind... outcasts, not too far from here."

Ral's head was buzzing with this information. He had heard that some of the dwarfs in the team had trouble with minor infractions or suspicion of independent thought. A deep anger began to burn within him. Those old fools in the Council. This was something they could come up with, all right. Take a group of troublemakers, send them on some bogus mission and let someone else kill them. The Council keep their noses clean and the Complex is pure once again. Ral was sure that his name had already been added to the Wall of Honourable but Very Dead Heroes.

He looked up at Tolwin. "Tell me where to go", he said. The Council had not heard the last of this!

The Seven Mothers and the Mostali by Alison Place

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 23, 1995)

(Editor's Note: I'm not entirely certain what Alison wanted this called. Seven Mothers and Mostali was the original subject line).

To Felicitus Harmonius, Archpriest and Holder of the Eye of Knowledge of Irrippi Ontor in the Holy City of Glamour, his humble servant Mirca Morsus, Head Priest of the New Pavis Temple, sends greetings.

My dear and honoured friend, I am afraid that I have grave news to impart. I am afraid that something has happened in this benighted place that I scarcely have words to describe. Having no other to whom to appeal for guidance, I have taken the liberty of prevailing upon the acquaintance of our old days in the novitiate together, and gathered the facts together as I could to put them in your benevolent hands. I pray that some officious underling does not intercept this missive, and gossip its contents about the halls. Perhaps you might check that your secretary is sufficiently discreet?

To continue, this problem (if it may be so lightly termed) came about due to a new novice by the name of Jorson Ingilli. The Ingillies, by the way, are a relatively important local family, due to their control of the human part of the river trade. Most of the other major worshippers are transient bachelor newtlings, and sentient fish. Jorson was studying to be a member of the attached Temple of Lhankor Mhy, that forebear of our own glorious god, whose worship is still allowed in these newly-conquered parts. Attracted by the greater knowledge of Irrippi Ontor, she transferred to our temple. A bright and talented scribe already, we rejoiced that such a worthy initiate had joined our ranks, and rapidly (after all due caution, I assure you!) initiated her.

However, while on a mission into the closed stacks that we shared with the aforementioned temple, she found a scroll lying next to the one which she had been instructed to bring to her mentor, and "borrowed" it. The first that I knew of this was certain disturbing questions that came from her during our next examination of her progress in the cult history. Next she produced an abominable scroll, of which I have included a fair copy in my own hand.

To say that I was flabbergasted at the contents is hardly to be wondered! However, my first act was to confiscate the scroll as not being suitable to the possession of a novice, and my second to conduct my own tests and investigations. The gist of these are that it is quite possible that the materials are genuine. The parchment is definitely pre-Zero Wane, and just barely so. My Date Parchment spell is quite reliable, though as you know quite difficult to do, and requiring expensive ingredients. The script looks right, an excellent late example of pre-Imperial minuscule bookhand (note the elision of the s-t combinations, for example). As far as I can determine through the full range of spells that I can cast, this is also the only writing ever used on this parchment. It is not a palimpsest.

Although it must be a forgery, it is one done with care and skill, by someone who knows their palaeography inside out. Beyond Jorson, that's certain. Also, I would swear, beyond any of the local LM priests, none of whom have the knowledge of scripts and letter forms of that stage of Peloria's history.

Jorson, curse her eyes and all that they have seen, abruptly left the temple shortly after to visit an ailing relative, according to the priestess of the initiates. She has not come back since. Indeed, she has since gone back to the LM temple, claiming that Irrippi Ontor and the Red Goddess herself are pawns of the Mostali. She took with her a copy of the scroll, (thankfully not the original, which I still have in my possession), and copies of this abortion have since started circulating in the LM temple, not to mention among some of the Pavisite population. We have followed the usual path of denouncing it as obviously fabricated anti-Lunar propaganda, but the mob is so delighted at the idea that we didn't even know that one of our gods is a goddess that it has been even less convincing than usual.

I have also started a search of the stacks, to find out if there are any other similar manuscripts. This one appears to have been a draft, judging by the number of phrases scratched out. I have deleted these in my copy, for the sake of clarity.

May the Light of the Red Goddess show all seekers the path of Truth!

Great and mighty are the ways of the World Machine. May It be Perfected before I Die! ⁸⁷

To the Diamond Dwarf of Dwarf Run, ⁸⁸

I have found the agent which you desire. There is a Priestess of Lhankor Mhy in the city of Nochet who should answer to your needs. Although she has the usual habit of this group of wearing a false beard when female (and actually insists that she was meant to be a man and to address her as such), she is otherwise fairly stable. She is extremely powerful, very well trained in the arts of ritual and summoning, and deeply interested in the history of the Godtime, Heroquesting and the Broken Council. Her knowledge of these is considered to be well beyond anyone else's now living. She is also vain, arrogant and cannot be bothered to interpret the motivations of others, so long as their objects accord with her own. In short, she is a typical priest of Lhankor Mhy.

In conversation with her, I suggested that the reason that the Broken Council failed was that they were not headed by a person of the detached and pure interest in the truth as a priest of Lhankor Mhy. This flattery she agreed with immediately. In an intellectual spirit of inquiry, I also asked that were an ancient deity to be brought back, what would be needed to perform this ritual? Although rather attached to the Lightbringer's Quest (unavoidable; she is Lhankor Mhy) as an example, her choice of potential collaborators was novel. It combines elements of the Lightbringers' Quest with others from sacrificial and shamanic rituals, and safety elements that protect some of the ritualists, while placing most of the risk on others. No guesses needed as to whom shall be protected.

⁸⁷ A standard salutation between dwarves of some cults.

⁸⁸ My best interpretation of this line. It is unfortunately rather smudged.

Her interest is now piqued to the point that she is sincerely willing to undertake the rigours of the search for other participants (though I intend to exert as much influence as necessary in this), as well as the final framing of the ritual itself. She has accepted the ancient moon goddess (as she calls it) as a fitting recipient of her resurrection ceremony. This, she feels, will immortalise her reputation beyond any doubt, and leave a lasting memorial in the heavens to her abilities.

Do not worry that she suspects my motives in this. She is convinced that at best I merely sparked a latent project of her own into active planning. Her talk of gods and goddesses was tedious in the extreme. However, I am confident that her work, laden with peculiar symbolism though it may be, will reassemble one of the major destroyed components of the World Machine.

It is regrettable that our reduced state in the world today makes it impossible to consider this project in addition to the sorry load that we already have to bear. It goes hard to let a project of this magnitude stay in the hands of those who do not fully understand their place in the world. Nevertheless, they are also cogs in the World Machine, and should take their turn in its correct reassembly. The guidance of the Mostali should be sufficient to keep their work within tolerances. It is to be hoped that the characters of the summoners do not taint the purity of their actions.

I agree with you now wholeheartedly. It is obvious that it is time for the Moon to rise again, since the World Machine itself provides us with the tools to complete this necessary task.

I shall send further word when Irrippi Ontor has more to tell me concerning suitable collaborators. I do not intend to let her complete that without my aid and supervision.

Weran⁸⁹

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Shang-Hsa May-His-Name-Be-Cursed by Sandy Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest February 05, 1995)

I do not know who came before Shang-Hsa. There may well have been a number of emperors between Vayobi and Shang-Hsa.

When Shang-Hsa took office, he proclaimed, "All mankind is unhappy and wrought with cares. All mankind is beset with toil, poverty, sorrow, death. These are the Four Pains of life.

"The poor toil to please the rich. The rich toil to avoid having to toil.

⁸⁹ . Although a dwarvish name, the author may also be human. Some humans have accepted the Mostali philosophy. Another point in favour of this interpretation is that the letter itself is written in New Pelorian, c. 1160-1185 S.T. Certainly a human agent would be much less obvious in most areas of Peloria and Esrolia.

"The poor wish they had more, so they dwell in poverty. The rich can always see a richer, so they, too, dwell in poverty.

"The poor are sorrowful, because they have naught. The rich are sorrowful, because they fear losing what they have.

"The poor grieve for the death of those they love. The rich are no different.

"I alone know how to save all mankind from the Four Pains and now can enact this power. Always we have rejected and despised the temptations of the Flesh⁹⁰ and of Darkness⁹¹. And all previous emperors were right to do so, for the Flesh and Darkness are bad, singly. But I have seen beyond the Two Threats, and know how they can be merged into a harmonious whole. Consider the Four Pains.

The beasts do not toil, because they seek only pleasure. The ignorant do not strive to please others, because they do not know that harm will come of their idleness. Thus, they are happy.

"The beasts see only what they have. The ignorant do not lust for more, because they know not it can exist. Thus, they are happy.

"The beasts simply use what is at hand, seeking no more. The ignorant need nothing more, because they have all they can possibly use anyway.⁹² Thus, they are happy.

"The beasts do not grieve for the death of loved ones, because they forget them at once. The ignorant do not fear their own death, for they do not know it will happen. Thus, they are happy."

After this famous speech, Shang-Hsa began his program. First, he burned the books. This enabled all mankind to move a vast step towards ignorance and lack of knowledge. Then he slew the rulers of the people⁹³, for they led the common folk in the paths of wisdom. Then he destroyed all the calendars, lest folk use them to look ahead.

Yet was Shang-Hsa discontent. The land was unhappy. Famine and plague ravaged it. The armies of Ignorance and the beasts invaded and were not driven back.⁹⁴ He realized that the Two Sins were

⁹⁰ The Hsunchen, also referred to as the Beasts

⁹¹ The Kol, of course, at this time still troll-controlled.

⁹² The implication is that a man from the Kol could not use, say, a plow, because it requires skill and wisdom to do so. So he is happy with his little gardening trowel, laboring away on his skimpy crop.

⁹³ Presumably whatever the First Age had as equivalents for Mandarins or Exarchs.

⁹⁴ This is widely recorded as having greatly upset Shang-Hsa. He had believed that by emulating the Beasts and Ignorance, he would reach harmonious balance with them, and they might even join his happy empire as a first step towards blanketing the world. It was nearly as great a betrayal as Shang-Hsa's attempt to eliminate crime by providing wrongdoers with a government stipend.

insufficient for happiness, and that he would need to uncover a Third Sin, like unto the beasts and ignorance. So he meditated, and commanded all the world⁹⁵ to pray with him.

At the Sunstop, his prayer was answered. He was enlightened, and Passed On.

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The Sleep of Nealda by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Daily July 26, 1994)

(There are a number of different versions about the long sleep of Nealda. This version is common to the Southlands of Imther, particularly amongst the Argon, Mallust, Mastine, and Valusi marls.)

When Nealda was taken by Orlantio, Orlantio thought to have his way with the goddess for he desired her greatly. But Nealda was a mystery to Orlantio and he could not enter her. So Orlantio traded Nealda to his brother Orak, the Hell Wind, who also desired the goddess, for a pair of sandals which could always hide his movements in the dark.

Orak carried Nealda down into the depths of the world for Orak thought to have his way with the goddess, though he desired to do so in secret. When Orak reached the deep hell, he placed Nealda upon a bed of darkness and tried to take her, but she was a mystery to Orak and he could not enter her.

Orak was enraged by this treachery and he cried, 'You have tricked me foul goddess! But I will not be deterred. You shall lay here until I can find the secret to enter you.' Orak stormed off to find the answer to this riddle.

At first Nealda cried for she was alone upon this bed of darkness and far from her true love Khelmal. Gradually, though, her tears grew less and less frequent and she grew drowsy and fell asleep. It was a deep sleep, a sleep within the dark places of the world, for she was close to the Land of Dreams.

Orak returned once and could not wake her. So he tried to take her while she slept, but she remained a mystery to him and he left again in a rage. 'First she keeps me from entering her,' he shouted, 'and now she will not even answer my call. She will pay for this treachery.'

But Nealda kept sleeping and the darkness grew around her until she was completely hidden from the world and only Orak knew her whereabouts. Orak meanwhile continued to search for a way to enter her. He went to his brother Valind and asked him if he knew how to do so. 'Ah, brother, you must freeze her to the bone so she is hard and brittle and then you must break the shell from her. That is how you can enter her.'

Orak borrowed Valind's Chilling Cloak and returned to the sleeping Nealda. He draped the cloak over her unmoving body and waited. When the body was cold enough, he took his great club and hammered her until she broke into many pieces. But he could not find a way to enter her and her spirit slept on.

⁹⁵ i.e., Kralorela.

(Note: some versions say that Orak's seed froze, too, when trying to enter her and grew to form the Ice Maidens.)

He returned to Valind in a fury. 'This cloak of yours was useless. Once broken there was nothing left to enter!'

'Well it always worked for me.' Valind replied coldly. 'I have tasks to attend to, so go bother someone else.'

Orak left and continued to search for a way to enter Nealda. He found Lodrem, the deep fire walking through the depths of hell. Though the two had often fought, Orak made a sign for peace. Orak asked Lodril if he knew how to put Nealda back together and how to enter her. 'Ah, dark-visaged foe of mine, you must melt her to the bone so she is hot and supple. Then you must mix her back together. Finally, when she is restored, you must merge yourself with her. That is how you can enter her.'

Orak borrowed Lodrem's Burning Mantle and returned to the sleeping and broken Nealda. He draped the mantle over her broken body and waited. When the body was hot enough, he molded her together into one piece. He then lay next to her and tried to merge himself to her. But she was far too hot and Orak was badly burned and scarred. And he could not find a way to enter her. Nealda's spirit slept on.

(Note: some versions say that Orak's seed boiled and grew to form the Blood Queen Balurga.)

He returned to Lodrem in a fury, howling in pain from his scars. 'This mantle of yours was useless. Once molded there was no place to enter! And look at me--I am horrible now to behold!'

'Well it always worked for me.' Lodrem replied hotly. 'I have tasks to attend to so go bother someone else.'

Orak was obsessed about entering Nealda. He scoured the world high and low, his hellish winds driving all away. He searched the tormented seas and the pits of evil to find a way. He searched through the ghostly tomes and to the gate to the void. But he could find no way to enter her. Finally, he came to the place where Khelmal, his eternal foe, walked. 'Hold foe for I come to make you an offer.'

Khelmal did not trust Orak (and rightly so for Orak certainly planned to renege on his offer), but he bid him speak for he desired to recover his love, Nealda.

Orak said haughtily, 'I will return your Nealda to you, but only after you tell me how to enter her.'

Khelmal considered this for awhile and then agreed. 'There are five tasks you must perform to do this. But only if you can perform these tasks can you enter her Do you wish to perform these tasks?'

'I do!' Orak hastily answered for he was always impatient.

'Very well. First, you must build a fire pit, a home for the goddess Ralaska.'

'Why should I do so?' Orak asked suspiciously since this hardly sounded necessary to enter Nealda.

'Because it creates the marriage bed,' answered Khelmal.

Orak nodded and agreed. He set to making the fire pit, digging a fine large hole, placing flagstones at the bottom, setting stones to hold back the dirt, and finally placing a heated coal from the underearth within the pit. The hearth blazed merrily away.

'Very good,' said Khelmal. 'Now, for your second task, you must build a fine stone building with four stout walls and a roof of slate around this fire pit.'

'Why should I do so?' Orak asked, wondering of what use a building could be.

'Because Nealda is bashful and cannot be entered in view of everyone,' responded Khelmal.

Orak nodded and agreed. He gathered fine stone and dark slate for the building, making the walls high and square, setting the slate on top, and leaving an opening to go in and out. The building grew warm and cozy around the hearth protected from the fierce winds that followed Orak.

'Very good,' said Khelmal. 'Now, for your third task, you must fetch the Finenosed Hound and place it at the entrance to the building.'

'Why should I do so?' Orak asked for the Finenosed Hound was a demonic animal of fierce temperament who could always find his foes.

'Because you must have a fierce animal to guard the entrance so you and Nealda are not interrupted,' said Khelmal in reply.

Orak nodded and agreed. He gathered up his snares and weapons and a blackened sack and sought the Finenosed Hound.

He found the beast at the Last Blood Pool and after a long, terrible fight, Orak stuffed the hound into the sack and returned it to the building. The building was now well guarded from harm and intruders.

'Very good,' said Khelmal. 'Now, for your fourth task, you must bring Nealda here to this building beside this fire pit, for only in this building can she be entered.'

Orak did not question this for it seemed to be required. He descended into the darkest hell, past the Land of Dreams, to the bed where Nealda lay inert and sleeping. Orak lifted her up and carried her to the building. Inside he set her by the hearth.

'Very good,' said Khelmal. 'Now you must perform the final task to satisfy all the conditions. You must pluck the White Rose of the Stygian Shore and return here with it.'

'Why should I do so?' Orak asked for he knew not of this White Rose and could think of no reason to pluck it.

'Because Nealda requires a gift of wonder if you are to enter her,' answered Khelmal.

So Orak nodded and agreed and he set off for the Stygian Shore to find the White Rose.

When Orak had gone, though, Khelmal entered the building. He fed the Finenosed Hound and gently stroked its muzzle so that it was happy and content. Khelmal then set it to guard the entry. He came to Nealda's side and lay beside the sleeping goddess. He whispered in her ear, into her dreams, 'I offer you a hearth and home. I offer you a guardian for your sleep and my love you your waking hours. As my gift to you I offer hope.'

Raising then his Spear of Hope, Khelmal entered the sleeping goddess. She awoke then to find herself in a wonderful home beside a glowing hearth with a fine guardian at her door and with her true love beside her. Life stirred within her and they laughed and loved in joy.

Orak, having failed to find the White Rose, returned to ask Khelmal how to find it. But when he heard Nealda's laugh he knew he was tricked by his foe. He gathered his fury and was ready to rage when Khelmal stepped to the door.

'You have heard the tasks required to enter Nealda and you have now returned Nealda to my side. Our bargain is complete. Begone from here for Nealda is my wife. Here we have hearth and home and friends to shelter us from darkest winds. Here we have love and hope to protect us from darkest despair. It is these last, though, that are the keys and you will never have them. So begone!' Khelmal stood firm at the door.

Orak raged, his winds howled about him. 'Cheat and liar!' Orak screamed, 'I shall slay you!'

Then Khelmal released the Finenosed Hound and the demon beast tore at Orak. Not to be daunted a second time, the hound ate the tendons of the dark god's arms. Then Khelmal commanded his first sons, Mastus and Malus, Valus and Argus to seize the dark-visaged one. They each seized a limb and bound the limbs together. Finally, Khelmal came and took the blackened sack of Orak and stuffed Orak within the sack. And following the instructions of Nealda, Khelmal carried the sack to the Land of Dreams and cast it into the depths of that land so that Orak can now only find us in nightmares.

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The Snow Monkeys by Sandy Petersen

(Originally appeared on the Glorantha Digest January 20, 1995)

A troop of mountain monkeys one evening were sad and lonely and bored. While pottering about aimlessly, one came across a glowworm. "See!" he chattered. "Fire! Let us be warm!" So the monkeys gathered round the insect, pushed tufts of dry grass and leaves over it, thrust forward their hands and toes towards the grub, and enjoyed themselves immensely, imagining that they were warm.

One monkey in particular, felt exceedingly cold, and kept blowing on the grub to increase its flame, paying much attention to it. A bird, watching this display, finally could stand it no longer, and flew down to the monkey. "Sir," said the bird. "You need not put yourself to all this trouble. This is not a fire, but

only a glowworm." The monkey completely ignored her, and kept working with the glowworm. The bird, undeterred, continued to inform the monkey of his error, when suddenly the monkey, vexed by the bird's importunities, grasped her and crushed her upon a log, breaking face, eyes, head, and neck so that she died.

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Some Dorradi Myths by Sandy Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Rune Quest Digest June 15, 1994)

(Author's notes: Most of the Doraddi have heard garbled versions of the Lightbringers' Quest, about the Seven (or Nine, or Thirty) Brave Folk who went to Hell after the Sun. One version of the basic Doraddi myth (which varies greatly with different regions, of course), follows 😊)

Okay. First you have to know that in the Old Old Days, when the Perfect Land was here, and the White Tree grew, there was only One Day for all the people. Pamalt was not important then, but he knew that if there was One Day, there would have to be One Night, too. But the Perfect Land said it knew better and did not get ready for the night. When the Night did come after all, and the Sun came down, the Perfect Land was not ready, and everyone screamed and ran around.

"It was very scary then, because it was the first night ever, and nobody knew what would happen. And all the Night Monsters came out, because they had had to wait so long long time during the One Day. This was their first time out, and so they played and murdered everywhere. In those days, no one knew what was supposed to happen after the One Night. Pamalt said that the One Day was really just the First Day, and that the One Night was really just the First Night, and that after the Night the Day would come back again. Do not be afraid, he said.

"But Filth-Which-Walks came and he said that after the First Night, another thing would come, worse than Night. and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another, until everything was worse than you could possibly believe. We don't say the names of the things he said would come. Only the bad people talk about them. Filth-Which-Walks said he was the First Token of the thing to come after the First Night, and that once he had proved he was the new Chieftain the first new thing would come.

"But everyone has heard the story of the meeting of Pamalt and Vovisibor. I will tell it tomorrow, not today.

"Pamalt proved he was right, and Filth-Which-Walks was wrong. Some people gave up, and became bad things, or were killed, or ran into the swamps or the jungle to get away. But Pamalt told us that stayed behind that if we waited and lived on, the Night would end. Just watch, he said. And he was right.

"The sun came back, and it was the Second Day again, and then it was the Second Night, and then it was day again. Now the Night Monsters know that they'll have another night to play in after this one, so they

don't get so carried away. Only the people and creatures that followed Filth-Which-Walks still want the new thing to come after the night."

NOTE: The Perfect Land is probably the Artmali Empire. The White Tree is probably the Spike. It is unclear who the Night Monsters are.

The Doraddi Lightbringers Myth:

"Some people who live way far off tell an amazing story about the First Night. I'll tell it to you, too. Then you'll know it. When the Sun set after the First Day, some gods who lived far away were afraid that Filth-Which-Walks was right, and that the Sun would never come back. So they went after the Sun, and found it, and worshiped it, and asked it to return. And of course it did.

"One thing is true for certain. If Pamalt had not made Filth-Which-Walks into a liar, then the Sun could never have come back -- because the new thing would have happened after the First Night, and there would have been no Sun, no Night. So Pamalt really saved us all.

The Doraddi Secret Wise Man Lightbringers Myth (not for everybody, just special initiates)

"The gods who saved the Sun were trapped, just like the Sun, because they had to keep following the Sun every night into Hell, so that they can bring it back. If they don't keep bringing it back, it might stay there. So we are glad that those gods are still chasing the Sun around and around. If they stopped doing it, then the Sun would stop, too, and then someone else would have to go into Hell and start pushing the Sun again.

"But here is a big secret -- the Sun stopped once, because the gods who fetched it back in the First Night were all killed by Gbaji. The Sun stopped for a long long time, but it finally started again, when the Spiderweb got it moving. Now, the Sun is moving, and there are a pack of gods who say they are pushing it, and they are. But they are a DIFFERENT group of gods than the ones who were doing it before the Sunstop. Don't tell the people from up North who believe in those gods, because it just makes them angry and there is nothing they can do about it. But it is true, anyway. Gbaji killed their gods, and now they have a bunch of new ones."

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Some Extracts from the Glorious Conflagration of Fida'Is⁹⁶ by Simon Bray

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest July 09, 1997).

"It is said that no-one is free, a revelation that was taught to Fonritans by God Learners as they ravaged our land and our mythology." - A quote from the Sister Philosopher as she preached to the masses at Garguna.

It is noted that there are interesting differences between the Kareeshti and Afadjanni. It is interesting to note that both say the same thing about one another, each tells its slaves that the other is more harsh, wicked and tyrannical than they are.

Slaves who flee their Afadjanni massarin have few places to go, to the west lies Umathela filled with man eating trees and white skinned devils, to the north lies the ocean, to the east lies Kareeshtu who will only make them slaves again and to the south is the Veldt which crawls with bandits and charngibbers. So the slaves remain at home happy and loyal and worship Ennug with a song.

The Shakh of Faladje is so obese that he has lost the use of his legs, he is carried about by twenty slaves upon a great jewelled palanquin (any less than twenty could not lift his weight). When the Shakh eats he has a magician dislocate his jaw and in this way his appetite can be satiated with whole platters of food. His table is mighty and ostentatious, being five hundred feet in length and decorated with mother of pearl. All visitors to his palace must sit upon the western end of the table as he sits in the east, to communicate messages are whispered by eunuch dressed in gold who must run up and down the table, leaping over dishes and goblets without spilling a drop. During the visit of the Ambassador of Hombori Tondo five table runners died of exhaustion as the debate reached its climax.

In the Glorious Year of One (500ST), Garangordos came to Fonrit. With him he brought culture, civilisation, might and the gods of the Torab. The truth of the gods was carried about in a great book called the Garan. Garangordos led his people to great things he renewed old traditions and effected ancient rites to make the blues our slaves for ever more. Great achievement causes great jealousy and Garangordos was slain by his brother, who burns in hell for ever. As Garangordos' body lay, still twitching it was dismembered by his seventeen brothers and sisters, they then dismembered the Garan and then finally the land. The pieces of Garangordos were placed within the Seventeen Canopic Jars of Separation and hidden, the Garan was taken to the temples and the brothers and sisters guarded it jealously, the land was divided and could never be whole until Garangordos became one again. Of the Garan it is said that each sibling refused to allow the others to see their section, but instead each tried to fill in the sections they did not have by memory. Some got it right, most got it wrong and confused with the myths of the land that they had conquered. Thus there are seventeen versions of the Garan and seventeen versions of Heaven.

⁹⁶ Also known as GCoF or Guh Cough, this book was part of the three documents scribed by the Jann Astamanyx of Hombori Tondo himself between 1613-1617. The other two were the Fortunate Strangulation and the Enkidusiad. All the books were published in two forms, one on salt papyrus from the marshes of Poysida Strait, the other was intricately etched onto titanother teeth and are known as the Ivory Plaque editions.

The most powerful people in Afadjann are the Jann himself, the High Priest of Darleester the Noose in Garguna, the Blue Eunuch of Barueli, the Jann's mother, the head of the secret police and the white skinned gardener of the palace. Red Ravaal the Jann of Kumanku, Ovgormangis the usurped prince, Energastor the Sister Philosopher and the Jann of Thieves in Sarro are all impressive but have little impact.

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Some Imperial Parables by Simon Bray

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest December 16, 1996)

Humakt's Luck

A Fazzik of Storal was walking amongst the gardens of his Kassir, when his most loyal Hazar raced up to him with a most harrowed expression:

"Save me, I have seen Humakt this morning and he gave me a most threatening look. I wish that tonight I was away from this place and within the walls of Harandash."

The Fazzik thus lent him his swiftest horse. That afternoon as the Fazzik walked through the rose gardens he met Humakt.

"Why did you give my favourite Hazar a threatening look?"

"I gave the man no threatening look, it was an expression of surprise, for when I take his soul tonight I knew it would be in Harandash. So far away."

The Eyes of Guilt

A rich man of Alkoth wanted companionship and so he bought a girl for ten thousand silver pieces. Looking at her one day he burst into tears. She asked him why he cried. He replied, your eyes are too beautiful, they make me forget my gods when I look at them." Later when she was alone the girl plucked out her eyes. "You have disfigured yourself girl! You have defiled your worth and my money is now wasted!" bellowed the rich man. That night the man dreamed of the goddesses in all their forms and he heard them say, "The girl devalued herself in your eyes, but increased her worth to us a thousand fold. She is now ours and you shall never be." When the man awoke the girl was dead and beneath his pillow lay ten thousand silver pieces.

The Man Who Could Not See Miracles

A son sat in mourning beside the body of his dead father. Suddenly the body sat up and began to convulse. "Father!" cried the man, "Be still and do not shatter my faith and prove miracles exist." With that the body fell back to the slab and was consumed by Shargash's flames.

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The Song of Glory by Anacharsis

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 08, 2003)

The House of Gastar is no more.
Hear, hear the Song of Glory that was Gastar.
Gods and Heroes die but the Song is forever.

Listen to the Song and do not interrupt it
For your Bard knows ancient secrets.
Praised be the Kings, the chiefs and the thanes who feed and reward the Skalds.

The Song of Glory tells the story of Gastar
Gastar the Old was a Great Hero among the Vingkotlings.
He held the Bow Arrowsong
Which killed all his foes
He had performed many deeds and he was dying.

Gastar Gastarsson was waiting to get the Bow
Which killed all his foes
His heart was full of desire
He came to the Bard and asked when he would get the Bow
The Bard replied by those famous words:

"Do not seek Glory, o Hero
You will not get the Bow
You will desire the Lute
And because of that Song
The House of Gastar will be no more."

Gastar Gastarsson was angry and went to seek glory.
He killed all his foes and the Bard sang the Song of Glory.
"Gods and Heroes die but the Song of Glory is forever."
Gastar had never heard a more beautiful Song,
His heart was full of desire.
He came to the Bard and asked how he could sing the Song.
The Bard replied by those famous words:

"Do not seek Glory, o Hero
You want the Lute
Which is full of heart, blood and tears
And because of that Song
The House of Gastar will be no more."

Gastar Gastarsson was angry and went to become a Bard
He made a Lute but could not play it.
He wanted his deeds to be immortal.
"Gods and Heroes die but the Song of Glory is forever."
His heart was full of desire.
He came to the Bard and asked why the Lute kept silent.
The Bard replied by those famous words:

"Do not seek Glory, o Hero
The Lute needs to be quenched
It drinks heart, blood and tears
And because of that Song
The House of Gastar will be no more."

Gastar Gastarsson was angry and went to fight
He came with his seven sons.
When the eldest son died, the women wept on the Lute,
The corpse bled on the Lute,
And Gastar lost a part of his heart.
But the Lute was still silent.
He came with his other sons.
When they all died, the women wept on the Lute,
The corpse bled on the Lute,
And Gastar was angry no more.
Gastar the Old died, Gastar Gastarsson had no desire
He became the Song and
The Lute started to sing:

"The House of Gastar is no more.
Hear, hear the Song of Glory that was Gastar.
Gods and Heroes die but the Song is forever."

*[This story is a simplified version of the Soninké story of Gassire and the Fall of the Wagandu
"Tetrapolis", in Ancien Ghana. The Soninke is a tribe which lives across Western Africa, mainly in Mali.
"Lute" is a translation of the Soninke four-stringed "ganbare". For the original story see*

*Leo Frobenius, Atlantis (1921-28) v. 6.
Alta Jablow, Gassire's Lute: A West African Epic, 1991.
Nathaniel Mackey, , "Gassire's Lute", Talisman 5-8 (1990-1992).
Ezra Pound, Cantos, Canto LXXIV.]*

(Editor's Note: Or see Gassire's Lute).

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Soravatoor, The Son of Heaven and the Monkey King by Simon Bray

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest February 06, 1998)

In the time of the great and illustrious Kingdom of Soravatoor, Son of Heaven a great wailing was heard across the lands. The mighty king sent out his soldiers and his priests to seek out the great noise, that was disturbing the peace of the palace. The Kings men sought first amongst the Mountains of Diamond but found only the Statues of Brass. They sought South as far as the Churning Sea but found only the Eggs of Sofal. They sought East as far as the Forests of Fethlon but found only the Yellow Men of the Kanula Trees. Finally they sought West to the Forests of Fevers where the wailing grew much louder. It was the priests that found the Wailing One, for had it been the soldiers then the story might have ended here.

Amongst the dark and dreadful forest sat a mighty spirit. His form was that of a man, but the great gods had covered him in hair and bestowed him a tail for reasons of their own knowing. When the priest came upon the spirit they saw that his Fire had slipped from it's proper place in his heart and was burning his buttocks and tail. They question the spirit as to how this had happened and it explained that Solf himself had fallen from heaven and landed upon his city, scaring his inner fire without. The people of his city had become indulgent and had forgotten the ways of Somash and Zitro Argan and had prayed to the Lord of Volcanoes so that they could know his decadence. Like all kings whose people had turned bad the great spirit had left. The priests understood the spirits plight and showed him how to put the Fire back in his heart. With great majesty they then led him back to the court of Soravatoor, the Son of Heaven.

Soravatoor, the Son of Heaven was a wise and just man. He knew that the fate of the strange foreign king spirit could happen to any lord whose people were foolish. Soravatoor named the spirit Kang Luway or King with his Fire Without. He then called for his barbers to shave off Kang Luway's animal hair and his tailors to dress him. Kang Luway then sat at the feet of Soravatoor and listened to the words of Zitro Argan.

To the south of the Splendid Lands of Soravatoor, Son of Heaven there lay and evil kingdom inhabited by wicked gods. The king of the island was a demon of the night called Takuzang. The evil Takuzang was a twisted and ugly fiend, with blue skin, great fangs and wicked claws. He strutted and lurched about his land keeping all his people as slaves. One day Takuzang stalked from his own land to the Splendid Lands, he lurked about the fields causing crops to wither and trees to gnarl. He then slipped into the villages and made the farmers lazy and the women grow warts. He then entered the towns and befouled all the grains stores and turned all the gold into lead. Finally under the cover of night he crawled into the Palace of Soravatoor through a mouse hole and stole the Princess Subanahey from her bed and carried her away to his evil land.

Soravatoor, the Son of Heaven mourned greatly the loss of his daughter, fearing that her Fire had been put out. He called to his soldiers and commanded them to go south and bring back her body. He called to the Priests of Furalor to make a great pyre. He called to Kang Luway to grieve with him. The soldiers headed south and came to the edge of the Churning Sea, but they had stolen the Eggs of Sofal and here

children would not let them pass. The priests of Furalor built a great pyre, but they used the wood of the Kanula trees and the Yellow Men would not let it burn. Kang Luway seeing the plight of Soravatoor leaped to his feet and said that he would bring back the Princess.

King Soravatoor was surprised and asked what his servant wanted to aid him. Kang Luway humbly requested to be gifted with a cloud, a fire hardened stick and a lock of the hair that the barbers had cut from his body. Mighty Soravatoor gladly gave Kang Luway all. The soldiers of Soravatoor stood in a great line along the beach, facing the Turtle Mother and her insolent children. The soldiers were armed with axes and iron, the Turles Children with clubs and shells. Neither line moved for fear of casting blood upon the Land of Splendour. Kang Luway arrived amongst the soldiers carrying his cloud, his stick and his fur.

"How will those save the Princess" asked the mighty thewed captain of the army, "Ook, you shall see" replied Kang Luway and leapt atop the cloud.

With a mighty whistle the cloud flew south to the evil land with Kang Luway aboard. The evil Demon King Takuzang had fallen in love with the beauty of the Princess Subanahey. He had locked her in a tower of bones and each day would visit her with gifts of magic and mystery. Each day the Princess

Subanahey closed her eyes to the ugly visage of her captor and prayed that Furalor might take her. Each day the Demon howled his annoyance and the land shook. Kang Luway flew across the Churning Sea upon the cloud and landed upon the evil shores. The Monster Army had heard the whistle of his magic and had gathered upon the cliffs to slay him. Kang Luway was not a mortal however and his magic was great, with a mighty leap he jumped over the army. As he leaped he let go of the lock of fur that wise Soravatoor had given to him. When the hair hit the ground it transformed into an army of monkeys that ravaged the Monster Army with teeth and claws. Kang Luway then leaped again and came to land at the base of the Bone Tower. The Demon King appeared at the gate, his blue skin shining, his horns rattling and his teeth gnashing. Kang Luway was not afraid, and knew that Takuzang was just a nightmare. He hefted his stick as a spear and his cloud as a shield and charged his foe. The nightmare could not withstand the truth of a servant of Soravatoor, Son of Heaven and was split asunder. Kang Luway then used the bones, the teeth and the horns of the Demon King to forge a ladder and climbed to the prison of Princess Subanahey. With a twitch of his mighty muscles Kang Luway smashed down the doors and swept the Princess atop his cloud and her back to her father.

King Soravatoor, was pleased. So pleased that he returned the Eggs of Sofal to Turtle Mother and the Wood of the Kanula Tree to the Yellow Men.

He praised Kang Luway and made him a temple on the spot that he had been discovered in which to live. He then returned the Monkey King his fur and decreed "Though Kang Luway may not be a man and his skin is covered with fur, his heart burns with as great a Fire as any man in the realm of Soravatoor, Son of Heaven"

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A Story about Elmal as told by Glowric Truthsayer of the Vantaros tribe (with footnotes by Griflet Asread) by David Hall

"During the Godtime, Yelmalio was the favourite son of the Dara Happan Sun God, the Emperor Yelm. The ceaseless majesty of Godtime was ended when Yelm was treacherously struck down by the rebellious and bullying god, Orlanth. Not content with killing Yelm and ending his Divine and wondrous Empire, Orlanth also stole away with Yelmalio (who was only a small child).⁹⁷

Bullying Orlanth, and his shrewish and unfaithful wife Ernalda, brought up Yelmalio in their lowly stead, renaming him Elmal the Cold Sun. While Orlanth's children were fed with white bread and mead, Elmal lived amongst the thralls and only on a good day was he fed black bread and barley beer. He soon forgot his true father, and though Orlanth treated him like a slave, he served Orlanth loyally. Orlanth gifted Elmal many times for his loyal service, though always with the things he had stolen from others. One time he gave Elmal Yelm's spear, claiming it as his own invention. Another time he gave Elmal Vision at Night which he had stolen from the Troll, Gore the Gasher.

One day Elmal said to Orlanth that he would like to be married, as was his right. But Orlanth contemptuously gave him Inora the Snow Princess as his bride. Inora was cold and disdainful of Elmal and would not allow him to lie with her. Theirs was an unhappy and childless marriage. Even so, Elmal did not hold this against Orlanth, such was his loyalty.

Then one day there came to Orlanth's pitiful stead a bright and fiery messenger from the clean and well-dressed people of the lowlands. Before he could speak Orlanth slew him - without honour.

Another bright messenger came soon afterwards, but as soon as he started speaking Orlanth slew him, even though he had made the right sign of peace.

However, one day Orlanth had to leave his stead since his sheep had caught foot-rot because of the unclean ways of his son the shepherd. When he was away another Bright Messenger came, and this time he was able to speak his words of peace and tell of the return of the Bright Emperor. These words had a great effect on Elmal. They were words he had heard before in his dreams. He knew then who his real father was.

Realising that he had been lied to by his master, Yelmalio was then free to act in right fashion. He cast out his cold and frigid wife, and entered the stead of Orlanth. Unfaithful Ernalda was there, lying with one of Orlanth's slaves while her husband was away⁹⁸. Yelmalio took her then, and beat her, as every husband should beat an unfaithful wife. Then, as he had been stolen from his father, he stole Ernalda away from Orlanth and made her his dutiful wife.

⁹⁷ Presumably Orlanth took Ernalda with him at the same time. Ernalda was a hostage of Yelm.

⁹⁸ In other stories the slave is named as Heler, the rain god.

When Orlanth returned he was very angry. He sought out Yelmlio and tried to attack and kill him, but he could not, such was the weight of his dishonour. Though he stole back Yelm's spear, he could not steal back his wife or Yelmlio's respect. Beaten, he returned to his pathetic farm and instead forced himself upon his wife's daughters - but that is the way of the Orlanthi."⁹⁹

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A Story from the Upland Marsh by Guy Jobbins

Long, long ago there was a time of great hunger. Ernalda Earth Mother slept, dull and grey. The rivers were brackish and black. Elmal Sun Thane was just a pale shadow. The winds hung limp and weak as Orlanth was so far away. The Gods had left the world, people were hungry, and evil was everywhere.

The weaponthanes of the village had gone off to fight evil, and they hadn't come back. When Ernalda stopped giving food the carls had mustered the fyrd and gone marching off to fight evil too, and they hadn't come back. When the forest gave no more meat the hunters had packed up and gone off to fight evil, and they hadn't come back either. Soon everyone in the village was hungry and tired of chewing on dirt and old leather.

Some of the children decided that it would be better look for some food - any food - in the forest. Those with the strength went off and foraged, and they met back in the centre of the village. As they trickled back, one had discovered a few beetles, another some moss - but that was all they had found all day long. Everyone was very disappointed, but thought that at least they could have some beetle and moss stew. Then, just as the people were starting to cook, two young boys came back to the village, yelling happily and jumping up and down. "Perhaps they've found some bark," said their mother hopefully.

But instead the boys had got a very odd creature that they had put in a sack. It had a strange looking head with a weird beak, lots of legs, and was covered with feathers. It was almost as big as a rat, and would round off the beetle and moss stew wonderfully. Excitedly the people began to pluck it for the pot. But every time they pulled out a feather, the creature grew twice in size. Everyone was so hungry they couldn't believe this great good fortune, and they plucked and plucked away, imagining the feast that would follow, until the strange thing was twice the size of a house. Slowly a great silence fell over the people as they contemplated this suddenly enormous beast, and regarded its beak, which they now saw was full of teeth.

"Oh," said one of the boys.

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note that the Orlanthi Amad tribe accept the basic truth of this myth, but say that Yelmlio was the son of Yelm and Ernalda! This may be the source of their rather crude accusations that Vantaros and Tovtaros warriors sleep with their mothers.

And then the monster let out a scream! It rounded on the villagers and chased them all about, and every time it closed down one of the people it would grab them in its legs, stuff them into its mouth, suck all the life out of them, and then spit out the dry husk that remained. It grabbed grandmothers, it grabbed babies, it grabbed children, it grabbed anyone it could, gobbled them up and spat out the dry husks that remained - *fluah-splat*, *fluah-splat*, *fluah-splat*.

The people ran around in panic, terrified by this evil thing in their midst, not knowing what to do. Mothers threw ladles at it. Old men, remembering the glory of their youth, yelled challenges and charged it, brandishing their walking sticks. *Fluah-splat* went the monster, as their dried-up corpses were spat out on the ground, *fluah-splat*.

One of the boys who had found the creature drew up his courage like a small rock in his stomach and threw it so hard that it cut off the monster's head. Everyone jumped on the monster with knives and saws and cut it into seven pieces. Then they stood back, panting, and congratulated themselves on killing the evil thing.

But they saw that the monster's arms were still moving! They saw that the monster's head was rolling towards a small child, desperately trying to get close enough to suck the life out of her! The relief washed out of them like prunes through grandpa! "Quick!" they yelled, and picking up pieces of the monster they ran and threw them on the cooking fire, hoping to burn the monster into ashes.

The monster, trapped on the cooking fire, screamed and screamed and screamed. Folk went blind, frogs turned upside down at the sound of that scream. The bits of the monster writhed in the fire, wriggling in a yukky way that made peoples' minds gibber and shake. And then, as the screaming and wriggling climaxed, the monster exploded into ten hundred thousand million pieces that rained down all over the village. And each little bit of the monster was still alive, still evil, still hungry, still determined to suck the life out of everyone in the world and eat them alive.....

And that's where mosquitoes come from.

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The Story of the Sword of Dwya Nanga by Simon Bray

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest July 15, 1998)

Once amongst the people of Laskal there lived a mighty king. He ruled the jungle tribes with a rod of iron. Order ruled and the dread fear of anarchy. However the king was an enemy of the aldryami, and each growing season their raiders would come to destroy his lands. The king was wise and so he turned to his blacksmith and had him forge a sword of iron with which to slay the evil children of Errinoru. The sword was created, a mighty thing with two great blades.

The sword however was unusual, for upon its blades were the words Dwya Nanga, or 'Warrior Comes' in the native language. No hammering or forging could remove the words. The king found that the weapon

had the power to slay the very trees themselves and used it to defeat even the wicked council of the Green Witch. Peace and order returned to his lands.

Many years later a man of Fonrit was walking in the woods of Laskal, when he heard a voice. The voice told him that his first wife was with child and by the command of Azmurad, Lord of Destruction he was to call it Dwya Nanga. The masarin was good and pious and so returned to his house and called named his son as he was commanded. The child was as big as a titanother, and strong as one too. He was a mighty warrior, but had no sword, so could not be in the jann's army. One day while the boy was cooking a spirit of fire rose up from the hearth and told him of the sword Dwya Nanga. Without a word to his father, the son left to lay claim to his destiny.

The King of the jungle tribes heard of Dwya Nanga's coming and did not want to lose his favourite weapon. He decided to trick the boy by placing the sword at the bottom of a well filled with swords, with the hope that Dwya Nanga would never find the real sword. As Dwya Nanga approached the jungle king, there was a great ringing sound and the sword raised itself from the well and placed itself into the boy's hands. He was now truly a warrior.

The Jungle King bowed before Dwya Nanga and swore fealty to one so blessed by the gods. Dwya Nanga became a great general in the armies of Istam the first, and his house grew in power until it was one of the mightiest in all Afadjann. The house claimed that the sword held their power and without it they were lost.

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A Strange Fragment by Simon Bray

(Originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest August 20, 1997)

(Author's Note: Another strange fragment has slipped out of my brain, I think that it is Esrolian.).

One woman descended into her mother in harsh times.
The two women waited, one woman made within herself.
The third came child of one, grand child of one's mother.
Three together called upon their sisters.
Three tormented came and sat with the first three in warmth.
Six together joined and made the perfect earth.
From the cube that was earth, that was six came the eight ways.
The eight ways were the limbs of SHE, the mother of all.
The Spider was born and sang the world's hidden songs.
Three of comfort, three of torment, one the Spider.
The three tormented took their pains to bring evil.
The three comforted called the husbands to their breast.
Three made the loom and waited.
The Spider span the world's hidden pattern.

Evil came lured and hounded by the three in torment.
The pattern was the web, the web was reality.
Six together, husbands at their sides and the spider.
Evil was devoured and hidden within the pattern.
The Spider who is one and all made our destiny.
Two were born Spring and Time.

(Author's Note: Don't ask me where that one came from!)

©1997 by Simon Bray

The Taking of Elkoi 1564 by Barry Blatt

As told by Yuvas Potbelly, former centurion of the Vanch Sun Dome militia, to Inistes Horlus, while gathering evidence for the court martial of Captain Jaskor Zhemestis in 1573.

'So Jaskor's gone mad has he? I can't say as I'm surprised. Went a little mad myself after serving with him that last time - it's how I come to be in this place I suppose. I know I drink too much, I know I shouldn't drink at all, but only the priests get to go into the Tower of Contemplation, and that's the only place I'll find peace, proper peace, not the sort you get at the bottom of a mug of ale. Still, this place is quiet enough.

The Elkoi expedition... where shall I start? We, that is the Vanch Sun Dome Militia, had fought for Jaskor and the Lunar Provincial Army before. He ran a good army, not like some of the damn fools who have hired us out... No forget that, the court martial might want to know more and some of them fools are still in power hereabouts...

The job was a simple one on the face of it. I wasn't privy to the details, the Comes Militaris worried about that. We'd never heard of Partobas before even. Just another bandit, really, except he had a fortress somewhere out in the wilds which is more than most of them have. I did hear that he was sheltering some old enemies of Phargentes from the Longaxe rebellion days, that probably had a lot to do with it. If he'd stuck to straight banditry he'd have been all right, but politics is a different thing.

The march down from Soldier Ferry was hard, but at least there was no opposition. We met up with a big group of locals who had some grudge against Partobas. Horrible savages they were for all that some of them claimed to be fellow Yelmalios. Jaskor met us there with a bunch of 'politicals' - snooty types from Sylila who reckon they know it all, a nasty looking thug who I heard was to be the new king of Elkoi, and a dozen priestesses from Jillaro who we thought were missionaries or healers of something of the sort. They well dressed, and pretty too, some of them, with a gang of eunuchs following them about like dogs and scowling badly at anyone who got too near. They had a lot of slaves carrying a big chest draped in a black cloth, I thought it was the pay chest, fool that I was. The head priestess seemed to be pally with a couple of the stinking Balazarings, which I thought odd at the time.

We sacrificed for safe passage in our various ways - there was no way you could call that Balazaring howling a proper way to carry on, yet they said it was for Yelmadio. Some of the lads wanted to string a few of the heretics up, but we had the job in hand to get on with and I quietened them down. I was quite big on the Lunar Way in those days, live and let live and all that, but I'm rambling now -

We met the other part of the force in the Elmwoods after a stiff march to meet some kind of deadline. The other column had come in more secretly from Holay. In total we had 350 men, 250 hoplites and 50 archers and 50 camp followers in the baggage train. The Balazarings kept changing with groups dropping out and joining in along the way, but I would guess around 200 as well, plus this dozen priestesses and 40 eunuchs, Jaskor and his staff and the politicals, maybe another 20. The other column was 50 Tarshite cavalry under a nephew of Phargentes, a motley crew of weaponthanes like we used to have in Vanch before we got civilised, and 30 or so Axe Maidens. You might not have seen the type up in the Heartlands, but they are scary, very scary. They don't come out in such numbers for any old fight neither, but Partobas had sacked an Earth Temple in Holay a few years back and they wanted his balls for earrings and that's not a figure of speech.

There was a bit of a pow wow, with the leaders of the various contingents talking about this and that, and squads of locals were sent out to scout out the last stretch of road. We were worried by this point. We hadn't met Partobas' crew in the field, which was what we thought was the plan. These savages do hit and run mostly, but a strong column can weather that and pick off a few of the swine along the way, do some punitive actions against the farms and peasants, except we found out there is no such thing as either in Balazar. We also had no idea how many there would be. We had been told he had 50 cavalry and a few hundred tribesmen, but it was clear from the odd chat we had with the locals in our column that it was at least twice that in cavalry and a couple of thousand tribesmen if he called them all in for a stand up fight. Then there was the citadel. We had rations for maybe a couple of weeks with us, not enough for a siege, and no siege engines at all for an assault. We had thought we would be setting up an advance camp and then have the engineers follow us, but that wasn't going to happen, orders were to march that night.

Night marches can be death to an army, but me and a lot of the other under officers had been blessed by Yelmadio, we saw through the darkness so we could use it as a weapon against his enemies. Some of the Balazarings could do it too, so I guess they weren't completely lying about being Yelmadios. Some of the other units had more trouble, we had to stop for a while for the Balazaring scouts to go and find the Tarshites.

The sun was coming up as we got there, and the battle began. There were a lot of huts outside the citadel proper and the people in them were not happy when we showed up. Our unit was formed up in full battle order in front of the gate, and we saw the poor wretches panicking and flapping and beating on the doors of the town. They were not let in - I found out later that some of them were in fact spies for our side, and I guess Partobas knew that. We left them alone, but our tribesmen chased them, and after a bit of a skirmish in front of the gates, during which most of the huts got fired, they scattered. Our tribesmen lost a few to archery, but only a few, then they chased the rest off into the hills. I'd have been

happier if we had had a proper cordon to catch them all - they could have brought back some of those thousands of hairies we'd heard about, but no, we stuck to the gate.

There were some of the usual siege preliminaries - a line of our spearmen was detached to set up camp for our unit, there was a parley by the politicals that got nowhere, they were shot at and the cavalry had to rush in and get the wounded, there was shouting and hullabaloo from the walls and dire threats of curses. But there being no engineers and precious few archers we didn't set up any screens, assemble any rams or catapults, not even do an escalade to test the mettle of the defenders, nothing.

About midday we got the expected sally. Partobas sent out maybe thirty horsemen in a mad dash at our unit. We weren't that busy - as I said, we weren't doing any of the usual preparations, and we had a nice neat phalanx formed up in no time. They didn't like that and turned tail, and our cavalry and the savages chased them back to the gate, then came back once the arrows started flying. We heard there was another sally at the same time from the Dog Gate, a little postern on the south side of the town, that was carved up in no time by the Axe Maidens.

Night fell, night of the full moon. Being gifted I was watch officer, and I saw the start of the happenings. The priestesses and Axe Maidens camp was maybe three hundred yards away from ours, but they weren't sleeping, they were chanting and howling, blood curdling stuff, and the priestess were carrying things that glowed red. I knew then we were in for trouble.

The priestesses left their circle and went round the far end of the town with these red things. And Jaskor came up to me all excited and told me to get the troops out of bed and ready to march on the gate at a moments notice. He met with the Trash cavalry captain and I overheard them talking. 'They can do it now!' Jaskor told him, 'The moment is more propitious than we thought!'

The cavalry guy gets his men up sharpish and they rode off after the priestesses, Jaskor riding with them.

Our men are not happy about being roused out of bed, not after a night march the previous night and a lot of standing about all day, but the Decurions lay the lash on a couple of slackers and we get a phalanx more or less together by having squads line up along pikes in the dark.

Then it starts to get Dark. Now I know you are thinking that it's night already, but even at night the celestial realm shows its power in the stars and moon and the torches and camp fires, and of course Yelmalions like me can do perfectly well on that glimmer, just as our God did when all about him was falling into chaos. This was real Dark, Subere black and cold as hell itself, creeping out of the shadows in the ditch in front of the town walls and up toward the torches on the ramparts, which all at once just wink out. Many of the men are praying now, and the Comes Militaris comes and stands next to me. He asks if the men will march into this stuff if they had to and I told him straight that I doubted it. He raised his spear and called on the light of the Sky and lit it up in a golden glow. That put some heart back into the lads, but it was still unnerving.

There were sounds coming from the town now, screams and the like, and a red glow appeared in the sky above us, spreading out in the blackness like blood falling on black marble. I don't know how long this

lasted, but the gate was just visible again when it was flung open and a horde of people ran out, men, women, pigs, dogs, everything, packed into the gateway and falling in the ditch and all screaming, screaming...

Many fought each other as they ran, I saw children stomped under foot, old folk falling - panic like someone had shouted fire at an arena or something. We got the order to advance at steady pace, leaving the civilians to run, but not letting them stand between us and the gate.

By this time the red glow had taken over completely and the air was warm and kind of sticky and humid and we began to sweat. The gate loomed at us and we could see flames inside the walls and licking up wards in places over the top. The sounds from inside the town carried on, but different, more like a wave on a beach or wind in the trees or bees humming. I could see people through the gateway - we were maybe thirty feet from it now - well I say people, but I wasn't so sure anymore, I couldn't see that well. There were things flying above us, I'm sure of it, moths, insects, beetles maybe. The comes raised his spear, and I remember it being yellow against a blood red sky and thinking it was like the sun and moon had got reversed, and realised that maybe that was what was going to happen someday and began to tell the bloke next to me about it, except he was telling me something else, something about horses and snakes, and then there were snakes, loads of them, all over the ground between us and the gate, writhing and hissing...

The men were falling back, and I pulled myself together and shouted at them to keep ranks. The Comes was crying I think, it looked like blood pouring from his eyes in that light, and he was staggering like he was drunk. 'None must escape,' he said, 'None, none at all, and none will. Not even us.'

I grabbed him and pulled him back with the others, there was no holding them, and we ran back to the camp. It was bad that night. The archers were firing out into the night at nothing, men were sat in circles singing hymns to the sun, one of the Decurions was having a recruit whip him until I stopped it, and I definitely did not like the sounds coming from a couple of the tents. There wasn't a lot I could do about it though, I was busy enough breaking up fights and stopping the archers wasting their arrows. Things had calmed a bit by dawn, and I have never ever been so glad to see Yelm as I was that morning, or heard the morning prayers spoken so fervently.

Jaskor came up to us looking wild eyed and frantic and practically beat the Comes trying to get out of him what we had done that night. The comes kept crying - I never saw a Templar cry, ever! - and Jaskor grabs me and says I have to get a squad together to search the lower half of the town.

I found a dozen men who seemed to be back in their right minds, and we stumbled off into the town. We had a hard time getting over the threshold of that gate I can tell you, but it was quiet. Too quiet. No birds. Inside there were fires still burning, the place was full of smoke. There was blood in great patches all over the floor but no bodies that we could see. There was a beetle; one of the lads said it might be a gold beetle and we followed it hoping it would lead us some loot but it wasn't, it was a common scarab and it led us to a pile of pig shit. I remember chasing beetles and catching one and showing it to Jaskor later telling him it was our only captive. He should have put me on a charge, but he just nodded and noted it down on a wax tablet.

Later that day he called all the troops from all the various units except the priestesses together. I don't know what happened to the priestesses, I never saw them leave, and he had one of the politicals, an old man in a long tunic with a gold sash, chant over us in the name of Yelm the father and Ernalda the mother. It was lovely, like a lullaby, and I was so tired that I was practically falling asleep on the spot. Then the Balazaring shaman women joined in and it sounded bloody awful and I woke up. We left the Balazarings to their business and went back to camp and fell dead asleep, all of us, not even a sentry. Fortunately nothing happened to us that night.

And that I suppose was the end of it. We had taken Elkoi. The Axe Maidens found the bodies of Partobas and his cronies in the upper city and cut their heads off to put on the gate. I know a severed head doesn't look the happiest of souls, but the expression on these ones was ghastly. What we got at the gate must have been nothing compared to what they went through. They gave us nightmares so we cut them down once the Axe Maidens had packed up and gone home. That didn't stop the nightmares though.

Jaskor must have got it pretty bad as well, and a few of the others, like Bykotus and some of the Tarshites. They had been the first into the town you see, got in by a secret gate Bykotus knew about before the red light had gone. They were looking for Partobas to make sure he was dead. I gather that there was no problem with that - they had all gone so crazy in the upper town that they had fought each other and had come down to start on the civilians in the lower part, which was why they bust out of the gate and ran for it.

Jaskor left after a couple of weeks, as did the Comes and half our men. I was left as garrison commander along with Bykotus and a few local friends of his. They made trips out into the wilds with the Tarshites and eventually got a few people to come back to the town. I don't know if any were the same ones as fled the night of the red mist. We ended up staying twice as long as we should have done. I wrote to Jaskor and the Comes several times, asking that a relief force be sent to take over the garrison, but we never got a reply until suddenly a troop of Sylilans turned up in the middle of Earth season and told us they were taking over and good bye.

I didn't see Jaskor again, nor did I do any more jobs for the Provincial Army. A couple have come up in the years since, but I asked not to be sent and the priests have accepted that, and eventually I left the temple altogether. There was no comeback over the shambles we made of guarding the gate either, which surprised me. Where is the Comes? Well, he went off on a pilgrimage to a temple someplace far off in the wilds south of Dragon Pass and never came back. The drinking, that started after Elkoi. I'd had a drop before, we're not real hard liners up here in Vanch Temple, but I did get a bit more into it afterwards. Now as for my payment for all this... I know this might sound odd, but our beetle collection here at the museum is not entirely complete. I don't know if would be in the power of the Provincial Government, but I have always wanted to study a Karrg Beetle, one of the big ones from...

Explanatory notes by Commander Urlianus Har-Kenla:

The Comes Militaris is the overall unit commander and the main link between the Yelmalion unit and any non-Yelmalion allies. The position is temporary among the Vanchites, and filled by a member of the

temple hierarchy appropriate to the task in hand. In this small expedition the Comes was probably a recently promoted priest on one of his first battlefield commands.

The Decurions stand at the back of the phalanx - which would have been 16 ranks deep on a full deployment, though this is often halved to eight by the Vanchites borrowing from modern Lunar practice. They are reliable veterans who keep discipline in camp and in battle stop the front ranks falling back and running away.

There would have been several Centurions among the Vanchite troops, a couple of staff officers assisting the Comes, but most as senior decurions capable enough to lead from the front if they have to, spread out along the fighting line at about ten file intervals. They do not give orders or show much initiative in Yelmalion units, just shout what the Comes and his staff tell them to shout and order the Decurions to thump anyone they feel is not obeying quickly enough.

In Vanch it is not unknown for nobles to temporarily install their own thegns as Centurions in Yelmalion mercenary units they have hired. Being from the more flexible Heortling warrior tradition they make the Yelmalion force far more capable of reacting quickly to changing situations on the battlefield. I have seen the admirably dogged but woefully robotic Yelmalions being massacred as they march forward in neat ranks by more nimble light cavalry and infantry units, and Yelmalios vs. ballistae is a tragedy. Even Yelmalion archers suffer from this defect, standing there in neat files firing away even when they are obviously outranged and outnumbered, and not taking cover from cavalry until it is too late to save themselves. Jaskor did the sensible thing by taking Balazaring irregulars as support, and should really have had far more cavalry, but in the event it seems they played only a minor role in the fighting. I conclude he did the best with the limited budget he was allowed.

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A Tale from Moonpost¹⁰⁰ by Harald Smith

(as originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest April 26, 1995)

You all know this rhyme, for the children sing it while picking apples from the orchard and I know you were all children once.

Dance left, dance right
Seek the rabbit in the light

Dash, dash, run, run
Down to where Quick Rabbit runs¹⁰¹

Hunt left, hunt right
Find his prints, mark his bite

¹⁰⁰ a village in the Southlands of Imther

¹⁰¹ Quick Rabbit is the current fireseason spirit for the village

Dash, dash, run, run
Follow the trail beneath the sun

Search left, search right
Peer in holes without fright

Run, run, dash, dash
When he runs, run just as fast

Jump left, jump right
Catch him there, hold him tight

Run, run, dash, dash
Tie him to your sturdy sash

Hop left, hop right
Come on back before the Night

Many times have you heard this rhyme, but how many of you know why you must seek the Quick Rabbit in the light? Many times have the children followed the trail in the Sacred Dance¹⁰², but how many of you know why you must return before the night?

I tell you this because there was a time when in my own grandfather's day when the village did not know. This was in the Year of a Thousand Rabbits¹⁰³, the year the village first honored Quick Rabbit with the choicest greens and said the first prayers over the slain rabbits. Quick Rabbit was pleased and told the Keepers how to honor him upon the Day of Ralaska during the Sacred Dance.

My grandfather was one of the ten children chosen to seek for Quick Rabbit. But they did not know better yet, so they did not start the hunt until Yelem had left his throne. The ten children set off to find Quick Rabbit. Each of them carried a special tool, just as they still do. My grandfather carried the Hawk Feather for far sight and quick movement. Others carried the Tasty Greens and the Five-star Clover, the Foot of Yurmalio and the Wolf Tooth, the Holding Knot and the Binding Sash.¹⁰⁴

They all ran into the Quick Rabbit Run and scattered so they could cover the most ground. They looked by the Old Willow and atop the Giant's Toe¹⁰⁵. They searched the creek bed and the Mossy Slope¹⁰⁶. They found quail and cardinal, squirrel and mouse. But they couldn't find the Quick Rabbit.

¹⁰² Sacred Dance = Sacred Time

¹⁰³ Year of a Thousand Rabbits - supposedly 1000 rabbits were caught by villagers that year, apparently a higher amount than before.

¹⁰⁴ Hawk Feather, etc. - these are items charged with magical significance during Sacred Time. It is not clear whether these were spell matrices or not.

¹⁰⁵ Giant's Toe - a rocky outcrop in the Quick Rabbit Run

¹⁰⁶ Mossy Slope - a rocky slope covered by a bright green and shaggy moss. This is sometimes called the Giant's Beard.

At last my grandfather, standing still and waving the Hawk Feather, saw Quick Rabbit dash from his den. He ran after Quick Rabbit and shouted for the others to come. They did, dashing first left and then right, until at last Quick Rabbit tired. They lured him close with the Tasty Greens and the Five-Star Clover and caught him with the Holding Knot.

It was late then and Yelem was at the Gates of Dusk. When they tied Quick Rabbit to the Binding Sash, Quick Rabbit looked up and spoke. "Too late, too late! he cried. "The sun is down, the wood folk prowl."

This, of course, scared the children, including my grandfather and they all ran. Now, though, the Emperor of the Night and his minions were about. And with them walked Long Willow¹⁰⁷, angry that the village abandoned him for Quick Rabbit.

Shadows rose up before the children, turning them from their way home. Wind dogs howled amongst the trees to mark the paths the children took. Behind them came the Night Hunters, cloaked in darkness and carrying whips of knotted flesh.¹⁰⁸

When the children ran down paths, Long Willow seized them in his branches and threw them aside. When the children ran to the creek banks, Long Willow lifted his roots to trip them up. When the children screamed, Long Willow masked their cries with his mocking laughter.

Soon the children, including my grandfather, found themselves upon Ash Knoll, surrounded by the minions of the Emperor of the Night. The evil dark things giggled and tittered, anxious for a taste of the children. Changelings walked forth to mark the children they would steal away.

Then a hush fell upon the dark assembly and the shadows parted as a throne was carried forth. Upon that throne sat the Emperor of the Night¹⁰⁹ himself and he was blacker than the night, blacker than the blackest shadow. Even Long Willow trembled and bowed at his passing. The children cried and wailed at their fate.

Alas, poor little Hudor¹¹⁰ tried to run from there. His wails can still be heard upon Ash Knoll on the darkest nights as he struggles to break free from the clinging shadows. The others, though they stood their ground, would have suffered similar fates, too, and woe betide our village should that have happened.

¹⁰⁷ Long Willow was the fireseason spirit for the village before Quick Rabbit. Ousted spirits often try to exact vengeance against the villagers that have abandoned them.

¹⁰⁸ Wind Dogs and Night Hunters - spirits of darkness that can only easily manifest during Darkseason or Sacred Time nights. They are usually restricted to certain locations such as the Quick Rabbit Run.

¹⁰⁹ The Emperor of the Night is an arbitrary god, the ruler of the underworld by day and the surface world by night. He receives no worship, but is known to manifest occasionally in Sacred Time. Yelem spends much effort righting the wrongs created by the Emperor.

¹¹⁰ one of the village children

But Piritin¹¹¹ was ever a wily man and you know his blood passed on to Belhar the Elder¹¹². He, though despised by all the village men, was the only man to make his way round shadows and through grasping trees to come to Ash Knoll.

And when he reached it, he took a stand between the Emperor of the Night and the children.

Piritin asked for a boon. The Emperor denied it. Piritin asked for justice. The Emperor just laughed and ignored it. Piritin asked for a wager. The Emperor smiled and accepted it, for he ruled over Luck and knew he could not lose.

Piritin bet that only he, of all assembled, could catch Quick Rabbit that night. The Emperor agreed. But when the Emperor made to take Quick Rabbit from the children and bind them, Piritin held up his hand.

"You agreed that all assembled should try to catch Quick Rabbit. The children are assembled, therefore they should also try to catch him."

The Emperor agreed that this was so. When Piritin came to the child carrying Quick Rabbit, he told all of them to dash for the village as soon as all others started after Quick Rabbit.

Piritin turned back to the Emperor with Quick Rabbit in hand. "See, I have already caught Quick Rabbit. Now lets see if you can catch him." With that Piritin released Quick Rabbit and Quick Rabbit started with a great dash and jump, right over the assembled shadows. The assembly dashed after, all except the children, who ran for the village as fast as they could.

Piritin, though, followed the trail of Quick Rabbit. When Long Willow was about to catch Quick Rabbit, Piritin called out to Long Willow. Long Willow turned just so, and Piritin looked him square in the eye. Long Willow's branches caught in his roots and came tumbling down right into the creek and could not right himself.

When the Wind Dogs were about to catch Quick Rabbit, Piritin called out to the lead dog. The leader of the Wind Dogs turned just so, and Piritin looked him square in the eye. The leader of the Wind Dogs stumbled and all the other Wind Dogs crashed into the leader and they could not free themselves.

When the Night Hunters were about to catch Quick Rabbit, Piritin called out to the Night Hunters. The Night Hunters turned just so, and Piritin looked at them square in the eyes. The Night Hunters cloak's caught in the shadowy branches. When they raised their whips, their whips caught too and they could not go on without their whips and cloaks.

When the Emperor of the Night was about to catch Quick Rabbit, Piritin called out to the Emperor. The Emperor refused to turn his head though or look Piritin in the eye. So Piritin flung a jagged rock as hard as he could and hit the Emperor square in the back of the head, knocking him right out.

¹¹¹ Piritin was the village trickster at the time, probably a worshipper of Yurmaliu, a wily god who often steals the luck of others.

¹¹² Belhar the Elder was a more recent villager who won a farm from his brother in a famous dice match.

Now only Piritin was left to run after Quick Rabbit. And he called out to the Quick Rabbit and the Quick Rabbit turned just so. Piritin looked him square in the eye, too, and Quick Rabbit caught his foot in a hole in the ground. Piritin came up, pulled Quick Rabbit out and carried him back to the village.

Thus was Quick Rabbit first honored in Moonpost, but never again did the children wait to go hunting Quick Rabbit, and they always make sure they get back before sunset, lest they be caught by the Emperor of the Night and his minions or hear the sad wailings of poor little Hudor.

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Tamorongo and the Rock Eater by Nils Weinander

This happened in the bad time of the Nightmare. The evil ones wanted to destroy our island and kill our ancestors. To protect us weak mortals Tamorongo told us to hide in the deep caves of his mountain. So we lived in the caves. They were dark and cold, but our ancestors were crafty and took a bowl of burning liquid rock from the fires of Mingemelor over on Mingai. That bowl provided them with both warmth and light. While our ancestors were hiding, Tamorongo sat on the top of the mountain and watched for any and all danger.

When an evil one approached Tamoro, he stepped down to the shore, with his mighty axe and his trusty shield. Thus he turned away all intruders. Then came the Rock Eater. It is a monster, terrible to behold. Its legs are thicker than trees, its skin black and hard as rock and its teeth are like great chisels of a metal brighter than silver and harder than iron. When the Rock Eater approached Tamoro, Tamorongo stepped down from his seat on the mountain and met it at the shore.

"Who are you?" Tamorongo shouted, "and what is your business on Tamoro?"

"I am the Rock Eater" the RockEater said, "and I have come to take your weapons, to rule this island and to eat that mountain".

"That I cannot allow" said Tamorongo "for this is my island and my mountain".

"Then you must take up my challenge," said theRock Eater.

"So be it," answered Tamorongo.

"First I challenge you for your weapons. You must beat me at burrowing to keep them". In the sea beside Tamoro there were four small rocky islands where nobody lived. The Rock Eater pointed at one of them, "You burrow through that island, I'll take the one beside it".

So Tamorongo laid down his axe and his shield and took up his mining tools instead. He set to work as fast as he could and burrowed straight through the island from one side to the other. When he was done he called to the Rock Eater,

"Well Rock Eater, now I have burrowed all through the island, how far have you come?".

"Look for yourself," said the Rock Eater. And Tamorongo looked at the island the Rock Eater had chosen. It was all riddled through with caves of all sizes and the wind whistled a sad tune when it ran through the holes. So Tamorongo had to surrender his weapons to the Rock Eater who swallowed them promptly.

"Now I challenge you for your island," said the Rock Eater. "You must beat me at eating to keep it". The Rock Eater pointed to third of the small islands, "You take that one, I'll take the one beside it".

So Tamorongo went to the third island and started to eat the sand of the beach. When he had eaten all the sand he looked up to see how far the Rock Eater had come. The monster had gulped down the entire island and was gleefully watching our god. So Tamorongo had to surrender our island.

"Now I challenge you for the pitiful mortals hiding in the caves" said the Rock Eater. "You must beat me in a match of strength to keep them".

"That I will do" said Tamorongo and seized the Rock Eater by the neck. Back and forth they pulled and pushed and heaved but neither could win. Then Tamorongo thought of our ancestors and how they would suffer if the Rock Eater won them too. This thought lent him their strength and he cast down the Rock Eater and trod on its neck.

"Now evil monster I have won,"he said triumphantly, "and if you don't do as I say I will kill you". So Tamorongo forced the Rock Eater to spit out his weapons and then he chained the monster and forced it to work for him. Thus the Rock Eater burrowed into the mountain and made our ancestors' caves larger and more comfortable and then it chewed out the Stairs of Glass so that they could walk down the mountain once the Nightmare was over. Then Tamorongo faced other enemies and had to release the Rock Eater, but that is another story.

What you should learn from this one is the same things that Tamorongo learned from his bout with the Rock Eater: betting on more than you can afford is bad but with the help of your people your strength is supreme.

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A Tarshite Joke by Roderick Robertson

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-Digest June 23, 2003)

A young Tarshite lad and lassie were sitting on a low stone wall, holding hands, and just gazing out over the view. For several minutes they sat silently, then finally the girl looked at the boy and said, "A penny for your thoughts, Torkal."

"Well, uh, I was thinking'.... perhaps it's about time for a wee kiss."

The girl blushed, then leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Then he blushed.

Then the two turned once again to gaze out over the view. After a while the girl spoke again. "Another penny for your thoughts, Torkal."

"Well, uh, I was thinkin' perhaps it's noo about time for a wee cuddle."

The girl blushed, then leaned over and cuddled him for a few seconds.

Then he blushed.

Then the two turned once again to gaze out over the view. After a while the girl spoke again. "Another penny for your thoughts, Torkal."

"Well, uh, I was thinkin.' ... perhaps it's about time you let me poot ma hand on your leg."

The girl blushed, then took his hand and put it on her knee. Then he blushed.

Then the two turned once again to gaze out over the view. After a while the girl spoke again. "Another penny for your thoughts, Torkal."

The young man knit his brow. "Well, now," he said, "My thoughts are a bit more serious this time.

"Really?" said the girl in a whisper, filled with anticipation.

"Aye," said the lad. The girl looked away in shyness, began to blush, and bit her lip in anticipation of the ultimate request.

"Din'na ye think it's about time ye paid me the first three pennies?"

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The Test of the Water Dog by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest September 15, 2003)

Author's Notes: From the Verenmars Saga

Verenmars returned to Goramshold and asked of his own people, the Wentorth, "I would bring you together with all the folk of Saird. Though I now rule you, I would ask you to make Saird strong and throw off the yoke of Empire and dark shadows."

The Lawspeaker replied, "Tell us what you would propose and we will listen."

Verenmars told his own people of his plans for the Erindamic Council until the Lawspeaker nodded. "It is a good plan and we will accept if you can prove to us that you are worthy."

"Very well," said Verenmars.

"To prove your worth," said the Lawspeaker, "We ask that you perform one task: to free the river of a knot which confounds us."

Verenmars agreed and swam into the river of the Blue Serpent. He came to the place where the knot was and dove deep in that spot to examine the knot. But when Verenmars had reached the verge of the deepest point, he was seized in the mouth of the Garaship.

The Garaship said, "You smell of rich blood and great power. I fear it is time for me to eat you. It has been too long since I've tasted good flesh." And so the Garaship swallowed Verenmars.

Verenmars lodged his spear in the throat of the Garaship, though, until the Garaship spat him back out.

The Garaship said then, "You taste of rich blood and great power. You have stymied me once, but I fear it is time for me to eat you. It has been too long since I've tasted good flesh." And so the Garaship swallowed Verenmars again.

Verenmars seized the uvula then and tickled the throat of the Garaship until the Garaship gagged and spat him back out.

The Garaship said then, "You taste of rich blood and great power. You have stymied me twice, but I fear it is time for me to eat you for good. It has been too long since I've tasted good flesh." And so the Garaship prepared to swallow Verenmars again.

But Verenmars replied, "Why eat me now? If you let me go, I promise that my people will honor you."

"Ah," said the Garaship, "but they already offer me their tasteless prayers. I am bored with such dull and lifeless food. It is you I will eat, for you taste of rich blood and great power and good flesh."

Verenmars replied, "Then if you must eat me, I would ask for one boon."

"Ah," said the Garaship, "I can do that, but it must not relate to your escape from me or to my own demise."

Verenmars said, "It does not. I merely ask that you allow me to scratch and stroke your head."

"Ah," said the Garaship, "Then your boon is granted."

Verenmars scratched and stroked the head of the Garaship until it was practically asleep. Then Verenmars stopped.

"Ah," said the Garaship, "I was almost asleep, but then you stopped. I would have more of that."

Verenmars replied, "But I am ready to be eaten now. However, if you do not eat me, then I can scratch and stroke your head more."

The Garaship thought upon this for a time and finally said, "Very well. Though you smell of rich blood and taste of great power and look of good flesh, I shall not eat you, for I like this head scratching and seek more of it."

Verenmars said, "For your generosity and for my passage beyond, I would pledge this, that my people shall not only offer you prayer, but shall also scratch and stroke your head provided you do not eat them."

The Garaship accepted this and granted passage beyond. Verenmars gave the Garaship the Law of Friendship in return.

So Verenmars dove again, now down below the verge of the deepest part. He entered into a cave that he found there, though it was held in darkness. He followed a trail from the cave, though it was washed of all scent. And he came to a place where an old hag sat beside a loom. She was loathly, but Verenmars held his eyes and looked upon her. She wailed a song of sorrow and perpetual gloom, but Verenmars opened his ears and listened to it. She was tireless and never stopped, but Verenmars took up the threads and passed them to her without making a single mistake. And Verenmars kept watching her, listening to her, and aiding her until the tapestry she wove was complete.

The hag smiled her loathly smile and cackled a dolorous laugh and said to Verenmars "I ask who is it that can bear my sight and can hear my song and can aid my task?"

Verenmars answered her with his truth, "I am called Verenmars by some, and Dog by others, but I know that to myself I am but the Voice and Hands of the Heart God."

"Then you know much already," answered the crone. "For your help I will offer you my own gifts, if you know what you seek."

"I seek to untie the Knot of the Blue Serpent."

"Then take these items in your quest," she replied as she drew three items from her bag. "These are the Eyes of Discernment. Three times may you invoke them to clarify your sight. This is the Blade of Separation, which you may use but once. And this is the Lamentation of the Siren, whose use you must feel in your heart, if you are indeed the Voice and Hands of the Heart God."

Verenmars took these gifts and left the hag, passing through the Unnamed Arch. The Blue Arms, which sought to tear him asunder, seized him then, pinioning his arms and seeking his soul. His eyes were plucked, but he freed his arms and placed the Eyes of Discernment in his own bare sockets to clarify his view. He saw through the Blue Arms to their very joints and ripped apart those arms and retrieved his own eyes.

He swam forward then into the swirling waters, but the Twin Snakes of Ardethos coiled their tails about him and squeezed his breath from him. But he used the Eyes of Discernment again to clarify his view and saw how the Twin Snakes wove themselves around him. He opened wide his mouth and ate the head of

each snake in turn. Each tail fell away and Verenmars gained the breath of the Twin Snakes of Ardethos for his own.

He swam forward once again, but a haze and peace descended upon him, comforting him in the Blue Grotto. He struggled against the peace and calm and used the Eyes of Discernment for the third time to clarify his view. Now within the Blue Grotto, he saw the Blue Lovers, Yerdetha and Galpolin, with arms and tails embracing in their never-ending love. Now did Verenmars recognize in his heart the time for the Blade of Separation, though the love of Yerdetha and Galpolin was beautiful and wondrous.

Verenmars raised the Blade of Separation and cut down, straight between Yerdetha and Galpolin, so that it separated their lips, their arms, and severed the member of Galpolin so that it stayed in Yerdetha. Galpolin screamed in agony and loss. Yerdetha cursed in rage and frustration. The lamentation of the river folk was loud and overwhelming and called on him, if he had a heart to hear the Lamentation of the Siren. But Verenmars did not hold the feeling in his heart and instead he released the breath of the Twin Snakes of Ardethos, which drove the two wounded lovers apart, and he rose from the water's depth.

When Verenmars returned to the surface of the Blue Waters, he found that the knot was gone from the river.

Verenmars returned to his people. He spoke to the Lawspeaker and the Wentorth then of his deeds and actions and they marveled at his prowess. He spoke to the Lawspeaker and the Wentorth then of his gifts and they marveled at this rewards. He spoke to the Lawspeaker and the Wentorth then of the beauty of the love of Yerdetha and Galpolin, the horror of their separation, and the feelings in his heart. And only then did he release the Lamentation of the Siren, which overwhelmed the hearts and minds of all present.

When all tears had been shed and had flowed into the streams of the world, the Lawspeaker said with sadness in his heart, "You have fared well, relieving us of a great knot and bringing a friend to our people. Thus we must accept your offer for you have proved yourself worthy, though I fear our hearts have been torn in two, and that you have released an undying sadness into the world."

"And you my people," replied Verenmars "have proved your loyalty by your test. I myself shall take the Water Dog seat of the Council."

Verenmars then himself took up a torch and an arm ring, a necklace and a sard. He took up the talisman of the Water Dog, imbued with the deepest friendship and greatest grief, a friendship based upon the power of loyalty and trust and bound with the grief of the heart. Thus was the last seat of the Council filled by Verenmars, ruler of the Wentorth tribe along the great river valley from Goramshold to the Palace of Riverjoins.

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A Troll Adoption Myth by James Frusetta

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest January 6, 1997)

When the Uz fled Wonderhome after the Great Sunny One showed up and spoiled the place, many tribes found themselves lost and abandoned in a world full of enemies. To these tribes came Trickster, who listened sympathetically over a mug or two.

"Listen," he said, "you're surely in trouble, for there's nothing better that the surface folk like to do than kill trolls."

There was much lamenting at this, and the Elders begged him to aid them.

"Well, sure." Trickster took off his skin, and showed the Elders how they could take off their skins, too. Then he brought them some fine Human skins. It took a little tugging to pull them on, but in the end each of the Trolls marveled that they did, in fact, look like humans.

"Now you're safe," said Trickster, "Because all that see you will think you're humans. When you find your friends and families, just call me and I'll bring you your real skins." So the Elders took off the skin of each troll, and replaced it with a human skin.

It took many years for the lost tribes to find their fellows, but one day they finally stood beneath the Castle of Lead itself. They crowded up to the gate, eagerly crying to be let in, but the gate guards refused to let humans inside. The lost trolls laughed, and cried out for Eurmál to come with their real skins.

And waited.

Soon their laughter turned to tears when they realized Eurmál was not going to return their real skins, and they would not be able to enter the castle. Xiola Umbar heard their cries, and felt sorrow. She took two great vats of Skullbuster, and set out to find Eurmál. She had many adventures in doing so, but finally found Eurmál at some mischief, somewhere.

At first, Eurmál refused to bargain with the goddess. But he could hardly resist the lure of liquor, and secretly believed that no other being could match his capacity for alcohol. So he agreed that if Xiola Umbar could outdrink him, he would return the skins.

Thus agreed, they began to drink. Xiola Umbar took careful little sips, and healed the damage incurred. Eurmál swallowed the contents of the vat in one gulp, and grinned at her.

Then his head exploded.

Xiola Umbar had been expecting this, and caught the head as it flew off. Despite Eurmál's angry demands, she refused to return it until he told her how to make the Lost Trolls proper Uz again. Eurmál had long ago bargained away the troll skins, but he knew another way, which he told her. And this is how the Lost Trolls were reborn as trolls. They still looked a little funny, because Eurmál did not know how to completely fix them, but everything that matters was again trollish. The goddess generously healed Eurmál's head, and though he was resentful at first, he later agreed it was a fine joke.

Occasionally, one of the Lost Trolls is reborn, and through perseverance may rejoin the family of Kyger Litor through the adoption rites.

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Tunoral's First Mask by Harald Smith

(As originally appeared in the HeroQuest-RPG Digest September 09, 2003)

Author's Notes: One of the tales of Tunoral's early adventures.

Tunoral was a minor figure at the great court of Heliakal and Reladiva. He was dutiful and tidied up after his betters, but no one paid him any attention. He was never known to say a word and few knew he was even there. He hoped that the maids of Reladiva would give him some attention, but they didn't, preferring the company of the companion dogs. Tunoral envied the companion dogs, for they accompanied their mistresses everywhere and curled up beside Reladiva's maids when the latter slept. Tunoral wished to be one of them so that he could receive the maid's affection and also satisfy his desire for them.

In the days after the shadows were revealed, Tunoral was tidying up when he found the discarded shadow of a companion dog. Tunoral had his own shadow, but he picked this discarded shadow up and tried it on, putting it even over his eyes. He went on his way, wearing this new shadow. Others greeted him as if he were a companion dog, too. Tunoral then got an idea. When all the maids of Reladiva slept, Tunoral, wearing the dog shadow, stole into the room of Negalla, one of the maids. She awoke briefly as he lay down next to her, but she was comforted to see that a companion had joined her. She stroked his fur and scratched his ears before she lay down to sleep with Tunoral beside her. She thought Tunoral slept, too, though he was fully awake.

Tunoral's desire came upon him then. He stroked the sleeping Negalla as she had stroked him and stirred her desire. Then Tunoral entered her, but Negalla came awake then and cried out, for this was not the action of a companion! Tunoral fled, though not before Negalla seized the dog shadow. The shadow was torn from Tunoral, leaving only a ragged bit covering his face. Other companion dogs heard Negalla's cried and came barking after Tunoral. Tunoral climbed into the trees that then covered the land and made his escape.

Tunoral found a quiet place away from the dogs high in the branches of the trees where he could rest and sleep. When he awoke, he found that the ragged bit of shadow still clung to his face, a dark mask across his eyes. He tried to remove it but while it would stretch and shrink making new shapes, it would not come off. Thus, did Tunoral gain his first mask. And the children which Negalla bore were also marked with the mask of Tunoral--thus they were called the masked dogs or raccoons.

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A Vadeli Short Story by Hervé Carteau

(As originally appears in the World of Glorantha List September 11, 2012).

"Again and again with the hatred..." sighed the brown Vadeli Abdalcar, sitting on the waterfront while checking his ship's inventory of trade goods. Thirty-four prime quality young human slaves, no thirty-three, one had been too damaged by last night's rite to be presented for sale - but he'd provide a proper meal or two. Four hundred and fifty-eight ounces of Black Lotus dust. Always a sure sell, these little packages. The scent alone drove customers mad. Oh yes, and the four springblade jagged swords from Fonrit - truly weapons of choice for any self-respecting assassin. And his favorite, the illusory pocket paradise - worth a mortal king's ransom and with so little side effects. Today's market was promising.

The young man, obviously well-off, had enquired about passage to faraway Pamaltela. He looked like he held some promise of amusement on the long way back - but he had to be reassured, quieted, lulled even before agreeing to talk about business. Well, Vadel had taught His people to remain courteous, always, to mortals, pagans and other animals. So Abdalcar began talking.

"We were always a Logical people, one of Malkion's own. We did study the Laws as deeply and rigorously as any Brithini. And then we acted on them, and remade the world a better place. Now all we want is to enjoy the fruits of our work and prosper - excuse me.

Yes, Sir? Indeed, we can and do help gentlemen down on hard times. How much would you need? Why, step on board to discuss the matter with my accountant. Collateral? Why, nothing more than a few of your hairs and, perhaps, a tooth, depending on the amount.

Sorry. Where was I? Ah, yes, the hatred. We have helped so many to rise over the years... the stories I could tell you... but, we are also professionals and never betray a customer's secrets to another. Vadeli service is Golden, they say. And we always provide what you need when in dire straits, or almost exactly (muffled scream from inside the ship).

(Aforementioned gentleman staggers out of the ship, blood trickling on his lower jaw, holding a hefty bag making metallic noises). "Well, Sir, there was nothing to it wasn't it? And now please do remember, if by great unluck you could not bring us back this sum with due interest before the next full moon, then the full penalty clauses will apply! Good day and best of luck in your endeavours Good Sir!

Sorry again. As you can see, many come to the Honest, Hard-Working Vadeli to get what they need. As for our private rites - well, don't the Brithini Tap anything alive? Don't they ruin the Work of God? Don't stygians copulate with trolls? Doesn't dread Theoblanc the living saint indulge in arkati oysters to prolong his allotted lifespan? And would you care to guess who he turns to supply him with the precious mollusks? Yes indeed, I can see that you know.

Now to your business, Kind Sir - and I must thank you for having the patience to have listened for so long to an old man's ramblings. What can you offer for my excellent ship and crew to carry you across Magasta's body?

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Waertag and the Malasps by Ian Cunningham

(As originally appeared on the World of Glorantha group. March 24, 2008).

In the name of Malkion, the Prophet and First Man, Most Blessed of Makan, by whom all things are possible, this is a story of the time before History. Blessed are those who hear and obey its lessons.

Waertag was one of Malkion's oldest children, born to him by the Queen of the Merfolk, and the first man to build both boat and ship. His rival was his youngest brother Vadel, who envied Waertag his father's love. Waertag sailed and explored, but remained within the laws of his Father, while Vadel tried to impress Malkion by sailing beyond the world into those places forbidden by God. They fought many times, never gaining the upper hand over one another.

One time, Vadel had stolen powerful magic from Zzabur, a spell that would bind the sylphs and the cumulides and the very fulgurids of the sky-dome to whisk his ship anywhere in the world. Vadel wanted to use this spell to appear in the middle of Waertag's shipyard and destroy his fleet. Keep in mind that this was before Waertag had tamed the Dragonships, and many wise men say that this even is why Waertag sought ships more powerful than vessels made of wood and pitch. So, Vadel spoke the runes of the Sorceror Supreme, and with a roar of the wind and lashing of angry rain, found himself transported to The Dock, which is where Waertag dwelled when not at sea. Vadel began to smash and destroy as much as he could; Waertag, ever protective of his creations, rushed to their defense. When the elder brother grasped his younger and began to wrench at Vadel's arms, Vadel grew very afraid and invoked Zzabur's runes again. To Vadel's great terror, Waertag held on. But because he was not protected by the Great Wizard's magic, the Cumulides grabbed Waertag and threw him into the ocean.

Waertag was the first shipbuilder, and he had soon created a serviceable raft from driftwood and seaweed. He began to sail home, plotting revenge against his brother. (see how soon the seeds of Error are planted!) Waertag was in the warm oceans at the very eastern borders of Lost Danmalastan, and did not lack for food as he journeyed, and his magic allowed him to drink the seawater with no ill effect! But soon, he found himself surrounded by horrible merfolk. Green and scaled, faces that do not know love or joy or Solace, finned and clawed, and terrible they were, and they grabbed Waertag's raft to stop it. "Why do you blaspheme against Magasta and Triolina your mother by breathing the accursed air and disturbing the mirrored sea?!", they cried. "We shall tear this blasphemy apart, and we shall tear YOU apart!" Waertag was sore afraid, and began to pray to Malkion, blessed be his name. The merfolk, who were called Malasp because of their hateful attitude, were held motionless as the great power of the First Man descended upon the raft. When His spirit had left, there were five items on the deck.

The first, a bronze sword. Waertag, in his wisdom, did not fight the Malasp with it, for surely they would have then dragged him below the waves. He instead offered it to the fiercest of the merfolk, explaining that forged metal was much more powerful than the coral it wielded. The merman quickly took the sword and swam away, later to slay one of the Gloomshark's spawn with it. Second, a bottle of kvass. He offered the most sour of the merfolk a drink, and upon the first taste of such sweetness, the fish-man snatched the bottle away to drink it all by himself. Next, a loaf of good rye bread. The sharp teeth and savage mien of the merfolk led Waertag not to offer it to those who threatened him, but to instead

break the loaf and cast it upon the waters. So many fish came to the surface to eat it, that one of the merfolk whooped their strange call of joy and ignored the raft to cast his net after the bounty. The fourth item, a ball of lead, heavy and dark. The keenest of the Merfolk had been eyeing for all this time, and Waertag asked, "Do you desire this? It is yours, a gift of friendship." The Malasp, whose shiver was at this time being threatened by the Krjalki, took the lead ball, and quickly sank beneath the waves.

This left one of the savage Mermen, who glared at Waertag contemptuously. "I cannot be bribed, or tricked, or enticed by sweets or glory. I am the chieftan and I will not countenance you." The fifth item was a simple scaling knife, wickedly sharp but too short to fight with. Waertag thought, and finally... "Chieftan, I would not presume to think such of you. I propose that in exchange for your forbearance, I and my children and my children's children, unto the return of the White Moon, will offer these gifts to your people whenever we meet them. You cannot be bribed or tricked, but I offer only tribute to you who are the most gifted of the sea." And to prove his sincerity, Waertag cut his palm with the scaling knife, and sealed this promise in blood with the merfolk.

This satisfied the malasp, and Waertag was free to sail home. And Waertag's skin grew green and blue, and scales could be found on his children, because of this oath; the Malasp, to their horror, discovered that they, too, could breathe air after this. But even now, in the clutches of History, even after Waertag, grown cold and proud and beholden to strange Gods, descended into the Underworld, even after the Closing and Dormal's Seven Voyages, this oath holds, and tribute is paid for safe passage in the warm waters. And none shall break it, save the Invisible God, in whom all things are possible, and the White Moon, whose coming will shatter all oaths.

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Wahanie the Bull by Daniel Fahey

(Wahanie is a Praxian Bison-Rider who is a follower of the Storm Bull, who hates chaos. His followers can sense the presence of chaotic distortions in the world. Bullsitch are chaotic fist-sized insects which bite. Streams are considered by Praxians to be serpents.)

One day while he was riding thru an empty serpent track, Wahanie sensed the presence of chaos up on an overhang, and up near the edge he saw a small cave, and from the cave came a loud buzzing-noise. Wahanie the Bull rode his Bison over to the side, put his hand on his lance and began to think. First of all he said to himself: "That buzzing-noise means something. You don't get a buzzing-noise like that from a chaos thing without its meaning something. If there's a buzzing-noise, something's making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for a chaos thing to be making a buzzing-noise is because it's a bullsitch."

Then he thought another long time, and said: "And the only reason for being a bullsitch is to be evil." And then he rose in his stirrups, and said: "And the only reason for being evil is so as I can kill it." So he stood on his mount's back and began to climb the bank.

It was only a small cliff and he only needed to climb an Impala-Rider's height but as he put his weight on a ledge, the ledge gave way and Wahanie fell face-first onto a cactus. "It all comes, I suppose, of wanting to kill chaos so much," he decided.

He pulled the needles from his nose and began to think again, and the first person he thought of was Krarsht-Hater Robon. So Wahanie the Bull went round to his friend Krarsht-Hater Robon, who lived in a green-painted tent in another part of the camp.

"Robon," he said, "I'm going to use your wife's High Llama."

"What do you want to use my wife's High Llama for?" said Robon.

Wahanie looked around to see that nobody was listening and whispered:

"Chaos!"

"But you don't get chaos with herd animals!"

"I do," said Wahanie.

They set out with the High Llama while Wahanie explained.

"Won't they notice you standing on the High Llama?" asked Robon.

"They might or they might not," said Wahanie. "You never can tell with chaos."

Wahanie climbed up on the High Llama's back and found his head level with the cave-mouth and half a lance-length away. Neither of the Bison Riders had any experience with High Llamas (except for aiming their lances angled up to hit the riders) and neither could get the stupid beast to move closer to the cliff. Wahanie could see the insects, he could sense their chaos, but he couldn't quite reach them.

After a little while he called down to Robon saying, "I think the bullsitch suspect something!"

"What sort of thing?" asked Robon.

"I don't know. But something tells me that they're suspicious!"

"Perhaps they think that you want to kill them."

"It may be that. You never can tell with chaos."

The bullsitch were beginning to buzz rather suspiciously. Some of them, indeed, left their nest and flew round the Praxian and one sat down on his nose for a moment, and then got up again.

"Krarsht-Hater-ow!-Robon!" called out Wahanie.

"Yes?"

"I have just been thinking," said Wahanie, "and I have come to a very important decision. I won't be able to kill these chaos creatures while standing on the back of this High Llama unless it moves closer to the cliff."

"Won't you?"

"No," answered Wahanie, so I suggest you hit the High Llama in such a way as to drive it toward the cliff. Do you happen to have a stick by you?"

"No," said Robon, "but there are many rocks in this wash. Shall I try throwing them at the High Llama?"

"Please do," said Wahanie.

Robon aimed very carefully at the High Llama and threw.

"Ow!" said Wahanie.

"Did I miss?" Robon asked.

"You didn't exactly miss," said Wahanie, "but you missed the High Llama."

"Well, no loss then," said Robon, and threw again, and this time landed his rock directly in the cave, and the bullsitch all came slowly out. Soon the bullsitch were stinging the High Llama so that the poor beast went running off into the wastes, never to be seen again, and Wahanie discovered that the cactus needles that he'd plucked from his nose had already grown back.

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What Happened to the False Dragon Ring by Sandy Petersen

As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest January 18, 1995

Author's Note: Here is yet another Kralori story, that I hope you like.

Once four scholars lived happily in Laonon Tao. One day they decided to travel. "What use is scholarship," they reasoned. "If we do not gain the favor of rich nobles and acquire much money? We can never become rich living here."

They journeyed until they found the dry bones of some deceased creature. They looked at it and said, "Behold, a chance to prove our scholarship. Here lies a beast, dead, lo these many months. Let us bring it to life by means of our wisdom, honestly obtained." The first wise man said, "I can put together the skeleton properly, joining ankle to knee to hip." The second wise man said, "I can supply skin, flesh, and organs." The third wise man said, "I can give it life." The fourth wise man was silent.

So the first assembled the skeleton, the second formed skin, flesh, and organs. But while the third was laboring on the breath of life, the fourth wise man looked hard at the remade corpse, and suddenly blurted out. "This is a nandi beast! If you bring him to life, he will kill every one of us." "You fool!", said

the third wise man. "I shall not quit and reduce all our scholarship to nullity." "Then," said the fourth. "Give me leave to climb this tree before you complete your task." When this was done, the nandi beast was restored to life, and killed the first three scholars. Once it had gorged itself, it went elsewhere, and the fourth wise man climbed down and went home.

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Why I Hate Cows - a Pentan Shaman Speaks by Peter Metcalfe

(This story first appeared in the World of Glorantha mailing list October 07, 2012).

You ask what have the Cows done to me that I should hate them so? That is not the right question. The real question is what have I not done to the Cows to make them fitting of me?

You have heard it said, no doubt by that idiot Khan and others, that Hyalor found a sky creature broken by others and made it the first horse. This tale is lies believed only by those fit for tending slaves. Hippoi was an evil monster that gorged itself on the flesh of the first people. You may still find her kind in the depths of our land if you are unlucky enough. With the might of Kargzant in him, Hyalor sought Hippoi out and broke it to make the First Slave, our horses. Others followed Hyalor's path and made more slaves so that our kin may have children, fight with weapons of bronze and iron and so on even though they do not deserve it.

This will be your duty should you chose to follow me - to make new slaves of the monsters that plague us and our kin. There will be nothing that we cannot break. The demons of the north were once strong and mighty until we broke them. Now they spawn the most weakest of wretches and tremble with fear whenever we are near. The Dead of Orathorn wanted to drink the blood of our kin but we broke them to be the basest of slaves. Everything in our land that makes our kin strong is there because we fought the monsters and broke them into our slaves.

Everything that is except for the cows, they were never broken. Our kin found them in a strange land and brought them back to make their lives easier. They refuse to let us break them because the resulting slaves were no good. And so our land is blighted by these creepy monsters with their weird unblinking eyes, their horns of sharp doom, their evil plotting while they chew their cud and their hideous udders...

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Why I Hate Lunars by Andrew Solovay

--by an anonymous Uz of the Blue Moon Plateau.

Okay, first off, I want you to notice the title. That's "Why *I* Hate Lunars", first person singular. All the Mothers and shamans and bosses back home just *loooove* the Lunars. And that's why I'm keeping my name to myself.

Now, me, I'm just an ordinary uzko. When I'm home, I do what the missus says. When it bugs me, I just volunteer for the next patrol or raid, get a little personal time, maybe beat in a few heads, y'know? Or like now, I sign on with a caravan, pick up a few bolgs, get to darksee the world. Let the other husbands look after the brats for a while. But when I'm home, I don't look for trouble, and it doesn't look for me. So I keep my mouth shut about politics.

But, Hell, we aren't on the Plateau, I can talk here. So I'm telling you straight--those Lunars are bastards, every one of 'em. Team up with one and you're just begging for a crescent-shaped dagger in your ribs.

Not for the reasons you think, though. Out here, everyone just thinks "Lunars = chaos = bastards". That isn't the story. Or at least, it's more complicated than that.

The Lunars use chaos, but it's not like they **like** it. They find a hundred-foot mutant bat that spits acid and eats souls, and they say, "Why, it would be very nice if he spent some quality time with the Heortlings." Well, that's just common sense. Those Orlanthi nuts, they'll say, "If you let chaos fight your enemies, it's like you're **siding** with chaos! It's better to let chaos eat **you**, that way everyone will know you're against it!" Yeah, whatever floats yer boat, chief. You get to fight the Crimson Bat all you like, hope it makes you happy.

No, my problem with the moonboys goes deeper. It all goes down to belief. What do **we** believe, and what do **they** believe?

I'll tell you what they believe: Fuck-all.

See, when they come up to the Plateau, they make it sound all nice and uzish. But I get out more than the Moms do. I hear what the Lunars tell everyone else, and I get to compare notes.

They first got going with all those sunboys down Dara Happa way. Out there, they tell everyone the Moon's a sky god. Like the sun, you know? Just a little lower and, y'know, redder. Set up a nice little Solar Emperor named Moonson (how's that for splitting the difference?). Slavery? Patriarchy? Inflexible class system? Long oily beards? You bet!

That's the Lunar Way!

Then they get some missionaries up to us, and they explain how the Moon Goddess is just slowly, patiently, trying to endarken those belighted Solars. Breaking 'em in by easy stages, you know. No, see, the Moon Goddess is a **darkness** goddess! Hangs out in the night sky, just like the **real** moon does. Turns from red to black, symbolizing, I dunno, symbolizing the redarkening of Wonderhome or something, give 'em a minute and they'll write you a myth.

That all sounds well and good, 'till I sign on to escort one of their caravans back to Glamour. Couple of sunboy mercs on that caravan, too--well, live and let live, long as they don't go looking for trouble. But they go complaining to the Lunar priest about having a "troll" on the team. And you know how loud hoomanz talk, I hear what he tells them--that the Red Moon, the Light which shines in Darkness

(ptooey), is gradually "enlightening" the DarkMen. That we'll all see the advantages of the Solar way, that we'll start farming and paying taxes and bossing our wives around just like good Lunars.

It gets better. The caravan didn't stop in Glamour, we made it all the way out West. By then I'd learned to keep my ears open, and, well, those hoomanz do talk loud. Plus I'm playing the dumb he-troll bit, you know, "Me much hungry, me smash head now", so they don't watch what they say around me. There, they explain that the Seven Mothers are actually *saints*. They believe in the One Invisible God, and they give sorcerous magic to all good Lunar monotheists. Didn't hear how they explain the big red thing in the sky, but they sure didn't call it a "goddess" out there. Probably explained that it was a new, showy kind of saint's-node.

Make a swing through Dorastor on the way back (and let me tell you, everything you heard about that place, triple it--you'll get some idea). Out there, the priests explain to everyone that the Red Moon is Chaos Triumphant or Entropy Resurgent or the ReBirth of Gorp or something. Join the Lunars, rape the world.

Beginning to see a pattern here? Out Prax way, the Moon is a Great Spirit. I'm sure when they get to Kralorela, they'll explain that the Moon is the Sky-Dragon's Arsehole or something.

Now, I never could make much sense out of hooman religion. Some of them talk about "souls" and some talk about "spirits" and whenever they try to sort it out they start fighting--gives me a headache. But whether they're right or not, at least they usually know what they believe, and they'll tell you. But those Lunars'll just tell you what you want to hear, every time.

Know how to tell when a Lunar is lying?

His lips are moving.

©2002 by Andrew Solovay

Why the Seas are Salt by Philippe Sigaud

"In the Beginning, the First Drop was Pure and Fresh. But during the Drowning of Chaos, so many good watery gods were slain, their blood and tears mingled with Ocean and Ocean was full of the blue and divine blood. Did you already taste your blood, little finned one? It is salty, and so is the whole Sea now, and the Oceans beyond that. That's the sorrow and the pain the Great Wars provoked, little one. But Magasta is Lord of Death and Life, and from this death came vengeance and life for us. Now, our seas are so salty that creatures from the Dry can't drink it and die if they dare. That is the vengeance of the Ancestors. Even if their souls have disappeared into the great beyond, their blood, their blue blood is still all around us. We are swimming in it."

© Philippe Sigaud

Why the Sea is Salty by Bo Rosén

Ah, I heard another story. This is what a fisherwoman in Esrolia told me, but I'm not sure everyone believes it there.

Long ago when it was dark everywhere and most of the Goddesses slept, chaos came slithering and jumping, crawling and running to the great Spike which stood in the center of the world. Now, the spike couldn't bear the touch of chaos on it's sides and with an BANG that could be heard everywhere it flew apart. Where that great mountain had reached for the sky and beyond, there was left the biggest hole you could imagine. And it reached all the way down into the darkest underworld, even further than the Uz live. When everyone that was still awake saw it they cried out in fear but only Magasta, the lord of the oceans did something about it. He called his children and their children and they all came rushing back to him to help him fill the hole. And everytime they pass through the hole, the blood from the wounded Earth mixes with them, and that is why the seas are salty

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The Wise Desman by Sandy Petersen

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest January 23, 1995)

A certain Exarch kept a band of desmans¹¹³ in his reflecting pool for the amusement of his son. The desmans cavorted and played, disporting themselves and enjoying life immensely.

The Exarch also kept sheep and horses. One of his elderly rams began to sneak into the kitchen, eating all he could see. When he pushed through the door, the cooks struck at him, striving to keep him out of the jellied mouse and similar delicacies.

As this feud developed, the eldest desman feared. He spoke to the other desmans. "We must flee from the Exarch's employment! I fear lest in their anger one day the cooks may strike the ram with a torch. Should this happen, his coat would surely catch afire. What if he ran to the stables, where dwell the exarch's prize horses? The sovereign remedy for horse burns is desman fat! We must flee, before this disaster strikes and we all suffer it!" "What?!" said the younger desmans. "Leave this pleasant place and go to the wilderness? Burrow in muddy riverbanks? Eat fruits puckery, sour, bitter?. Hunt fish spiny, scaly, teeming with bones? Chase frogs thin, sinewy, not of large size? Now we eat delicacies from the Exarch's son's table. We dwell in hutches made of bamboo. Your conceit is too wild, too unlikely. 'Twill never happen." "It may not be likely," said the old desman. "But you wager your life so. How many sweetmeats is existence worth?" But the others laughed him to scorn.

The old desman went to the river to live, ate wild minnows and worms, hid from fisher cats, and was exposed to all hardships. But one day the ram blundered into the kitchen and a cook, too furious to see his error, struck out with a brand from the cooking fire. At once the oily broad wool was ablaze. Baaing with terror, he fled to the stables. Most of the exarch's horses were fried alive. The few survivors,

¹¹³ What is a desman? Look it up. Small and fuzzy, for one.

burned half to death, neighed and screamed with agony in their blackened stalls. The Exarch, frantic, begged his veterinaries, and one and all they prescribed desman fat. "Take all the desmans." said the Exarch. And not one of the desmans escaped.

The old desman learned of the extermination of his friends and family, and lusted for vengeance. He wandered far and came to a mountain lake. Many animal tracks led up to the lake, but none led away. Despite his thirst and need to swim, the desman sat back and drank the lake water through a hollow reed. At once a hideous duocanth wearing a jeweled crown rose up. "Here have I dwelt for aeons, awaiting the ocean's return. None have I met who was as sage as you."¹¹⁴ The desman, amazed by the duocanth's horrendous form, asked, "What is your strength?" "Here, in my lake, I can outmatch the Emperor himself. On the shore, a hyrax can overpower me." The desman said, "Let me wear me your crown, and I will deliver many into your hands."

Now when the Exarch saw the crown, he coveted it, and had the desman brought to him. "A wondrous crown." said the Exarch. "As to that," said the desman. "I know how to get such a crown for anyone." The Exarch's eyes glazed with greed. The desman continued, "I found a secret place where, when one bathes there just at the first light of the new year, he or she comes out wearing such a crown. I will lead you there." The Exarch ordered all his household to travel to this wondrous place. After weeks of journeying, they arrived at the mountain lake just before the dawn of the new year.

"Send all your household within the water just when I say so." said the desman. "But you, O Exarch, come with me, and I will show you where the finest crowns are found."

At the desman's word, all the household leapt into the water. The Exarch was puzzled. "Why do they take so long to return?" he wondered.

The desman cackled. "You slew all my kin. Now I have done alike with you. All that leapt into the lake are gone forever. But I remembered that you are the Exarch, and not to be harmed." With that, the desman threw his crown into the lake,¹¹⁵ and scurried away from the weeping Exarch, never to be seen again.

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The Witch Cult in Western Prax and the Wastelands - Four Documents by Doyle Wayne Ramos-Tavener

(As originally appeared in the Glorantha Digest April 25, 1998)

Editor's Introduction

¹¹⁴ The duocanth is plainly referring to the Golden Age and the invasion of the land by the sea, when the rivers were first made. Presumably the implication here is that this monster was abandoned here in his lake when the sea retreated during the early Gods War. A Kralori would understand this, and also the further implication that this is a hell of an old monster and therefore mightily powerful.

¹¹⁵ Presumably returning it to the duocanth.

The following documents were found together in the green wing, which have produced a number of previously unknown manuscripts from the pre-illiteracy period.

That the documents, despite their disparate nature, were intended to be read together is obvious from the fact that they were bundled with a strong cord, constructed with variegated knots of odd appearance. There is a cover page, of sorts, made of the rich vellum of the fourth document, on which is inscribed the title, "The Witch-Cult in Western Prax and the Wastelands". I have decided to introduce each of the documents separately.

The first document seems to be an official Lunar report, from the time immediately before the Hero Wars period. The script is tight and official, and uses the old "New Pelorian" dialect. It is exceedingly short, especially compared to the other documents in the bundle.

Honored Governor,

Upon receipt of your commission, I must admit to feeling somewhat at loss. The various tribal politics, cults and social mores of the Animal Nomads of Prax have always seemed arcana beyond my humble understanding. Nonetheless, The Goddess demands that we grow in knowledge and in spirit and exceed our boundaries. Thus, I present the following report to you.

As you know, after the Battle of Moonbroth, we began to receive intelligence on how the Animal Nomads perceived their defeat. There was apparently some house cleaning in various tribes, where we suspect several powerful individuals were scapegoated for the general defeat. Of particular interest were the reports that certain Shamans were ousted and/or killed. Several times the Praxian word 'Garangi' was used in this context.

The Sable riders of the Hungry Plateau, who provide interpreters for the whole of the Corps, were unable to tell us much of the word, apart from a few crumbs. The word is a deadly insult, apparently, and it has connotations of filth. "Much like the Pelorian iskrawth", I was told, if the Governor will excuse the obscenity. Little else was known.

Armed with this knowledge (and a troop of regulars) I set out for the Moonbroth oasis, where I had information that a band of native Sable riders had temporarily encamped. Upon my arrival, I proceeded to engage various tribal elders in meetings concerning Garangi. All my efforts were rebuffed, and one junior Shaman I spoke to walked away from our meeting angrily.

Finally, a tribal elder 'suggested' that I leave the oasis, before I came to harm. It was only as I left, closely watched by half the clan's warriors, that I realized that I had broken some taboo by the mere mention of the word.

If this is truly the case, then it will be exceedingly difficult to find out anything about 'Garangi', if I am unable to bring up the subject of my inquiry in polite conversation.

Might I suggest that alternate means of discovering information about 'Garangi' be made? Much as I might wish to exceed my boundaries, I fear continued effort on this path might allow me to exceed my final boundary, which might, in the eyes of The Goddess, serve my own soul better, but would not, I fear, aid in your interrogatives.

Sincerely yours,

Nomius, Adjutant-Major to the Overseer's Staff

The following statement was inscribed at the bottom of the report, evidently after it had been written, "Post this fool to Corflu - SEA"

The next piece is somewhat more problematic, at least in determining the nature of its origin. Though it seems that it is directly connected in terms of location (Rubble, certainly) then names mentioned have to significance to us today.

The script is written in a very leisurely hand, on parchment very much like the preceding piece. This is in contrast to the somewhat savage references made.

My Dearest Brother,

As per your request, I have momentarily left off my interest in various sites of the Rubble (which in the end may serve us all well) and taken on the inquiry into this 'Garangi' matter.

A small amount of thought was all that was required to reason that a taboo is more likely to be broken outside the sight of one's fellows. Following the line of reasoning, one whom is permanently severed from his kin might reveal even more.

In Pavis, there are many outcast members of the Animal Nomads. Some are here because permanent injury has caused them to be unfit in their tribe's eyes, and they refused to submit to ritual suicide. Others are there because of broken taboos, infra-tribal warfare, or exile. Most are the scum of the earth, and most certainly, one might be found who would be able to inform me as to the nature of your inquiry.

Jaran was one such individual. He had no left arm above the elbow, and some sort of crippling injuries had devastated his legs.

To pry the information from him took a considerable amount of ale, and even then, he would reveal no information until we were within the walls of the Rubble.

He claimed that the eyes of the ancestors saw everywhere in the world, except within the Walls, which is why they were taboo. I scorned his story, and laughed at his fear, and told him that enough drink would suffice against the lies of those who had spawned him.

Thus fortified, he spoke at dreary length about those who had conspired against him, those of his tribe who had put him in the way of temptation, the Broo-wrought disease which had rotted his arm, the family which had scorned him, etc., etc.

With enough cheap ale and severe blows, he began to speak of the cause of it all.

"It was Corduz who sent us, and thus the weight of all that happened afterwards was his. Thus he should support me and mine, suffering us and my rightful place among Those Who Ride. Yet he would have none of it, and decreed that the ancestors were satisfied with the loss of my arm.

I went to the Khan, spoke openly in Council of my loss, and demanded retribution. He refused, and so then I spoke of Corduz as Garangi, for how else would the Broo know of our coming?

But my Khan wished none of it, having listened to the lies of my enemies. He grew angry, and said I should have no place in Council and Camp for three days.

On the second day of my ride, the Garangi's filth found me, and killed my mount. Then they ruined me, taking strips from my legs, so that I could ride no longer. I crawled back to Camp, but my own family saw me not, having been taken by the Garangi filth.

A trader came, and offered me food and camp if I would guide him. I agreed, much to my shame, and he left me here in this filth-town, covered in the dung of horse."

He told me a little more of the supposed ways of the Garangi, of how their 'ally' was corrupt, and solid, and how it was sent out at night to suck blood from horse, and other riding beasts, and how it whisked away the Garangi to unholy feasts, hosted by Broo, etc.

In general, his tales reminded me of the stories I heard in my youth, in Carmania, told by my nurse, who was of the old blood. Her tales of the Voidezny, which means, roughly, Old Hag, seem startlingly similar.

Perhaps some research in this area might prove helpful? I doubt seriously whether such creature as a Garangi exists among the Animal Nomads. But we should keep in mind the powerful nature of these accusations. They might prove helpful someday.

As for Jaran, put your mind at ease. His days of pain are past.

With respect,

Gim-Gim

The next piece seems to be the transcription of an oral tale. Certain passages resemble the 'barn tales' of our own times, but more investigation would be necessary to determine direct oral descent. The work is written in New Pelorian as well, but there are many strange words from an older language, which remain untranslated. The strange last line would seem to be a form of ritual closing, like our own, "And then they all died."

The Story of Little No-Hands

Little Mosca was a darling girl, bright of eye and sound of limb, who lived in a small village on the edge of the Sweet Sea. Her father was a fisherman, who made his living from the bounty of the lake. One day he pulled up a blue woman in his nets. He was about to toss her with the other fish to be skinned and boned, but she cried out for mercy, saying that she would give a great gift to him if he freed her from his

nets. The fisherman agreed, and released the blue woman into the sea, where she landed with a plop and swam away.

When the Fisherman arrived home, his wife told him that they had a baby girl. The Fisherman knew instantly that this was the gift of the blue woman and cursed both his luck and his foolishness in letting her go. Her mother named her Little Mosca, which means Blue.

One day the fisherman was coming home from his toil and was accosted on the path by a horrid old woman, a voidezny. She had blue hair and iron nails, her teeth were sharp and filed and she smelled like fish set to lie out in the sun for too long.

The fisherman was very afraid, and tried to run away (he was a great coward) but could not, as the Voidezny had cast a spell which had glued his feet the path.

"Mercy" he cried, "what have I ever done to you?"

"Ha!" said the Voidezny, "What have you ever done for me? I am hungry for a little piece of meat, and I will carve it off your plump behind."

"Please do not do that," replied the coward, "and I will provide a piece of meat far sweeter than what I wear."

"Very well," said the Voidezny. "Here is my pot. Take it home with you, and put the meat inside it."

The fisherman took the pot home with him and placed it on a shelf. His wife smelled magic about it, and would not cook food in it, though the Fisherman begged her to.

That night, the pot got off the shelf and walked over to the bed where the Fisherman lay. It reached up onto the bed, its sharp teeth gnashing. When he heard it he trembled and said, "Please do not climb upon my bed. Tomorrow I will provide you a piece of meat far sweeter than what I wear."

The pot then went back to its place on shelf, but it gnashed its teeth all night long.

The next morning the Fisherman did not go to his day's work, but rather took his daughter with him into the woods through an old path. Little Mosca asked her father what they were doing in the woods, but the Fisherman's only replies were surly grunts.

Finally they arrived at a clearing, where the Fisherman instructed Little Mosca to gather herbs and vegetables for a soup. While Little Mosca performed her chores, The Fisherman poured some water from the Sweet Sea in the pot and built a fire under it.

"Ow!" cried the pot, but the Fisherman would say only "Shhh."

When Little Mosca was finished, she presented the herbs and vegetables to the Fisherman, who then said, "These are fine. But you have forgotten the wild onion, which will add flavor to the stew. Stay here and put your spoils in the pot: I will go and fetch the wild onion."

After the Fisherman had left the clearing, Little Mosca did as she was told, and placed the herbs and vegetables in the Voidezny's pot. Shrack! went the teeth of the pot, and chopped off poor Little Mosca's hands. With tears in her eyes, Little Mosca ran off into the woods, leaving the pot of the Voidezny behind.

The pot jumped down into the fire, crying "Ow!...ow!" and ran all the way home to the Voidezny. The pot jumped up on the table of its mistress, and discouraged its contents onto a copper plate. Then the Voidezny, who was very hungry, gobbled them up.

"KEE-WRAH!", cried the Voidezny, for she had never tasted a finer treat. At that moment, she swore she would not rest until she had more. "Pot!", cried the Voidezny, "Take me to the hut of the Fisherman, where I might have more tidbits!" And so the pot led her to the hut, where she gobbled up the Fisherman's wife.

When the Fisherman arrived in the clearing, the fire was burnt out, the pot was gone and Little Mosca was nowhere to be seen. "That takes care of that!", he thought to himself, and strolled home.

But when he got there, he discovered the Voidezny at his table, gnawing at the shinbone of his wife. When the horrid creature saw him, she spit out the right eyeball of his wife, and exclaimed, "Where are the rest of the tidbits that were placed in my pot? These measly strings and bones do not satisfy me."

The Fisherman trembled so much that that his eyeballs shook and the bones in his neck stuck out. "I do not know, honored lady. I gave my daughter the pot to cook some onions in, but neither she or the pot were where I had left them."

It was then that the Voidezny took out her iron pot, silver spoon and copper plate. With the spoon she scraped up the broth, blood red, from the pot and dipped it on the plate. It swirled on the plate for some time, rushing around as if in search of some secret toy. Then it lumped on one side of the plate. The Voidezny gave a loud cry and dragged the Fisherman into the pot with her. The pot then flew toward the palace where the quiet winds come from.

All the while Little No-Hands wandered the woods by the shore of the Sweet Sea, wailing from the pain she had so cruelly endured. The spirits of that strange wood cared for her, bringing her herbs to soothe her wounds, and singing odd songs to restore her spirit.

The waif wandered like this for many days, until she found herself at the shores of the Sweet Sea. Her stumps still burned, so the poor girl dipped them into the deep blue waters of the sea. With a sigh of relief, blood from the stumps drifted into the deep blue waters, where the Blue Lady smelled them.

The poor lady of the Sweet Sea cursed herself, saying, "May I never know happiness until my blood is avenged!" She then swam straight to the shore, where Little No-Hands had fallen asleep.

"Poor child!, said the Lady of the Sweet Sea, That monstrous creature that has maimed you will follow, for who could resist eating you, once they had a taste?"

The Lady of the Sweet Sea ripped her own hair, bluish-green, and made a couch with it. She placed Little No-Hands on the couch, and pushed it into the Sea.

With a chain of bright sea-metal she hitched the couch to the Fishes of the Deep, who pulled the couch all day and all night until Upstar was high over the Sweet Sea.

Meanwhile, the terrible Voidezny had been smacking her lips all this time, looking for the morsel that had so far been denied her. She flew in her pot, stroking the sides of it with her copper spoon, so that the pot would not close its jaws upon her and the Fisherman.

After a while, they passed over the Sweet Sea and saw Little No-Hands on her couch. "KEE-WRAH!", cried the Voidezny, as she tipped the pot. The Fisherman fell out with a cry, and landed into the mouth of one the Fishes of the Deep, who swallowed him up.

The Voidezny did not care that the Fisherman had fallen, but flew down to the couch, where Little No-Hands was sleeping.

Just then, a great blue tower shimmered into the air, right in the path of the horrible wretch. The Voidezny ran herself straight into the peak of the tower, impaling herself.

The tower was part of the Castle of the Blue Folk, which only comes very rarely.

Little No-Hands drifted on the couch into the bay of that great castle, and the inhabitants welcomed her as one of their own. They gave her a new pair of hands made from the sea-metal, and a husband of the same substance, who was always handsome, and who loved her the rest of the days of her life.

Do you have more Krichek?

The final piece is perhaps the oddest of all. It is written in a somewhat unschooled hand, in dialect of Theyalan known as New Kingdom Sartarite. The piece is written on a curious sample of white vellum, which has not ivoried at all in the intervening years. As to the nature or meaning of the work, I must admit to being mystified.

When I returned to the camp, all the riders clustered about my train, examining the goods contained therein. I shoosed them away from the gin, silently thanking Issaries for the Lunar Empire, which brings the Heartland Monopoly goods to even this far corner of the world (along with repression and conquest, of course).

Norayeep was glad to see me unharmed, and little Jerstius wanted to show me his newest finds. As usual, the child had discovered some useful goods among the dross, and I haggled with him at some length. I do believe he got the best of me over the walnuts, but as I had virtually swindled him out of a Falangian Diamond months earlier, I held no rancor over it.

I took the gin to Hermok's tent, and left the beast in charge of Fartha, his slave. Though I suppose slave is a strong word for what Fartha is. No woman wants to be known as a Shaman's wife. The casual indignities of the tribal slave status are no comparison, it seems. Still, from what I saw of their relationship, it appeared that the ugly, gap-toothed beast adored him.

It would be early evening before I spoke to Hermok, so I went and looked at the Bull. As usual, it was quietly grazing, surrounded by cows. Its attractiveness is more than a little annoying, as you have to

push away the cows just to examine the beast. There was still no sunburn, no parasites, and no disease. I suppose I should not be surprised, and discontinue my close watch over the beast, but old habits are the last to perish, as they say.

When I finally entered Hermok's tent, the smoke was thick, and billowed out from the flap as I opened it. I waited a moment for the acrid air to clear, only to endure that peculiar castigation that only a Praxian Shaman can deliver. In the dissipating smoke of his tent, I could see him, hunching over a small fire, obviously the source of the herb-laden fumes.

When he recognized me his greeting turned more personable, and he made me a place to sit. With the flap closed, the fire was our only light, but it sufficed. I had come to haggle, and sometimes the lack of light can work to one's benefit.

I was a distinct disadvantage, for I did not know what I was haggling for, so in the end I gave him all the liquor, save for a few bottles for the Khan. It was then that he began, taking a long knotted rope out of one of his many bags.

I was of course familiar with the so-called Praxian knot-writing, enough to know that such items were not writing per se, but rather a sort of map, that were hung at certain sacred spots. It is said that some of the places referred to no longer exist, except for a Heroquester, a path of life I had long avoided until recently.

The sample that he now asked me to examine was long, far longer than any I had seen before. I remembered that strange phrase that I heard spoken of in Alone more than once: If you need a rope, look for a Shaman. I had never understood what it meant until now.

The rope was evidently ancient, as it appeared to me to have been repaired or re-knitted over the years. The strands were of different thickness, and sometimes of different shades or hues. Knots crawled along the rope its entire length, each commemorating a different time or place. It was at least eight meters long.

"This Waha's rope", he began "and it starts with Chaos." He went on at some length, describing the primeval journey of Waha, which taught the Praxians how to survive such a hostile world.

"The ending is Chaos, too." And with that he partially untied the first and last knots, retying them together, so that when he was finished, the new knot seemed to resemble the jaws of a serpent consuming the end of the rope. "Liberator of the White Bull", he continued, using my full Praxian title, "where is Chaos now?"

I could not answer him. He seemed satisfied nonetheless, and bellowed for Fartha to bring him a bottle of gin.

The Praxians of my acquaintance call liquor "spirits", by which they imply the old belief that such drink allows one to speak with the Ancestors. Thus, they explain the effect of inebriation.

But I knew Hermok drank that night to keep the ancestors away.

Yavor Allfather by Bryan Thexton

(As originally appeared in the Fire Tribe PBEM January 24, 2005)

Orlanth left on his quest. Barntar was slain by Vadrudi. The earth goddesses one by one died, went to sleep, or hid. But the people remained, and yet needed to eat.

Elmal shared his light with them as best he could, which gave plants a chance. But the earth was turning barren, little able to bring forth crops. The people turned to all the remaining gods, asking even Yavor whom Elmal had recently liberated if he could help. He told them that he could, but what he demanded was so terrible that the people balked.

Things continued to get worse. Storm Village was abandoned, many of the people had hidden in the wilderness, following Yinkin and Odalya. But still a small, desperate, village lived on one of the few flatter places on Kero Finn, aiding Elmal, and still needing to farm. Finally they became desperate enough to turn to Yavor again.

"Anything that still is, that has not been consumed by chaos, has the potential for fertility. Go to Storm Village and tear down the walls and bring them back here, and burn them. Plant your crops in the ashes, and Durev's handiwork will give you a crop. Then next year go to the great forest, where the skeletons of the dead trees stand, and bring them back here and burn them. Plant your crops in the ashes, and the elves memories will give you a crop. Do likewise with all that you can find that was once great and good, but is no longer being used. No matter how great it once was, now it is all fuel for the living."

The people did this, and another generation lived to support Elmal in his desperate task. But finally they had burned all that they could find, and the hidden kings led them into hiding where they twisted Yavor's teaching, eating the flesh of the dead directly instead of burning it to grow new crops. Then did Yavor fuel himself on the memory of what had been while he fought chaos with all his fury and power, burning ever lower and lower until his ember went out and he helped came to hell to help hold the net.

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Yet Another Sartarite Joke by James Frusetta

(As originally appeared on the HeroQuest Digest June 27, 2003)

The new, pious High Priest of Orlanth in Boldhome decides to tour the countryside clans to see if all's well. He's horrified by the people's impious ways -- especially the rampant drunkenness! Accordingly the ring of the next clan he's to visit calls all the people together.

"Look," says the ring, "When the high priest is here, don't talk about drinking, okay? Talk about praying, instead, he'll love it."

So the high priest arrives, and all's going well when he selects a carl from the crowd and asks, "So, tell me about your daily life."

The carl, remembering the ring's instruction, thinks about it. "Well, we all get up early, and we have a couple of drinks --" and at this point the ring groans, and the high priest looks shocked.

A second carl is called forth, and begins the same way, with the same result.

The third carl to be called thinks it over rapidly, and says, "We get up early, hours before sunrise, and make a couple quick prayers before we take the sheep out. While they're grazing, we sit back and pray the whole time.

"Then, at lunch, we have a long prayer, so we can sleep after the meal. Then my friend Urath comes up, and we have a couple quick prayers before we return to the stead for the evening.

"The entire tula gets together at the temple. There we all pray, and discuss which prayer is better than others. Late at night, the priest says it's last call because we've already done finished the prayers in the temple. So then we go over to Ornal's, because he has his own shrine."

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