December 21Not far from where she stood, the darkly swirling massof clouds that had

loomed for half a year above a tallmountain in the distance flashed with a bright blue

light.Even at this distance the light was blinding, and she hadto shield her eyes from the

brilliance. She had no timeto wonder what it was. Seconds later, however, thefrigid air

around her was sucked toward the light. It wasso sudden and strong that it momentarily

knocked heroff balance. As the wind subsided, the air left behindwas temperate and calm.

Looking once more at the lightupon that mountainside, she saw the snow that hadbeen

dancing on the wind drawn from every side intothat dark cloud.It was an omen, she knew; a

portent of somethinghorrible that was about to befall her, possibly all of thosein Malifaux.

“That can’t be good,” she muttered.Sonnia found the cave entrance easily enough with

theancient glyphs that she could now decipher almostautomatically. Of course, many of the

images had beenbefouled by that bastard Seamus. As Hopkins hadrelayed, there were quite

a few lewd images as well asequally offensive limericks and rhymes. Hopkins mayhave

sought to keep the images from her as he stillmaintained society’s notions of propriety. She

smiled athis chivalry, though she hardly acknowledged the graffitisave the irritation of not

being able to see the truesymbols correctly. Samael had dutifully recorded asmany images

as he could for her interpretation, butnow, studying the wall illuminated by a small orb

offlame she held aloft, she found several more images inshadowed recesses that offered

even more informationto her understanding of what was about to befall them.Those new

signs and symbols disheartened her further,though they merely reinforced what she had

alreadycome to expect.Still, it was difficult for her to proceed, knowing thatdeep beneath the

surface Cherufe waited, an ancientTyrant so feared that It was imprisoned in the spirit

cageby Its own peers.Sonnia found the entrance to the subterraneanlabyrinth. Lava flowed

openly in a deep channel, morethan a dozen feet below her. The heat was intense,especially

given her acclimation to the severe cold thathad enveloped all of Malifaux since the cage

had fallen.No one understood what that cage contained, not eventhe native Neverborn,

some of which were partiallyresponsible for entrapping Cherufe. Sonnia knew. Shehad

searched obsessively for ancient books recordingIts destructive deeds, written by the

ancient Neverbornthat fought against It and the other Tyrants as theydevoured this world, its

inhabitants, and themselves.They raced toward ascension – to abandon the lastvestiges of

their mortality. Those ancient texts werewritten over the span of many centuries, by those

justwanting to survive across this world. But, even as theirworld fell beneath the weight of

that monumentalconflict, those texts migrated here, inevitably towardMalifaux, where they

were lost in forgotten temples andruins near the city.She was drawn to the books. And the

words thereinwere as familiar to her as they were alien. More thanonce she had thrust a

newly discovered book away asshe looked through it, certain she had read it before.And

though the words were written in a language nolonger known even to the Neverborn, she

seemed toinstinctively know what they said.Once, while perusing a small, seemingly

unremarkablebook, she had dropped it and staggered back, knockinga full stack aside as

she stumbled. Samael had beenthere, concerned, but she had assured him it wasmerely

fatigue. The truth that she never spoke of, nevereven allowed herself to think again, was that

the bookwas sofamiliar to her that it was as if she had written itherself. She knew each page

before turning to see it.From her surprise, she purged the book in flame. It wasthe first, but

only the first of many times, she uneartheda tome that spoke to her with such familiarity. It

becameso frequently disconcerting that she had come to expectthat dreaded sense of

knowing with each new writtendiscovery. It wasn’t merely the books, either. She

wasfrequently drawn to some remote ruins in the bayou,overgrown with vines to the extent

that it was otherwise

undiscoverable. Or, some building now buried in thebadlands beneath a makeshift mining

boomtown. She’dgo there on a ‘hunch’ and remarkably find the onemissing piece to a puzzle

she didn’t even know she wasworking out.Like this cave.She stood in the center of the

narrow chamber.Stalactites stretched from the ceiling, no more thaneight feet above her, to

the uneven and rocky floorbelow.How Seamus was connected to it all she could neverfully

understand. Like her, he had a strange affinity forthese places, leaving his mark more than

once for herto find. Samael knew he was pursuing the same writtenworks as Criid, but he did

not fully understand thedegree to which Seamus, too, was drawn. Usually a stepahead of

her, too, which perplexed her to no end. Hisbefouling the wall with limericks and graffiti were

tauntsfor her, and she knew it. It was merely a game forSeamus, and, now that she

descended into the narrowpassages below, she realized that she had come toanticipate the

game, to enjoy it on some perverse level.She had thought that, someday, he and she

wouldultimately meet for some kind of showdown. Thatnotion always seemed to linger in the

back of her mind.Her sword, strapped to her back, caught on theprotruding rocks of the tight

crevasse descending intothe tunnel below. She backed out, and removed thesword slung to

her back, so that she could more easilysqueeze through. Down the center of the bale was

afaint blue glowing line. It throbbed brighter then grewdim again with the rising and falling of

her breath.She was delivering the sword to its rightful owner;returning it, finally, to the hand

meant to wield it.Cherufe. The terrible and malevolent Tyrant that nearlydestroyed

everything. Where December devouredeverything, consuming, growing stronger, never

sated –Cherufe, it was written, seemed to take pleasure indestruction. And that was all. It

demonstrated no loftygoals of ascension save, perhaps, to ravage the nextworld beyond the

aether. Earth, maybe?Even other Tyrants stood against It, aligning with thelowly inhabitants

of a once thriving Malifaux city, andpossibly other cities just like it, now lost in the

barrenlandscape of the scorched Badlands or the even lesshospitable wasteland beyond the

Northern Mountains.But they could not kill It. In an elaborate twisting ofcomplex promises

and betrayals and false unions, theydid manage to trap and expel It, but at the cost

ofcountless lives. This was long before the Breach.She stepped down into a more open cave

system, liteerily from below as the lava flowed, hot and orange.She coughed, gagging upon

toxic gases from the moltenstream. Her eyes watered and burned, and she steppedback into

the cool passage between the upper cave andthe winding lava flow below to catch her

breath.The ground rumbled, slowly at first and just a tremor.Before she could run out of the

narrow passage and thecave, the tremor erupted in a violent quake thatknocked her to the

ground. It was deafening, and shewas battered back and forth against rocky

protrusions.Streams of lava shot upwards in the tumultuous quake.Rocks fell from above to

crash violently andthunderously nearby. She feared she would be crushedby falling debris or

the walls so close to her. She bracedherself for the inevitability.Even though the quaking

continued, she was notcrushed. She found herself in a sort of trance, possiblycaused by the

heat and vapors washing over her frombelow. As she succumbed to unconsciousness she

hada final thought. ‘This has nothing to do with the heat,’she thought. ‘You’re here, aren’t

you?’ she asked in hermind.Yes. The voice of Cherufe responded in her thoughts. I have

waited long for your coming.Cherufe guided her unconscious body out throughnarrow

tunnels and into the greater channel of lavaflowing southeast, toward Malifaux. She fell to

the rockyfloor beside the quickly moving river of lava.RRRSonnia awakened some time later.

She had no idea howlong she had lain there. Though the lava channel stillflowed beside her,

illuminating the cave, she saw thatshe was no longer at the cave entrance. She had

beenmoved. This cavern was still rough and rocky, but areasof the walls, floor, and ceiling

showed signs of beingcarved. She knew they were. Carved out in a greatlabyrinth that

stretched for many miles beyond the City.The vast city stood at its hub. The sewers, she

knew,were just the beginning. She was closer to it now, to

Malifaux. Interesting that she had been lured to oneremote and hidden location after

another, far beyond theCity, only to have that quest return her to the startingpoint. She sat

up, quickly shaking the foggy stupor that dulledher mind. She couldn’t be certain but thought

she saw aglowing reflection from several sets of eyes disappearingin the shadows and

branching tunnels. They were notnatural creatures, she knew at once. She could

sensethem, like the gentle lure of a large soulstone more thanshe could see them. These

creatures were differentthough, burning shadows at the edge of her arcaneperception rather

than the cool defiant spirit that couldbe captured, chilling the person who harnesses it.She

stood, turning to face the direction of the lava flow.Far above her, the heat and gases poured

through holesin the rock face by the earthquake.Ithad done that.Cherufe. Otherwise, she

wouldn’t have been able tobreathe. Those strange creatures she had vaguelyperceived

belonged to It as well. Creatures of fire andmolten rock given life as December had created

creaturesof ice and snow.She followed the lava, observing the branches of magmamerging

into this one as it, too, flowed into yet a widerflow. She crossed natural bridges of flat granite

or basaltthat had fallen from above, always keeping her on herpath.‘It was underground, all

along,’ she thought. ‘Each of thetemples, each of the ruins, each of the artifacts I foundup

there –’ She paused, both in her mind and in her pace.“No,” she said aloud. “How could I

have overlookedthat?” She thought of those places where she had madethe most important

discoveries – the key books orartifacts that gave her more pieces of the puzzle. Shequickly

unslung a tattered leather bag from her shoulderand withdrew a beaten book with yellowed

pages. Shethumbed through the familiar journal quickly and founda map scrawled by her

own hand. A map of the City andsurrounding area. Deeper in the back of the folio shefound

a much different sketch she had once transcribedof the cage designed to hold Cherufe. Back

to the mapof the City, with graphite stick in hand, she franticallycircled each of the major

locations and ruins that guidedher every step. In her obsessive pursuit to keep herprivate

research hidden, obfuscated from the probingeyes of the Guild, she had never marked those

locationson any map; never before recorded those key locationsin any way.She saw it now,

though. The last cave that led her downhere – the buried library that housed not a book, but

thegilded necklace that, when outstretched, had formed amap that led her to the fallen

temple where she foundthe record describing the first rise of the Tyrants – of theKythera

ruins where they confronted December and theGrave Spirit, but where she had also found

yet morepieces of the puzzle – of the ruins where she had beenforced to take Francis, the

Governor’s son, and she haddiscovered the dry fragments of one important piece

ofparchment while he doted over some pretty trinket – ofPhillip Tombers’ various

discoveries– thinking of thosenumerous places all at once, she reeled and dropped toone

knee, losing her balance. She couldn’t focus, not onthe cave, not on anything save the great

inundation ofsudden awareness.She had crisscrossed the landscape dozens of times.

Shehad thought of the City of Malifaux as the central huband some of her research took her

nearer the City whileother locations were further away. The City wasnotthehub. Each of

those locations that provided the keyinstruments of understanding formed a nearly

perfectcircle that spanned many miles. She hadn’t discoveredthem in sequential order,

however. That had added tothe confusion. Now she saw it. Putting the artifacts,books, other

discoveries in order around that great circleon an imaginary map in her mind, she saw the

storyunfold so logically, now.Another image focused within her mind andsuperimposed itself

on the mental map and highlightedlocations she had painstakingly explored over the

lastthree years. The new image was of a drawing, an oddlyrecorded schematic of Neverborn

engineers thatcreated the arcane Red Prison to contain Cherufe, thefiery Tyrant determined

to consume this world inconflagration. Its shape was a circle. Key points aroundthe cage

were marked in glyphs, each drawing powerout of the strange being, siphoning it into the

very cagethat held It. Itfueled the very device of its longimprisonment. Each of those arcane

points alignedperfectly with the forgotten places here, aroundMalifaux, where she had found

more and more of theclues. The image of the mental map had several placesmissing from

that otherwise perfect representation ofthe Red Cage. ‘Places I hadn’t even discovered yet,’

shethought. It was too late to find them now. What mightshe have found in those places had

she been there?What artifacts or clues could she use to fight for hersurvival and the survival

of all the inhabitants withinMalifaux? She regretted not knowing.

No one, so far as she knew, had ever traveled furtherbeyond the City than her, and she had

gone no furtherthan those key points along the great circle. Was thereanything left out there,

across the Northern Mountains,across the dry wasteland to the west beyond theBadlands?

Was the City all that remained?It was a prison.Of the Tyrants that sought to ascend; to end

theirimprisonment in Malifaux. The Neverborn thatremained – it was their prison, too, she

realized. Andthere were not many remaining; not enough to fill thesmallest section of the

great city. The settlers? Humanshere through the Breach? Were they equally trappedbut

didn’t know it?She stood and stared down the tunnel toward herdestination. She knew where

she was going now. In hermind, she saw the center of the great ring thatsurrounded Malifaux

where each of the artifacts andclues had been discovered. The center of the ring wasnot

within the City Malifaux – it was just north of itsboardersIt was the Breach.RRRSonnia

surveyed the expansive chamber that openedbeyond the tunnel, which while seemingly

natural, hadbecome ever more precise and clearly carved. The floorwas now smooth and

even, and the walls, too, were cutin sharp angles. The numerous lava flows ran in

equallyprecise channels that were exact replicas of the sewerlabyrinth below the City. The

lava rivers poured into onewide pool from different channels from the north, west,east, and

even several smaller channels from Malifaux,all leading toward the river to the south.The

molten pool, really a small subterranean lake,illuminated the large cavern with warm light.

The ceilingof the chamber was far above. Beyond it, directly abovethe epicenter of the

whirlpool at the heart of theburning pool, was the crackling breach -- the gatewaybridging

this world and Earth. She was deep beneaththe ground, but the hill above was just as large.

TheBreach, Ridley Station, the Governor’s Mansion, eventhe Hanging Tree and innumerable

bodies buriedbeneath it all loomed in the rock and dirt far overhead.“I’m here!” she called.

Her voice echoed above thecrackling lava which occasionally erupted in a pyroclasticrush as

bubbles rose to the surface of the churning lava,now more quiescent as it moved into the

large pool.Only her voice called back to her. “I’m here, you bastard!What do you want of

me?” The “me” of her voicebounced back to her in diminishing echoes.She waited. Much

longer than she expected.“So you’ve got a sense of humor,” she said morenaturally.On the

far side of the chamber, she could see the shapeof the walls change as columns and

funneled into asecondary tunnel extending out beyond her.The Necropolis, she realized. She

was within the vastNecropolis. She had read much about it and hadexpected it. This place

was significant in many of thereferences to the Tyrants. She realized she had justentered it

but expected it ran far throughout thesubterranean area below the world they knew.

Theanswers were all below the ground. They were neverlooking in the right place. Or,

perhaps that was theirsalvation. What dark secrets were buried beneathMalifaux’s surface,

she wondered. What dark secretswere better left undiscovered?Despite the sweltering heat

within the tunnels, she hadkept her coat on throughout her subterranean trek. Shedidn’t

perspire. She was never too hot. ‘How long haveI been its vessel?’ she thought. ‘Since I

crossed theBreach? Before?’ She unbuckled the numerous strapsholding the long coat

tightly fastened around her torso.She removed the greatsword from her back and restedit

against the low brick wall encircling the lava pool. Theangle upon which it rested was too

oblique, and whenshe sat upon the wall beside it, the sword clattered tothe paving stones

beneath her.It glowed dimly blue. ‘This is what started it all,’ shethought, looking at the thick

blade. She shouldn’t evenbe able to swing such a great weapon, much less wieldit with any

skill. Others found its weight match its size,but to her, it was light. Where others found the

metalcool to the touch, it felt warm to Sonnia, like a candle’sflame when her fingers drew

near it. She no longerremembered whether she had developed her masteryand manipulation

of fire before or after finding thesword.

The glow behind her grew more luminous, and shejumped to her feet. She spun to see the

form of a giantcreature rising from the midst of the pool. It wasanthropomorphic, yet reptilian,

too, with twin eyes ofdark obsidian that reflected her image as it rose. Thelava flowed over

its great body and cooled to a dark grayin seconds. The dry shell continued to crack and

flowdown its molten body. Between them, across its form,the cracks glowed white hot from

the heat beneath.Sonnia had come here on her own, fulfilling thedesperation to understand

her role in the ascension ofthe tyrants and her clear connection to this creature,the most

feared and reviled of them all. She had beenunafraid. But now, standing beneath the

monster thattowered above her, she had only the instinctive need toflee. Her heart beat, and

for the first time in severalyears, she felt the heat as its humid breath washeddown upon

her.It took all of her will to stifle the panic rising so quicklywithin her. She addressed the

creature, shouting up atit, “You have physical form! What do you want of me?”Nothing.Its

voice was soft and soothing, but deep, likea fire burning hot but long, near the end of a

coal’susefulness.She was confused.Its arm reached toward her, the smell of sulfur

strikingfirst, stinging her eyes and making her recoil. She turnedinvoluntarily from It, from the

fear she could not denyas well as the foulness. Through watering eyes, she sawthe sword at

her feet. ‘You’re not here for me,’ shethought.No.“You want my sword.”It was never yours.So

many clues. They were all so obtusely written,obfuscated so cleverly that she could barely

understandthe portents and prophecies that were spelled out solong before man ever set

foot in Malifaux. And she knewmore than any other human in Malifaux about itshistory and

the struggle the Neverborn fought forsurvival. She possibly had acquired more

knowledgethan the Neverborn had, themselves. There was a key and a vessel they each

needed.Rasputina was the vessel for December, she knew, andSeamus, too, had been

chosen though he doggedlypursued the Grave Spirit. Others she suspected andconsidered

as she uncovered more and more of thetruth. But the keys for each were so much more

guardedand obscurely referenced. She had arrogantly thoughtshe must be the chosen

vessel for Cherufe. It hadseemed so logical. But now, she realized that her destinywas not in

becoming the living embodiment of the FireTyrant, but in delivering the key to open the final

lock ofIts mortal imprisonment.Its burning hand, large enough to engulf her torso drewbefore

her.“You want it?” she growled. “You’ll have to take it.” Herboot kicked beneath the

cross-guard spikes, lifting iteasily into the air before her. In the same movement,she grabbed

the long hilt with one hand, and as sheswung it up and then down toward the arm, her

secondhand closed around the hilt. She howled as she swungwith all of her might, leaping

forward beside itsoutstretched arm of crackling fire and molten rock. Thesword slid easily

through Its wrist, severing it, and aspray of lava erupted as the hand fell back into theswirling

pool below. Where she struck, the lava turnedcrystalline and blue, snaking up Its arm. It

seemed to groan at first, like a rumbling of rocks justbefore the ground would split in a

quake. But, as thecreature pulled back, she wondered if it was laughter.Cherufe’s other arm

lunged forward, faster than shecould imagine, but she held her sword firm and impaledthe

blade into the open palm. Pressing forward againsther, she could not hold her ground. Her

boots draggedand scraped on the stone as she was pushed back, butthe heat of its hand

quickly cooled as the lava withincrystallized, turning deep blue like the sword’s glow.

Shegrew confident once more.She pulled herself up onto Its hand, easily drawing thesword

from the cool stone of Its arm. The crystallizationwithin the arm snaked upwards toward Its

torso but nomore than half way, and she leapt toward that pointwhere the glow beneath the

gray plates of Its outermantle was still burning white. She sank the bladewithin the arm, and

It hissed as the arm grew bluearound the impaling weapon.

The “key” was not for them to use to free the final bondsof their mortal prison after all. It was

the final tool to holdthem at bay. She jerked the sword free from Its arm,standing upon its

body above the lava. Ever inquisitive,she studied the sizzling pock-marks burning into

Itssurface and so never saw the blue stump of Its other armswinging toward her. It struck

violently, knocking herthrough the air. The sword flew from her, arcing end overend toward

the pool. She hit the ground bodily androlled, the wind knocked from her and several

bonescracked, at the least. Sonnia watched as the weapon, heronly hope, fell toward the

pool.Cherufe saw both the girl and the sword and surprisedher by lunging toward the

weapon, as quickly as it could,to strike it in mid-air with the end of its blue hand, frozenby the

magical blade for which it was created. It flewbeyond the end of the pool, struck the wall, and

fell tothe ground. Its rocky head turned toward her, thegleaming stone eyes reflecting the

lava below.Cool white vapor enveloped her as the stone in her handcracked, releasing the

spiritual energy within. She drewit in, melding the fragmentary whispers it spoke with herown

formidable will, and found immediate relief from thepain. Before the healing was complete,

she was up andmoving, running around the circumference of the pooltoward her sword.The

Tyrant’s arm slashed in the air, and a tall spray of firesliced forth, striking the path before

her. But Sonnia Criidwas not without similar mastery of the primal forces ofnature, and

without pausing in her stride, her hand struckthe air before her, and the wall of flame

exploded beforeher as her own red fire struck it. She ran through the holein Cherufe’s flame

wall even as it closed back around her.Not to have her escape again, Its dark arms lifted

quicklyabove Its head, and the entire pool rose in a wave, rollingquickly toward her. It rose

above the short wall aroundthe pool, at least ten feet high. She had little time toprepare for it

but had grabbed another soulstone andcrushed it just as the wave crested before her.

Flameexploded from her outstretched arms as she slid to a halton the paving stones, facing

the lava and attacking it withthe full force of the power she commanded. The fire thatbelched

forth was deep red and streaked with cool whitefrom the stone. She howled in defiance

anddetermination as her own fire burst through the thickwave of lava, redirecting it as it

washed down upon her.The lava spilled around her, but she was safe. The sword,however,

was in the path of the orange liquid from herexplosive fire.The twisting of the fabric of fate

and the arcane threadsof the aether were something intangible, imperceptibleto almost

every living thing, even those that had somemastery of the arcane, themselves. Sonnia

Criid,however, had acquired her position in the Guild for thealmost unique skills she

commanded at being able toperceive the very exertion upon those gossamerthreads that

wove around all things. She saw its twistingof the threads of fate and the aether, wrapping its

willabout it and manipulating it. The rock beneath thesword bucked in a small but violent

tremor. The swordleapt from the ground, spiraling end over end towardCherufe. Also unlike

so many other beings that could commandthe twisting of the fabric of fate, she had the

power tounravel others’ control of it, of the unnaturalinterference they invoked upon it.

Typically, she couldonly affect another’s aetheric manipulation if the spellsthey cast involved

her own spiritual connection with theaether, but the sword was not just a weapon of

metal,folded by man in a forge. It was a weapon made for theundoing of Cherufe, and it was

intended to be wieldedby her. Fate had chosen a purpose and a weapon forher long before

she was ever conceived.She saw the threads of aether twisting in the spacebetween

Cherufe and the spiraling sword. They werecool and white, but gaseous and tenuous.

Thosethreads did not envelop her, she knew. How could sheunravel them?Her mind raced.

Time seemed to slow as she sought theanswer.It was too powerful. Cherufe had far greater

controlover self and the arcane than Its fellow Tyrants. Sheknew her sword was meant to

strike down Cherufe, butthe Tyrant was keeping it from her, drawing it in. If Itheld the

weapon, consumed or otherwise destroyed it,there would be nothing to stop Its ascent. The

image of December flickered in her mind as shesuccumbed to failure. But she realized

something at thelast moment about December. He was a mere shell ofHis true form. She

had read dozens of manuscriptsabout Him along with the more fragmentary snippetsoffered

of Cherufe. For all of the Fire Tyrant’s might andterror, December had occupied more of the

ancientNeverborn’s attention. Though the Wendigo at Kytherawas formidable, nearly

unstoppable, Hewasa merereflection of His true self. They needed a vessel.

Cherufe had lied to her, and she knew it. She felt it. Shewas sure of it beyond any certainty

she had knownbefore. She wasthis creature’s vessel. The sword wasthe key to Its undoing,

and possessing it meant It wouldhave nothing again to fear. Nothing would step in Itsway,

and It would consume her in the fires of Its will andbeing. The truth struck her immediately.

The sword was notthe key. She was.The sword was hers, and she was tied to it. She felt

thetendrils of control it had wrapped around the sword,pulling it through space. She

screamed, extending herown control through the distance that separated themand severed

its control over the sword.The sword continued through the air, but free from

itscontrol.Sonnia’s boot hit the top of the short wall, and shereleased an explosive blast of

concentrating fire thatsent her hurling toward the sword, her legs aflame. Cherufe again tried

to manipulate the threads of fate,lashing out in frustration at her unexpected defiance.Its will

striking her with the tectonic vibrations at itsdisposal, hitting her in the side strong enough to

againsnap her ribs. She could have unraveled the magicalmanipulations again, even easier

than she did with thesword, but she did not try to stop it. Instead, she hadcounted on it for

the strike sent her straight across thelava, feet above the burning pool. It sent her

directlytoward the sword hurling across its surface. Despite itsstrongest attempt to

manipulate this outcome, thismoment had been established by fate so long beforeeither of

them walked that she wondered how any ofthem, Tyrant, human, Neverborn – how any of

themcould avoid the great power that sought to right thepath that they continued to twist.The

Fire Tyrant could do nothing more as the sword andSonnia came together in the space

above the lava. Shecertainly did not try to stop it. She knew the truth now.It was in the

books, the artifacts, all through theuncovered ancient messages that she found and

readover and over. She was the vessel It was destined toconsume. Possessing her, It would

walk again, heraldingthe beginning of the end.The sword arced once more as she flew

before it. Thetip of the blade struck her in the chest and sank deep,piercing the fabric of her

blouse, severing flesh, bone,and the sinews of muscle before bursting through theback of

the thick canvas coat. She gasped as the metalburned, unraveling not only the threads of

fate that hadlong entwined her, but the control of the spiritual andarcane bonds that had tied

her to It.Cherufe howled and the ground trembled, splitting andbucking even as the woman

and sword tumbledtogether into the lava.