

The UNDERCROW

Vol.2 #2



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The Storyteller's Billboard

For People's Stories, Poems, Artwork, Etc...



Part II

[Warning: This chapter contains scenes of brutality; animal-lovers especially are hereby warned!]

Ash was starving to death. His lips were dry and his stomach no longer hurt. In the two months he had spent wandering above ground, his hair had grown to shoulder-length. Bits of it hung over his eyes like fine white cobwebs. His gaunt dark Elven features were emaciated to the point of looking like the gibbering mummified undead.

By day he slept in hollow trees. Often he had to curl up at the base, almost sitting up. He took comfort in the closeness of the wooden walls, so much like the niches of the caverns beneath the ground.

When the sun fell he awoke to a cooler time. Night animals flew by and Ash could not catch them. He ate insects for a time until one night, a largish beetle made him very ill. After that, he could not stand to eat bugs. There was plenty of water caught in the notches of the trees, but Ash could find no food.

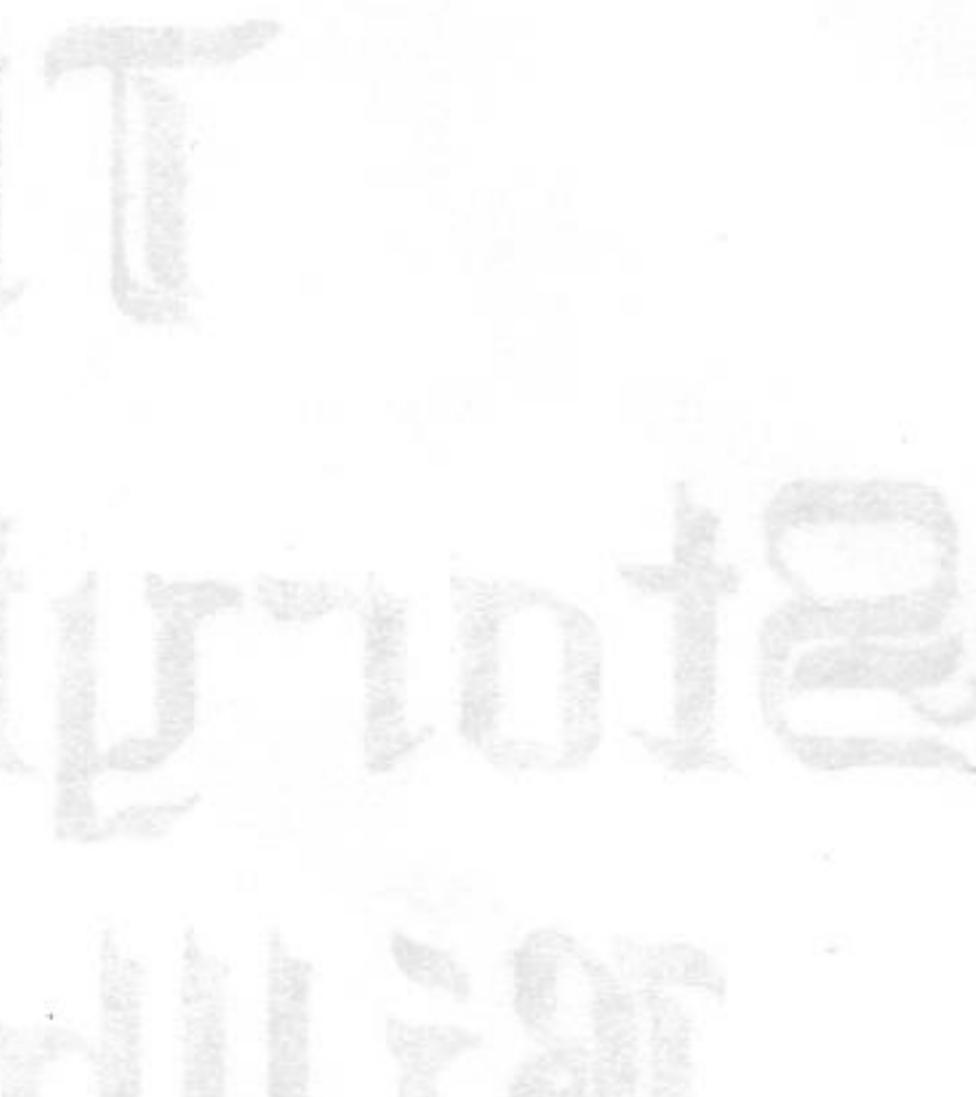
Elsewhere in the forest, the wolves were thriving. They brought down bony kills from the burgeoning herd, which had eaten this part of the woods quite bare. The deer had become over-populated and did not have enough to eat. The wolves trimmed the herd of the sickly ones, who were numerous.

Once Ash came upon the wolves as they were feeding upon a kill. They growled and leapt at him and he ran away. They were having too easy a time with the deer to bother with the skinny two-legger. Later Ash went to pick the bones of the carcass but they were quite well-cleaned.

Some time later, Ash attempted to drive them from their deer by throwing stones at them. They slunk away with sore noses but the moment Ash tried to grab a haunch or even some entrails, a half-dozen wolves moved together to guard their kill. Ash went away hungrier than ever.

Ash grew desperate. He followed the pack to their dens, then watched them to better learn their habits. He saw the reason the wolves defended their food so tenaciously: it was whelping season and there were quite a few roly-poly cubs sprawling and pouncing about. They were fat and playful.

Ash prepared for conflict by cutting a thick hawthorn branch with a piece of flint. This odd weapon was his own height in length and its plentiful thorns were dense and tough. He dragged it along the ground back to the dens when most of the wolves would be out hunting.



A single female was there with twelve cubs. Ash crept towards where they played together in the bracken. The she-wolf heard him and she herded the cubs into the den. Then she stood alertly guarding the entrance nose twitching and hackles raised.

Ash approached the den holding his branch in front of him. The wolf's golden eyes blazed into Ash's ruby red eyes and she snarled her challenge. To Ash she looked horse-sized with her fur all bristled.

Suddenly she lunged at him. She bit only thorns: two-inch spikes that pierced flesh. The wolf squealed and blood came from her mouth. She backed away but would not abandon the cave entrance. The red froth about her jaws made Ash's pulse pound in fear of those thick fangs. Several times she leapt at Ash, only to have the thorn branch thrust at her muzzle.

Ash advanced. She ran around the brambles this time and Ash tried to turn it around to halt her. It was too clumsy and he was too weak to swing it. He ran, still clutching the end of the branch, with the wolf in hot pursuit. Ash saw his chance: he dove for the den entrance while the she-wolf was on the other side of the branch. He pulled the tree limb after himself. As he clutched at the hawthorn he felt a thorn pierce his finger deeply.

The poor she-wolf snarled in anger and frustration. She tried several times to dig around the entrance but Ash had pulled the branch in quite far. He could see her clearly through the thorns, pacing and growling. He was too busy to be frightened.

In moments the dark elf had strangled all twelve cubs. They whimpered pitifully, too bewildered to defend themselves. Deep in the wolf lair Ash ate raw flesh as above the bitch howled for the return of the pack.

Sir Ahrmaand wondered why his pets did not come to his call. He had a servant saddle his horse. It was very skittish. Ahrmaand would have cursed its reluctance to hold still had he been the sort to spit oaths. But it took much more to mar that cool temperament. He reached out and held the bridle so that the horse's head was still.

The stallion pranced but Ahrmaand was far stronger. He held the horse like a little leaf on a string in the wind. The animal rolled its eyes, coughed a little foam and whinnied.

With a black-gloved hand the Viscount Ahrmaand pulled the beast's chin towards him. He looked into the horse's eyes. After a toss of its head and a stamp of its hoof, the stallion grew glassy-eyed. "Much better," murmured Ahrmaand as he mounted. He dug his knightly silver spurs into the flank of his steed. It broke into an immediate gallop and gave a peculiarly hollow whinny.

After a while Ahrmaand picked up the trail of his favorite wolf pack. He heard their howls and whimpers not far off. "Hmm," he thought, "they've cornered something."

A small demon, a female, with white feathered wings and delicate talons flew through the window of the citadel of Ak'kelron. She darted to and fro until she came to the throne room. It was nearly empty. The demon-lord sat with his pathetic retainers, the remnants of a once-mighty retinue.

"Ahh, Scarflight," said Ak'kelron, as he noticed the succubus. "What brings you here?" His tone was flat, emotionless. He played idly with a little dark sphere of crystal.

Ak'kelron, who had chosen to look like a handsome cyclops this night, shifted lazily in his throne. Behind him a sentry demon scratched its armpit listlessly.

"I'm a messenger today, lord."

"Speak," said the flat voice of Ak'kelron.

"You have requested the aid of Lord Mephistopheles in wreaking vengeance."

"Go on, damn you!" The demon-lord hated to admit that he needed an alliance, that he was too weak to gather an army himself. The little demon curtseyed and flicked its wings for balance.

"Lord Mephistopheles has agreed if you will give him one soul that belonged to someone of a place called Barad-Duin."

Thought the arch-duke, "But it's the only one I've got, and it's very special to me, too. Argh! Mephistopheles knows I only have De Hugh, my hated foe, to give him." Politics always upset his stomach. He opened up a mouth on his belly and fed it a piece of cherry pie with eyeballs for cherries and blood for glaze. The mouth chewed messily for a moment. Then it belched and Ak'kelron said, "Alright. Tell that old banker I'll do it. Here, you take it to him." He tossed the smoky bauble to the girl demon, then turned to one of his minions. "Accompany her; see that this deal goes through."

The leering Uluk-Hai sprouted several new appendages (it had only recently learned this skill), saluted with some of them and said, "Yes, sir!"

Nightstalker led Penumbra to a tunnel that was big enough for a cat to run through. Penumbra crawled in first and he followed. The passageway was a painstaking crawl that kept arms out in front of the body. Penumbra wondered how Nightstalker managed to keep up with her. Whenever she took a deep breath she felt stone on all sides of her torso. The pair moved like worms for many yards.

"Where does this lead?" asked the Dark Elf. Her abdomen and back had begun to ache from the effort.

Close behind her the human assassin said, "Lead to?" He laughed. "This is a dead end, elf. We might as well talk right here."

There was a pause. Penumbra licked her lips. No breeze came from the far end of the cave. Clearly Nightstalker had the advantage here. She felt his hand touch her boot. "What would you like to talk about?" she said.

"Tell me of Sinjen. Did you kill him as I instructed?" Nightstalker spoke of the man who was squire to Sir Ahrmaand. Sinjen and Penumbra were good friends.

"Um," she said, "no, I didn't. And it was a good thing, too. After I was arrested for treason, he was the only one who could have acquitted me. Sinjen came forwards in court and admitted he had asked me to go into the underground town of Penambra and the other Drow towns. Thus was my name cleared of treason."

With an edge to his whispery voice, Nightstalker said, "You did not tell me you came to Penambra deliberately."

"And you, Nightstalker, did not tell me that you and your brother Sinjen are immortals. If I had tried to kill him, he might have recovered and hunted me down."

"Then you would have known his true nature," said the voice of the assassin. "I expect you could have escaped his wrath or placated him somehow. I did not expect you to gain his trust. This is better still!" Penumbra suddenly felt a blade against her calf. "You do intend to slay him, don't you?" Her experience in the pits of Unseelie Court told her that a cut at that place would bleed profusely. She could bleed to death before getting half way out the tunnel, since going backwards would be even slower. Of course, Nightstalker did not know she was a magical healer.

"Sinjen has told the entire court that you and he are brothers. That secret is out!" The knife began to bite into skin. Penumbra spoke faster. "He's sent me with a message for you."

"Have you told him where I am?" Nightstalker said as he made a tiny scratch on her calf with the daggers tip. A drop of blood tickled as it trickled down her leg. Both the assassin and the Elf heard fall on the stone plop.

Penumbra sounded hurt. "Of course not." She crawled further on. Nightstalker grabbed her ankle to halt her. "He wants to speak with you," she added.

Nightstalker pulled her back and the little Elf slid on her stomach. She felt a touch on her wound. The assassin idly reached out a finger and tasted her sweet blood. "You have been taking in the nightshade toxin just as I instructed you. You trusted it would not kill you. Just as I said."

- End of Chapter 1

"I had a second opinion. ~~the man~~, she said it was safe, too." The grip on her leg loosened.

He crawled back at an amazing pace. Penumbra followed him. "Sinjen," she repeated, "wants to talk to you. He wants you to come to court, the Court of Barad-Duin."

"Why?"

Penumbra thought a moment. "He says this feud has gone on long enough. He says he wants his brother back."

The assassin sighed. "Do you believe him, Penumbra?"

"No. I suspect he needs you. One only makes peace with an old foe when there is a greater enemy to be faced." She thought of her own enemy, the mage Celcarra, and her estranged brother Emirau. "Hate," she said bitterly, "is thicker than blood."

The man in black surprised Penumbra by saying, "If you believe that, then you must be younger than I, little one."

"What is she doing, Thariand?" asked Viscount Nithanaiorn. At his side sat his lady, Asil.

"She's going down a passage." He suppressed a profound shudder. "It's about this big around." He demonstrated its width by making a circle of his arms. The crystal ball was dark with reflections of the cave miles away.

"The assassin Nightstalker is behind her. I know his aura..." Thariand went on. "They speak of Sinjen."

Nithanaiorn looked concerned. "Ahrmaand's squire of the body," he said softly, thoughtfully. Asil remained inscrutable, not betraying her curiosity at the situation.

Asil said, "I think Sinjen suspects and calls on his nemesis to aid him against his own knight."

"Let us hope so," proclaimed Nithanaiorn. "I remember when Ahrmaand was horrified by what he had become, a vampire. I remember when he was the gentlest of peers, genteel and full of justice. Now he heads armies that massacre any enemies of the state, hires inquisitors in Barad Duin. O Ahrmaand, my dear friend, what has happened to thee?"

Ash heard the hoofbeats long before the rider was visible. For a full day he had hidden behind the thornbush wedged into the cave mouth. There were three wolf mothers who prowled about alternately whining and furiously digging to widen the cave mouth. They reached stone, continued to dig until their claws shattered and bled.

In spite of his full belly the young Drown could not sleep. Ahrmaand arrived as the largest wolf had gotten hold of the thickest part of the

branch. The Vampire Lord dismounted and helped the wolf. "Careful, boy. It's cornered, so it may be desperate."

When the wolf's grip slipped, a branch snapped back, driving a thorn into Ahrmaand. "Ow!" said the Viscount. He gingerly tried to remove it.

Alas for him, for it is said that oak, ash and thorn are sacred trees, guardians against the supernatural. Ahrmaand's fine clothing grew entangled in the stuff. "Damn," said the Vampire.

Ash peered out at the strange human lord. He decided to twist the branch. Ahrmaand's cloak began to rip. "Stop, villain!" he cried out in some alarm.

"Call off the wolves," said a voice from inside the wolf tunnel.

"You heard him," Ahrmaand said amiably enough. He gave a silent dismissal and his minions slunk away.

Ash pushed the branch out of the hole and Ahrmaand moved with it. Ash stood up in the twilight and immediately assessed the value of Ahrmaand's clothing. This was a veritable king in the eyes of the street-born Drow. He helped the lord out of the brambles.

Always charming, Sir Ahrmaand said, "You have rescued me, good man. Come, have dinner at my castle." He noted the Drow was dirty, bloody, and clothed in cheap rags.

As they travelled Ahrmaand saw the wounds the thorns had made. They were ugly red swollen gashes, far out of proportion to the spines that had inflicted them. For an instant the Viscount frowned. Then he saw the wounds begin to close again, and he smiled one of those smiles.

Lady Adela was surprised at her latest patient's identity: Cardinal Fang. He was pale and barely conscious. His eyes, she noted, were far too dilated.

His pulse was erratic, too. The soldiers who had carried him looked concerned. "Is he still alive?" asked one.

"Oh, yes," said Adela. "He's merely poisoned. Some form of Atropine see how the veins of his hands bulge."

One big guard said, "Just cure him, Ma'am. We want him back all better by the time Sir Ahrmaand returns." Another tossed a few coins on the table for her. She cast a spell of curing.

As Fang sat up, he kissed her hand. "My eternal thanks, lady." But Adela had seen a glint of unnatural light in his eyes, a spark of purple light.

"May God watch over you," she said solemnly. It was not a blessing, it was a recognition of the threat that was Cardinal Fang.

Nightstalker placed a bandage on Penumbra's leg. She was surprised at the action but she did not interfere. He remained masked although they had

entered his living quarters. They sat together at a table like Daimyo Koronata's: very short legs and pearl inlay designs.

Another Drow brought them a meal. "I'm afraid I'm not hungry," said Penumbra.

Nightstalker opened a bottle of plum wine. "You are my guest. Do not dishonor your host by refusing his generosity." He poured two glasses, let her pick one.

She eyed it dubiously, sniffed it. "This will make me drunk."

"And maybe me as well," said Nightstalker. He turned away, drank the glass, remasked and turned back to face her. She set her glass down without so much as a sip.

Nightstalker lay back on cushions. "Come closer," he whispered. "There is no need for you to be afraid of me."

Embarrassed by his intense gaze she stood up to leave. "I don't understand you," she said.

"It's simple. You are on a Quest for your Name, this I have heard."

"This is common knowledge on the streets. What of it?" she said.

"I am looking for a certain object," Nightstalker began. "Eat," he encouraged her but although she sat down, she did not partake of the delicacies spread before her.

"I will help you with this Quest if you will bring me this object," said the assassin.

"If I bring this thing to you, will you make peace with Sinjen?" asked the Rhiattin Dark Elf.

Nightstalker laughed at Penumbra. "He would die before letting you have it. Yet he does not know truly what it is he bears."

"What is it?"

Nightstalker thought a moment. "It is a small amulet which he wears about his neck. It looks like three tears chasing each other about."

Penumbra said, "I have seen this thing before." She did not say that she had detected quite a powerful glamour about it-- a magical spell too strong to be completely concealed by the second spell of veiling. "What does it do?" She sat close to him, touched his arm.

He raised an eyebrow. "It is the key to the next age. He carries with him the seeds of the new times. Magical laws will change if it is awakened. Natural laws, too, perhaps. I am no scholar on the subject."

"This is no thing for you to use, Nightstalker," said Penumbra.

He laughed. "It is not 'usable.' Whatever it does, it does without the bidding of its wearer. To me, it is the symbol of the order to which he and I belong. The order of the Firebird Reborn, of which only he and I alone remain! We are sworn to protect this talisman and whoever is our order's leader wears it."

"Who does this magical thing benefit? What is its purpose?"

"Who knows?" said Nightstalker. "The realms it has passed through are many, and many times the lands in its presence were devastated. We of the order believe that it bestows justice. It symbolizes the Principles of Earth, Wind, and Fire."

"Justice," she murmured. "Do you act in the name of Justice?"

"Hail!" said Nightstalker, a word Sinjen had taught her meant 'yes.'

"Then I shall aid you."

Thariand looked into his crystal once more, this time breaching the seal between the towerlands and a mythical netherworld. He recalled that once the Party of Ten had harrowed Hell to bring back Sir Ahrmaand. Ahrmaand had been well-loved in spite of his aloof manner and inner torments. However, there was one other, a man who had been a longtime foe of Demonkind which had invaded a nation called Dreadwood Hold.

Now only scholars like the starmage Thariand remembered there had ever been a Dreadwood; it was now a blasted wasteland of black stone without even any ruins to hint at what had once stood there. And it was to be wondered if even any of the Party of Ten remembered De Hugh.

Baron De Hugh endured the nameless torments that had been his lot for longer than he could remember. The emotional suffering continued without ceasing and De Hugh knew the feelings were inflicted upon him by Hellions, invisible demons that used one's tiniest shortcomings as holes into which mental spikes were driven. He and Ahrmaand had been taken prisoner so long ago, brought to this mind-wrenchingly alien place. It was the home of a thousand devils, the spawning ground of much evil. It was a piece of Hell.

Mephistopheles began to materialize about De Hugh's cell, a howling putrid magical essence that swirled about and caressed De Hugh's chained body mockingly. It gathered in the center of the room, a glowing form with long nails, glowing eyes. A piercing shriek, the natural tongue of a demon, filled the stone room that had no door. Then Mephistopheles spoke in a tongue that De Hugh would understand. "Where is it?" he thundered.

"Where's what? Lost something, o mighty one?" Knowing the demon would be irritated by sarcasm, De Hugh felt he had little to lose. What would they do, cut his bread and water rations in half? He was not even a living body now. All that remained of him was his soul, manifested as a bound human form because it was in the underworld where ghosts are normal.

"You think you can suffer no further. Mayhap you are right. I am in a merciful mood, De Hugh. I will reduce your torment if you inform me of the spy who is in this room."

then he could see them: little ghostlings the size of a finger, each with a malicious little face with tiny biting jaws. He ignored them, picked up Thariand's body and did what any sensible warrior would do in his situation: he gave Thariand a solid slap to wake him up.

The blue star blazed out in response and a bolt of energy rocketed towards the center of Sinjen's chest. It connected with a similar one coming out of Sinjen's amulet. The bodies of warrior and mage trembled violently; Sinjen was both conscious and unhurt. A dazzling rainbow surrounded the two of them and the room was filled with brilliance.

De Hugh saw the demon in his prison grow stronger, more substantial. Smoke flowed in through all the chinks of the bricks, joining with Mephistopheles. Then a brilliant light flowed in and the demon was thrown back opposite De Hugh. Sapphire bonds formed about the Hellduke's wrists, ankles and neck. They glowed brilliantly, then became clear.

The shining light faded abruptly.

"Free!" thought the wizard Thariand. In a moment he was shaking Sinjen's hand and welcoming his friend back. "I thought you...might be dead," he said.

"Good thing for you that I wasn't!" replied the good-natured fighter. He said nothing of his amulet, for he still considered that one of his many secrets whose time for revelation had not yet come.

"I was trying to contact the spirit of De Hugh when you found me." Revelation struck Thariand as he realized that this meant De Hugh must be the very one imprisoned within the dark globe that Mephistopheles had held. "I have some very bad news, my friend," said Thariand.

"What's that?"

"We must once more deal with the Dark Lord who once besieged these lands, the Duke of Hell himself."

Sinjen said, "You mean Mephi--"

Thariand held up his hand. "Yes, him. He's holding De Hugh prisoner and torturing him mercilessly." Thariand clenched his fists and Sinjen's dark eyes sparked angrily at the outrage.

"Well, guess you're not going anywhere," said De Hugh. Across the tiny room from him the graceful form of Mephistopheles hung from the wall like a bizarre mirror for De Hugh. "Hmmm...I know..."

"Pebyr wrote this one; it's called Ten Thousand Ninjas. Of course, while Ak'kelron was torturing me..."

"Be quiet...Silence, or I will tear out your throat..."

"I occasionally sang it to myself to keep from going crazy..."

TO BE CONTINUED ??

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..with my teeth and grind your skull and brains to toothpaste..."

..Here, I'll teach it to you. One little ninja, sitting in a tree; One

little ninja, spying on me; One little ninja, trying not to pee; Yes, it's one

little ninja no one can see...Two little ninjas, sitting in a tree...Join in

anytime if you think you've got the tune!...two little ninjas, spying on me..

"Shut up! Shut up! Will you just--AAAARRRRGH!!"

The young Balron humbly led Ak'kelron of the Kelchenicht to the throne room of Mephistopheles. "And he'd better have a great army for me, after what I paid him with: a prime soul, one of the better ones of my collection!" said Ak'kelron.

"...of course, great one...yes, great one, oh yes..." rumbled the Balron inanely. They arrived at the throneroom but it was empty.

"Where is he?" Ak'kelron muttered irritably. Then he spotted the dark crystal ball nestled amongst the cushions of Archduke Mephistopheles's chair. "Hm?" he grunted as he picked it up and, after looking both ways, sat down in the throne himself.

The Balron grew uneasy but did not dare to contradict a greater demon.

After gazing into the crystal a moment, Ak'kelron let out a guttawing laugh. Then he shifted form to appear as a more comely human, a gallant warrior in slashed sleeves and short cape. The laugh became courtly and pleasant. Then mirth overcame Ak'kelron and he screeched with hilarity.

"Guess what, Balron? I'm...the new duke of this place, the Palace of Liesl!" The remnants of Ak'kelron's forces began coming through the door. Mephistopheles's startled minions crept forward to join them. Then they realized they were numerous, therefore strong again, and they set up a clamorous cheer for Ak'kelron Kelchenicht.

To BE CONTINUED ??

THE SAGA OF PEBYR CONTINUES!

For the next two weeks the raiding party saw no evidence of intelligence life in the desolate lands around the Kingdom of the Burning Lands. As they neared the great caravan route known as the "Gateway to the West", at a point approximately 5 days travel from the valley of "Oakdale", Sinjen ordered the supply train to set up camp in a hidden arroyo next to a large mesa. He left a small defensive force and had every man carry light provisions for a two week journey. Sinjen had planned a smaller diversionary raid to "Borrow" supplies, in order to bleed off forces from the defense of "Oakdale" and supplement their meager supplies.

He figured that it would do well not to count on surprise, since the ambush indicated that at least Aramithris knew of the existence of a raiding party. In fact Sinjen was counting on this. Aramithris had only one major failing as a commander. Though damn good in the field, he tended to underestimate his opponents. Usually this was no problem, since his troops were good enough to steamroll their way over most opponents. But this time it would cost him, on that Sinjen was determined.

Sinjen sent the diversionary force to attack the bastion of power, "Castle Memoria", with orders to make the attack convincing but to quickly withdraw down the gateway road liberating necessary stores and provisions for the journey home. Sinjen led his personal troops down the "Montana" roadway, which led to the valley of "Oakdale". They were guided by Fahrinaie, who was still pretending to be Pebyr. Sinjen hoped Pebyr was alright, because he had not showed up. He had to admit that he wouldn't have known it was Fahrinaie and not Pebyr who was with him, if Pebyr himself had not told him. But was that Pebyr he had talked to? God only knows, he thought to himself. They were capable of being so much alike it was almost impossible to tell them apart.

In the distance it was possible to see the Vast Bastions of Aramithris base of power. Sinjen sent Aurendir and the other scouts to investigate the position. He also posted picketts to screen the force from the surrounding countryside. He wanted them to believe that the main attack was on Castle Memoria.

As they reached the castle, Aurendir rode up with a burning lander in tow. He said, "This guy wants to see Pebyr, says he is with the Underground". Sinjen called "Pebyr" forward to talk to him. He hoped that Fahrinaie would indeed be able to convince the man that he was "Pebyr". He needn't have worried, since Fahrinaie was able to easily convince him of his false identity. The Burning Lander said to Sinjen, "If you will follow me I will show you a less traveled way around the ambush". Sinjen had the raiding party follow the Burning Lander off "Montana" road onto a smaller road. This road wound across the land following the path of least resistance. It was an excellent road for concealment and for the setting of an ambush. He certainly hoped that there were none ahead. As they neared the castle, he sent Dracnar to sneak ahead and see if there were troops around the castle. After a half hour, he returned telling of troops but not that many of the frontline troops. Sinjen guessed that they were either at Castle Memoria or at the Ambush on Montana Road.

"Well there's no sense wasting any time, so we might as well attack

now", Sinjen thought to himself. He signalled the troops to attack and prayed to all the gods in the heavens that it wasn't a trap they were charging into. If it were, they were going to make their deaths memorable ones.

They were met by scattered flights of arrows that quickly picked up in volume. Sinjen was able to adjust his lines accordingly, realizing that it wasn't a trap. But neither was it going to be a cake walk either. Just as he reached the wall and vaulted off his horse to scale the ladders, he noticed a horrible shimmer in the air as there appeared interspersed throughout his party, the ugliest most malevolent creatures that he had seen since his journey into hell, after Ahrmaand. "Bone devils? What the hell are they doing here?", he frantically thought to himself, "Gods, I hope they're on our side". Fahrinaie galloped up to him, shouting "Sinjen, don't worry they are with me. Come Pebyr is in this Castle, and is in danger of his life".

Fahrinaie grabbed Sinjen by the arm and shouted some words in a tongue that, as hardened as he was to such things, made Sinjen shudder in a primeaval instinct of fear. If anything convinced him of Fahrinaie's identity, it was that. That was the spell that Mephistopheles himself used to teleport them out of his castle. Thariand himself would later tell Sinjen of the truth to that. Only devils of a sufficient rank can cast the spells of the highest order of magnitude such as the one Fahrinaie himself now spoke.

After a brief instance of disorientation and the sensation of traveling vast reaches of time and space, Sinjen and Fahrinaie appeared in the dungeons under the castle outside a particular doorway accompanied by a Bone Devil. Fahrinaie commanded the Bone Devil to rip the door off the hinges and to guard the stairs against interruption. Quickly they rushed into the cell as Fahrinaie's staff lit up with a cold light that reminded Sinjen of a light used to illuminate graveyards. He spied a figure huddling in the corner away from the light of Fahrinaie's staff, and Pebyr spoke in tortured whisper, "Who is it? Can't you leave me alone, haven't you done enough already. I hate this lousy world. Leave me to die, I don't want to live. Not like this anyway. Not like this!".

"Shut up Pebyr you ain't dead yet, it's me and Fahrinaie. We've come to rescue you. Can you stand? We'll get you back to the healers. They should be able to make you feel better". Pebyr slowly and painstakingly made it to his feet aided in large part by the wall, Sinjen and Fahrinaie. They slowly walked him to the doorway of the cell. Fahrinaie then called the Bone Devil to him and muttered another spell of teleportation. "I don't care how many times I hear that language. It will always affect me. At least I can learn to control my reactions", Sinjen thought to himself.

By the time they made it to the healers, Pebyr was out cold. Sinjen left him and Fahrinaie and joined the battle. It was rapidly over, since the burning landers were not prepared to fight 3 battalions of Bone Devils as well as Sinjen's troops. Soon all resistance was ended except for those diehards holed up in the Central Keep of the fortress.

Many were the people who blessed Alloran and the healers that day, for without their gallant efforts all would have been in vain. For it took 30 minutes and thirty lives to break down the door to the central keep.

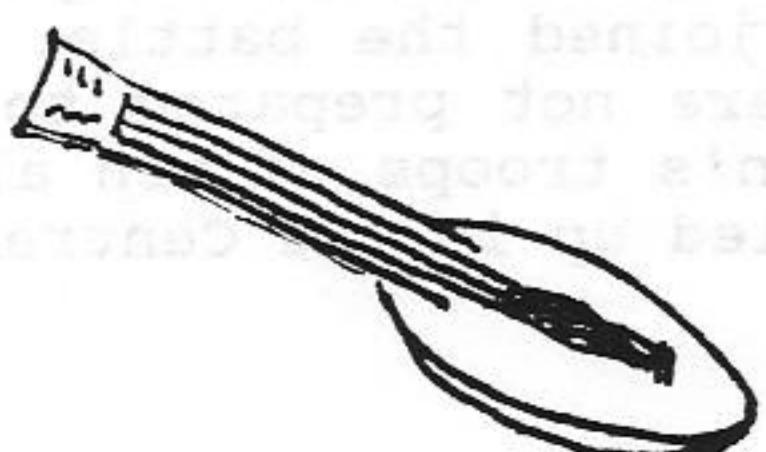
Sinjen and Fahrinaie raced into the keep and up the stairs fighting for almost every foot, until they finally reached the door leading to Aramithris's inner sanctum. He commanded two bone devils to break down the door and enter. They were commanded to kill no one, or Fahrinaie would make them suffer for it. It was an unusual sight, thought Sinjen, to see 8 foot tall Bone Devil's shudder in fear. The door splintered under their massive bodies, as they charged into the room beyond, closely followed by Sinjen and Fahrinaie.

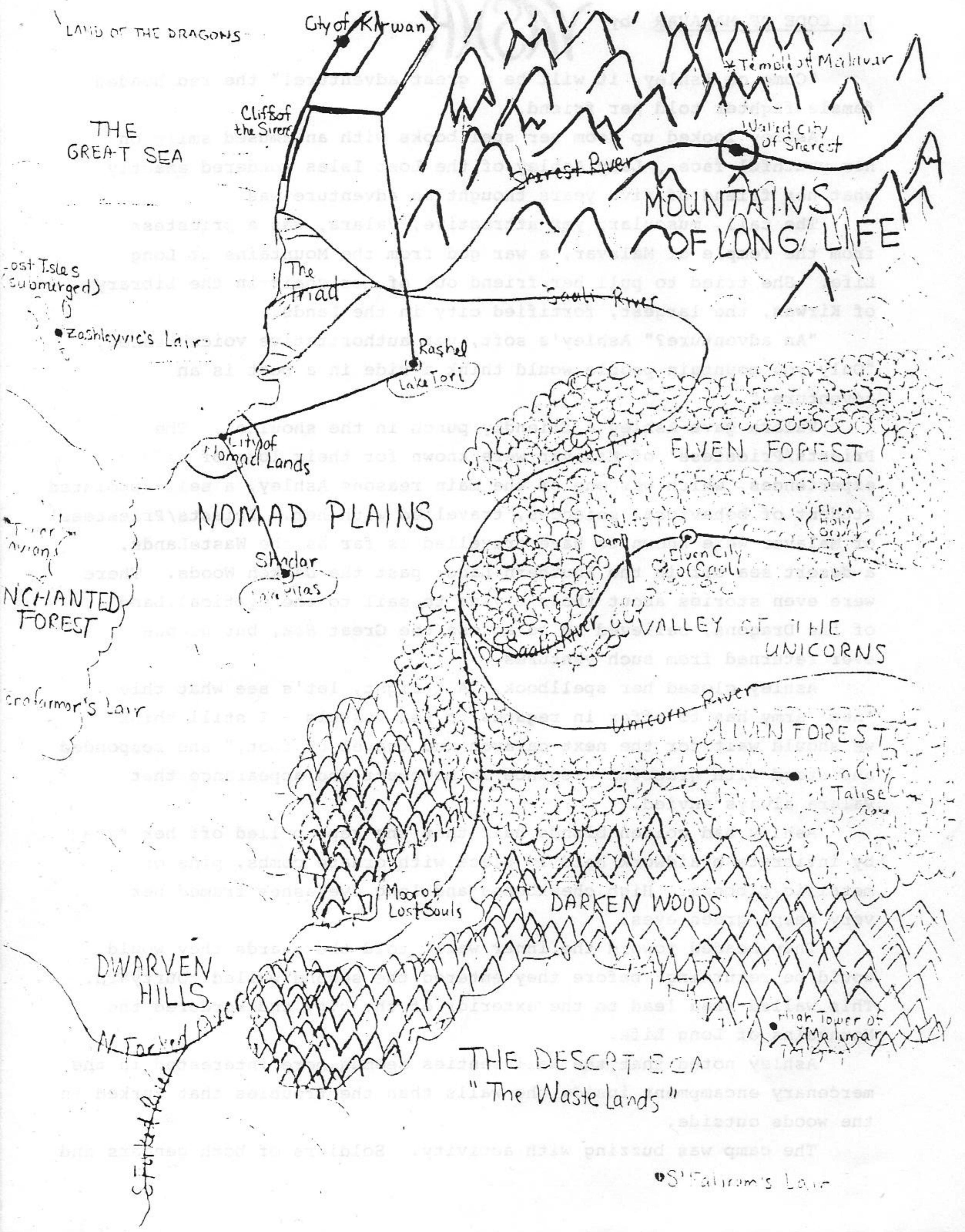
Aramithris stood in the room beyond standing with his back to a window. He stood tall in the room, and Sinjen could easily understand how he could singlehandedly wield so much power. He had the kind of presence a man could die for. But not this one, Sinjen thought to himself. He has wielded too much power for too long, and it would have to end now. Fahrinaie wasted no time and Iceballed Aramithris. This was the only thing he had that could effect a paladin as mighty as Aramithris. He quickly teleported them down to Aurendir and Alloran. Together the three were able to bind Aramithris with spells and ropes. Upon seeing Aramithris in the hands of the Barad-Duiners, the remaining Burning Landers stopped fighting, realizing the reasons were now no more. Their path out of the Burning Lands would be hard fought, but the task was done. All that remained was to heal the wounded and the dead and fight their way back home past the troops that had not heard of the wars end. Thankfully there would be guides out of as well as there were into the Kingdom.

The man who had led the party to the castle appeared at that moment, on a balcony of the keep and shouted to all those burning landers who could hear his voice, "The Tyranny is over, power is returned to the people. When the danger of Tyranny is past Aramithris can be allowed to contribute again to the world. But remember so much power should not rest in one set of hands for too long. The Tyranny has ended. May it never rise again."

* * * * *

The trip back to Barad-Duin was long and difficult. Sparhawk's mission was a qualified success. Though it had achieved it's purpose of drawing off troops, he had not been able to liberate as much supplies as he had hoped for. But only one dark cloud hung over the party. Try as they might, Pebyr remained as if sunk under a dark cloud of doom. No songs were sung by him on the road home, and Fahrinaie said Sinjen, "Only time will tell if any songs will be sung by him again..."





"Come on Ashley, it will be a great adventure!" the red headed female fighter told her friend.

Ashley looked up from her spellbooks with an amused smile on her youthful face. Lady Ashley of the Lost Isles wondered exactly what her friend of five years thought an adventure was.

The tall, muscular, yet attractive, Valara, was a priestess from the Temple of Malavar, a war god from the Mountains of Long Life. She tried to pull her friend out of her chair in the Library of Kirwan, the largest, fortified city in the Lands.

"An adventure?" Ashley's soft, yet authoritative voice teased, "Only you mountain people would think a ride in a boat is an adventure."

Valara gave Ashley a friendly punch in the shoulder. The Priests/Priestess' of Malavar were known for their love of life's experiences, which was one of the main reasons Ashley, a self-appointed student of behavioral sciences, travelled with her. Priests/Priestess' of Malavar were known to have travelled as far as the WasteLands, a desert sea off in the Southern Land, past the Darken Woods. There were even stories about their trying to sail to the mystical, Land of the Dragons, believed to be across the Great Sea, but no one ever returned from such ventures.

Ashley closed her spellbook, "All right, let's see what this 'new' army has to offer in regards to sea vessels - I still think we should wait for the next caravan and travel by foot," she responded and stood with graceful elegance in movement and appearance that Valara always envied.

Ashley had golden blonde hair that she kept pulled off her face by intricate braidwork held in place with ornate combs, pins or metallic ribbons. High cheekbones and long eyelashes framed her very deep, green eyes.

They headed toward the inner wall, told the guards they would be returning, before they entered the second walled courtyard. This walled area lead to the exterior of the city and bordered the Mountains of Long Life.

Ashley noted that the wall senties seemed more interested in the mercenary encampment inside the walls than the troubles that lurked in the woods outside.

The camp was buzzing with activity. Soldiers of both genders and

various races wore a variety of uniforms, armor and mail, carried a variety of weapons - some Ashley noted were magical - as they moved from tent to tent. War horses were coralled off to one side, along with herd animals, no doubt to feed the large army. Men and women in seductive clothing solicited their 'services' to the soldiers of the camp. Even town merchants wandered through the tents, trying to sell their wares.

Ashley and Valara seemed to blend in perfectly among the soldiers in the camp. Both were dressed in black leather and boots, but Valara wore shoulder, forearm, thigh and chin guards that Ashley had enchanted for her to increase their strength, decreasing their weight. Valara also wore a single gauntlet of leather with steel knuckles on her swordhand, while Ashley kept both hands bare for spell casting.

Valara carried a short, two-sided sword on her back, the sword made of a material Ashley said would never break; two throwing axes given to her by the Temple when she became a full Priestess. She was also skilled with the flail, but told the Elders she found it to be a messy weapon and declined receiving that type of weapon.

Ashley carried a staff, to which Valara still did not know it's full potential. It light their way with a pale, red light on many occasions, it's twin, spring knives on opposite ends of the stick had killed numerous orcs, trolls and goblins, as did the lightening the staff could occassionally harness. Besides that, Ashley used it for it's original purpose, a staff. Ashley's only other weapon, besides her magic, was a two edged dagger she kept tucked into her right boot.

"Hello Ladies. How may we serve you?" a short man with visible scars and muscles shown on his bare chest and arms, asked from behind a table at a tent marked with the standard of a flaming ax.

"We are looking for you ship's steward or executive. We wish to book passage to the City of Nomads," Ashley told the bearded man in front of them.

"We normally don't take passengers -."

"You move soldiers by boat. We can travel with them," Ashley told him as Valara watched the people move around them, covering their backs, "We are willing to pay very well."

From a leather purse Ashley wore slung over one shoulder and across her torso, she pulled out a small, velvet bag. She revealed

a handful of rubies and opals to the man, then closed the bag again.

"Mmm, yes. Let me introduce you to Lord Ragan, he is the Captain of the Bogwitch," the man told her, "I am the ship's First Lieutenant, Tempra, you are?"

"Lady Ashley and Valara, Priestess of Malavar," Ashley told him.

He bowed slightly with his head, but did not lower his eyes.

Valara followed the man into the tent, first. Ashley saw all with Valara's eyes, before Ashley would enter. A spell of seeing the two shared until death and could be activated by the person who's eyes were to be 'seer' according to the situation. The situation merited who went first.

Both Valara, and through her eyes, Ashley, saw the mirror of revealing off to one side of the tent's entrance. Valara appeared in the mirror in a gown of pure white, she made a face at her reflexion.

Ashley was already fishing out the spell components from her 'bottomless' purse, as Valara's eyes settled on the owner of the tent.

The man was quite handsome. His fair skin stood out sharply by black, intense eyes, raven black long hair, and strong facial features. He wore a white linen shirt and black trousers, but he was pulling on a sword belt and leather vest upon their arrival.

"I appologize," his calming, powerful voice stated, "I was not aware I had company. Please excuse my appearance and the condition of my living area."

Valara noted that his tent and his appearance were immaculate. He flashed her award winning smile.

Ashley entered behind Valara, throwing a handful of white, crystalized powder at the enchanted mirror, with an inconspicuous flick of the wrist.

Ashley saw a shimmering glimpse of gold as her true self was almost revealed before the mirror smoked over a true self even Valara did not know existed. Now with the mirror temporarily deactivated, she caste a spell to detect other magical items. not only were most of the objects in the room enchanted, but the strongest magics seem to emit from the darked haired man.

"Lord Ragan, leader of the Flaming Ax and Captain of the Bogwitch. How may I serve you charming Ladies?" he asked.

Ashley noticed the man's charm ability was partially spell induced,

patially natural talent.

Lord Ragan knew a powerful magic-user when he saw one, and both these women emitted powerful magic and souls of pure good. Odd for warrior women not to be tainted by the influence of the Lands.

"We need to charter your vessel for passage to the City of the Nomad Land," Valara stated.

"And they can pay us very well," Tempra added.

"I am sure they can indeed. But Ladies, there is a merchant caravan arriving during the First Moon's wan. Are you rushed?" Ragan asked.

"My companion has never sailed in a boat. She is intrigued by the experience," Ashley stated.

"Ah, yes. The Malavar Code - Live today as if there is no tomorrow. Grasp every experience and memory for each is a piece of your life. I've heard the Malavar philosophy. Quite interesting, really. The only civilized addition to this cursed Lands," Ragan commented, "And you?"

"I enjoy watching others."

"Well, if you don't mind a bunch of messy men and loud women, I see no problem with your sailing with us," Ragan told them, but was looking at Ashley. She was quite attractive. Her goodness seemed to make her all the more appealing.

"Here, sign your names, and it will be done," he replied, opening a thick, leather bound book to a ledger of names and manifests. He handed a pen to Ashley.

Ashley scowled. You would have to be a novice wizard not to notice the magical aura of the book. The book, like the mirror, would reveal Ashley's true names, if she signed it.

Ashley passed the pen to Valara, "Sign us in, please."

"You must sign your own names," Ragan instructed. Ashley focused her cold, emerald colored eyes on him.

"I will not seal my name in a magical book," she remarked. Valara slammed the pen down, almost spilling the ink.

"Neither shall I for that matter!" Valara proclaimed.

"Ladies, what is it you wish to hid?" he asked calmly.

"Does it matter? What is it you fear? That you wish for us to reveal?" Ashley asked.

"Very good. I'll write your names for you. Ship leaves tonight. Good day Ladies," Ragan told them. They took that as a dismissal and

left, not questioning the night schedule. Tempra reentered the tent after they had left. His servitude expression replaced with that of a cunning soldier.

"She disabled the mirror," Tempra told him.

"I noticed. She also refused to sign the book," Ragan added, "Who is she?"

"I spoke to a few townspeople while they were in audience. Lady Ashley is as she says according to a Kirwan Merchant. She also claims heritage to the Lost Isles. Valara is a Priestess of Malavar. They are quite popular in this area for their deeds. They rid the Triad area of the Trolls and their association with Lord Favian and the White Order is very strong. Valara is believed to be the next destined High Priestess and has claimed enough experiences to take that role if she wishes."

"Did you note their auras?"

"Pure good. Scary, eh?" Tempra remarked.

"No, I find it quite...stimulating, actually."

"You are the enchanter, not them," he warned.

"Yes, strange, isn't it?" Ragan commented.

"Watch it Captain. Remember, these are human women, even though warriors, you would destroy them before you can...enjoy them."

"Not them, Tempra, it's the magic-user I'm interested in. She has strong magic and a powerful soul. Both could be very benificial to me - and Vortaj's cause."

"Vortaj wants the death of Favian and the White Order, and the Elven Kingdoms. This woman is allied with Favian, possibly is a member of the White Order. How can that benefit you or Vortaj?"

"Stranger things have happened."

* * * *

"Hey, Ashley! You got to try this!" Valara yelled from her position in the hawsers and ropes that kept the sails and rigging in place. She hung upside down and waved to Ashley. Ashley sometimes wondered if the clergy of Malivar were not lover's of life, rather just suicidal or plain stupid. She tried to hid a smile of amusement as she watched the sailors around her.

"Your friend is quite a risk taker," Ashley heard Ragan state, from behind. Ashley didn't flinch at the voice. She knew he had been standing there for a few moments in the shadows, but hadn't

acknowledged his presence. It was a presence she felt she should recognize, but could not place.

"She enjoys challenges," Ashley said simply.

"So I see. Well, Lady Ashley, tell me about your self. Where did you apprentice, for instance?"

"I did not."

"Oh come on now, Lady. You could not have learned magic without a master."

"I know who to read," she retorted, "and I have a talent for it."

Ashley suddenly felt a wave of nausea overcome her. She steadied herself by grabbing the railing.

"Is something the matter?" Ragan asked with concern in his voice.

"I - I've never handled sea travel well," she admitted.

"Ah, that thing about magic-users and water - but I though that was just a myth?"

"It is," she commented, she was also only partially telling him the truth. It was merely an excuse. She felt something dangerous about this man and could not place it. He was the cause of this new affliction.

Valara landed with a thud, on both feet, next to them. She apparently jumped and flipped from the ropes.

"Is something the wrong, Le?" Valara asked with genuine concern.

"I need some solitude and rest, is all," Ashley responded, "I will retreat to my cabin."

"I insist on going with you," Valara told her and bid her farewell to Ragan. He nodded politely to the two women and watched them go.

"Uh oh," Tempra commented in Ragan's ear, suddenly at his side, "Problems in Lover's Court? She is a strong one, that woman. She senses something amiss in your demeanor."

"I will have to use better cloaking magic then, now will I?" he tried not to snap back.

"That you will. We pass the Cliff of Sirens in a moment..." he replied, handing his Captain some pieces of wax, "Best you prepare yourself."

"Useless precaution. We have no proof they can charm me," Ragan stated, but put the wax in his ears before they got within hearing distance of the dangerous and fatal music.

"I don't hear anything," Valara commented, next to the exterior portal.

"You are not a man, or have you forgotten?" Ashley told her from her position laying in a hammock, her arm covering her eyes.

Valara plucked the main string, making Ashley's hammock bounce but her friend did not move.

"What is bothering you? You are not seasick."

"No, I sense danger... and Ragan is it's vortex."

"Is he in danger or the cause of danger."

"He is the danger, but I do not know in what parameters."

"Huh?" Valara asked, puzzled.

"What the danger is related to," she clarified.

"Well, most women find that appealing in a man - danger, a touch of mystery. Anyway, you are the one who examines people's behaviours and actions. Looks like ya got a good subject to - ah - study."

"Not funny, Valara," Ashley retorted.

"True, I don't want to even imagine what kind of creature would be begot from your womb in such a union," Valara teased, but noticed her friend wince at the word 'creature'.

"Sorry if I offended...I ment it in jest."

"No offense taken. You made it sound like you expect a wolf with a lions head and eagle claws to be my offspring."

"No, no...I did not mean -."

"I know, I am just being difficult."

"Eh, what else is new," Valara commented back in good humor and turned back to see if she could catch a glimpse of a so-called siren.

(To be continued...if I can find a typerwriter to appropriate)

copywrited by the author, 1989

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The T-Tunic "Again"
by Baronet DeHugh

Yes, the T-tunic has been in the "Amtgard" rules since who knows when I bet everybody has seen it. Yet, I still see a few peasants roaming our land in shamed nakedness. Perhaps the current explanation for creating a tunic is a bit complex or oversimplistic?

Well, I will now pass on my meager knowledge of how I make T-tunics to you peasants or nobles. This actually may or may not be the correct way of doing this but it seems to work for me.

A. Obtain a piece of cloth that is of sufficient length from it's halfway point that it will be long enough to go from your shoulders to your desired length. It must also be wide enough to cover your shoulders.

B. Fold the cloth in half lengthwise, then fold it in half widthwise.

C. Now cut a hole for your head. Don't cut it as large as you might think it should be. It's much better to be too small than to big! You can cut it bigger if it needs to be.

D. Next, cut two rectangular pieces of material of the same size for the sleeves. The size of the sleeves will depend on your size. The width should be however long you wish your sleeves to be. The length should be double the length from the top of your shoulder down to the desired point. About a two foot length of cloth should be more than enough for anyone. This would make the sleeves very baggy and less restraining in battle. If it is too big for your taste then make them smaller.

E. Unfold the cloth with the head hole and sew the sleeves on. The best way to find where the sleeves go on is to fold the tunic in half and mark the top then fold the sleeves (lengthwise) in half and mark that too.

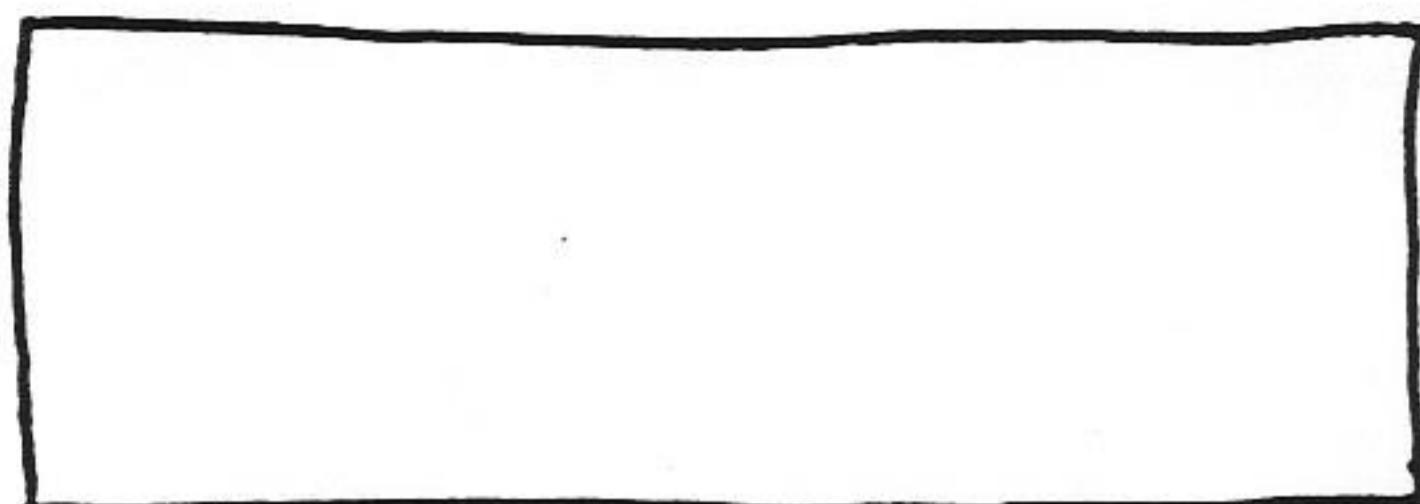
F. Next, after you have sewn the sleeves on. Fold the tunic like figure F and sew up the sides.

G. Sew the sleeves together.

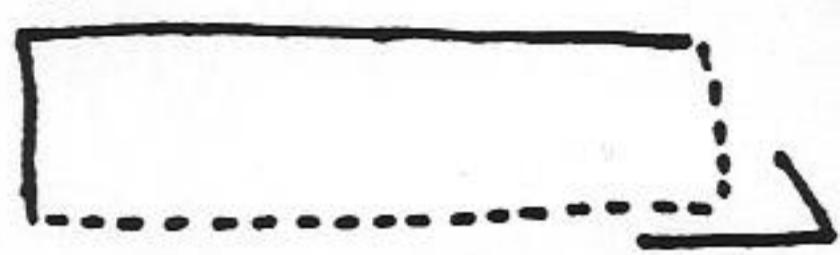
H. At this point you could stop and go with the "rough" look or you can hem up the edges. It's easy to do and give the tunic a finished look. To hem it up just fold the edges in a little and sew them there. Make sure your tunic is inside-out when you do this. You may do this to the head hole too, it's a little difficult but you can do it.

I. Turn your tunic rightside-out and your done!

A



B

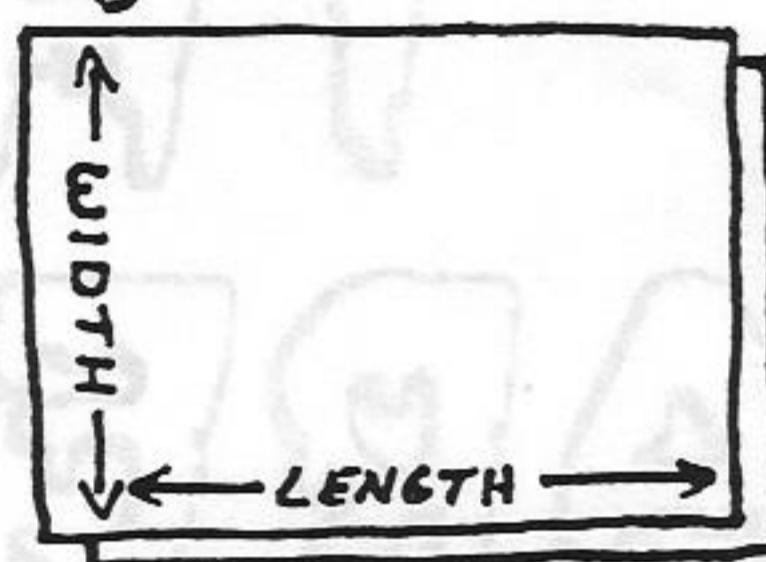


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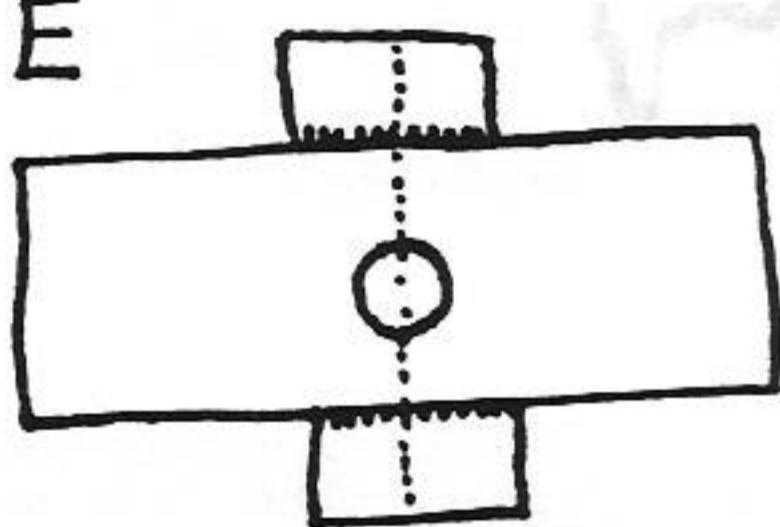
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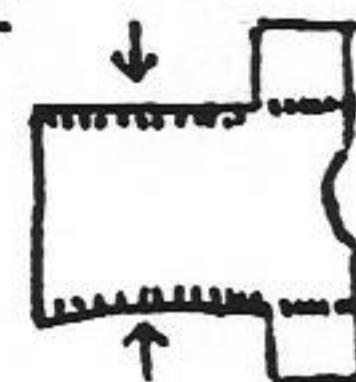
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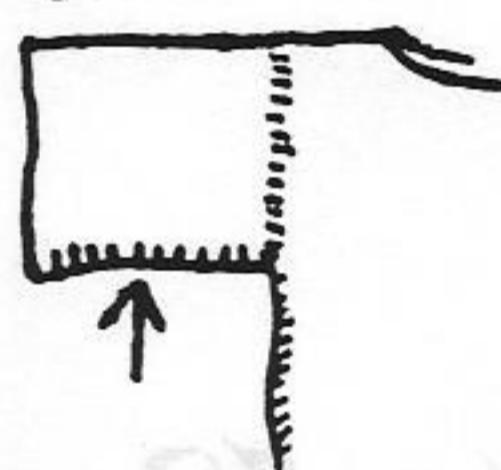
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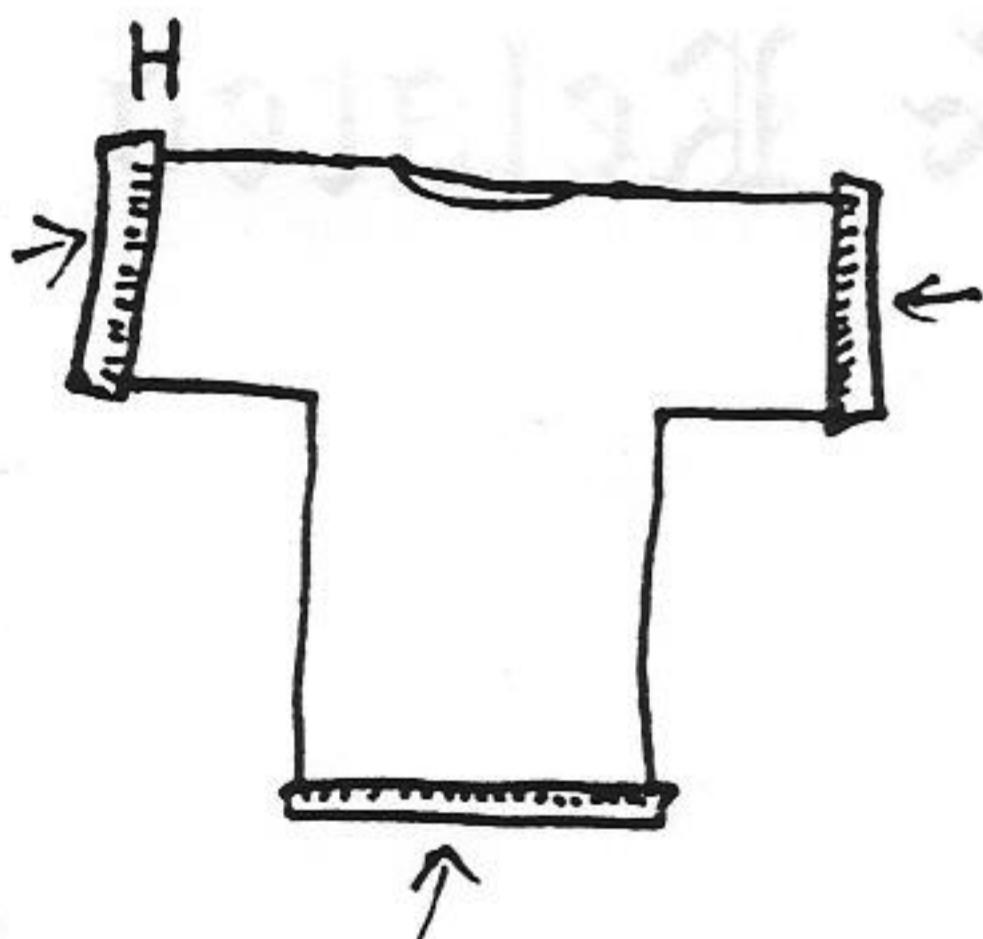
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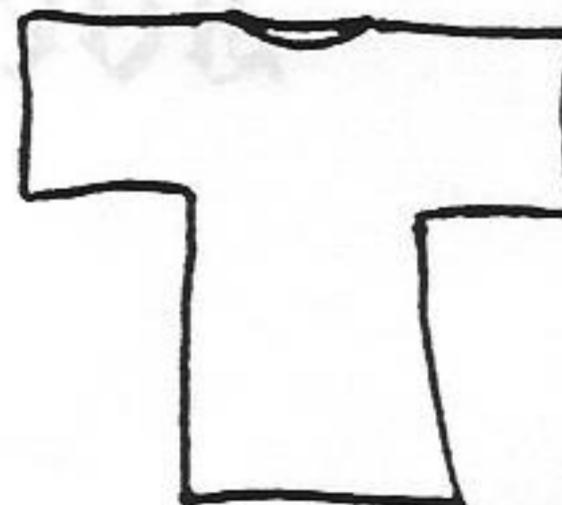
G



H



I



THE ARENA

New Battlegame & Related
Ideas

QUOTES

"Gods...Gods...Gods...in heaven."

James

"Usually, But not Always."

Matt

"He want's you."

Matt to waitress

"She got him to his knee's."

Todd Barr

"Hey, you've got my girlfriend on her knees...Gimme."

Nathan

"With prices like this whatever I get, I'm keeping."

James while reading the menu

"One Fian, Two Fiana, One Sionnach, Two Shnookum's"

Penumbra

"Oh I'll take that too...I'll take anything I can get."

James

"Get your butt out the door in the fucking dress

"", when I evnoughed at your ass and you
wonton, oh yeah"

"Does your girlfriend have a life?"

Todd & Matt to Nathan

"Yeah, but he uses it."

Austin

"So...where's your loveslave?"

"Shit off James"

"Which one?"

"Nathan"

"He's sporting Equal."

Matt about James

"HEY KORONADA, HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE YOU TO TIE HER UP?"
UNKNOWN

"IT DEPENDS..."
CHUCK

"YEAH, IT DEPENDS ON WHETHER OR NOT SHE'S ASLEEP WHEN HE STARTS."
AUSTIN

"THAT'S TRUE."
CHUCK

"OR MAYBE I'LL HANDCUFF HER ANKLES TOGETHER."

RAY TORTURING DEBBIE

"LIGHTNING STABBED THE EARTH LIKE AN
INEFFICIENT ASSASSIN."

LINE FROM A BOOK MONTY READ

"You booze too much to be twelve & under."

Matt to Anthony

"You know, I like this place-I'd like to be able to come back..."

Ray to Monty referring to "them"

"Give me your hand."

Rufus while preparing to bite hand

"I make no guarantee of quality."

Unknown

"And you wonder why he's a paranoid elf."

Lupic

If you've heard a funny quote someone said on the battlefield, or in court, let us know!?

Hello fellow members of Barad-Duin! We are starting a new and improved "UNDERGUND". But as any good newspaper we need YOUR help. We would appreciate your contributions in our Literary sections as well as our Artistic sections. We are adding some new sections to broaden our horizons, and make this paper all that much better.

Newbie Guild News & Submissions...

Special Acknowledgment to Newbies who have contributed to the club, and submissions to be printed in Undergund.

Advertisements...

For those who wish to sell their skills or objects. Such as Garb, Weapons, Spellballs, Armor, Cloth, Mugs, or anything that pertains to our game. Let it be known in this section.

Garb Section...

Patterns for simple garb that anyone could sew quickly.

Problem Shooters...

You have a problem with the game, or if you have suggestions for the ruling people, this is a billboard for those complaints, constructive critisisms, etc.

Awards Listings...

Weapons Master Tournaments? Ducal Qualifications? Quests? Jousts? Well the ending results will have a spot in the Awards Listings. As well as special moments from these events.

Special Events...

Courts, Camping Events, Feasts, you name it, it should be in this section. We hope to have special moments from these events in this section as well as how to get to upcoming events.

New Battlegame Ideas...

You think you have a neat idea for a battlegame? Send it to us. We will print it in Undergund. Or if you have special ideas to help the champion in his very hard job, send it to us. Let's try to help the champion and make his job easier.

A fictional storyline continued in every issue....

We plan to print a continuing story. We don't have author/s for this yet. If you want to do it, call us or send us some of your ideas for a story. It is not to be about todays Barad-Duin, or the past Barad-Duin.

Col. Hogen - Editor

Tremlock - Asst. Editor / Etc...

Malikor - Asst. Editor / Scribe & Reporter

Baronette Dehugh - Asst. Editor / Etc...

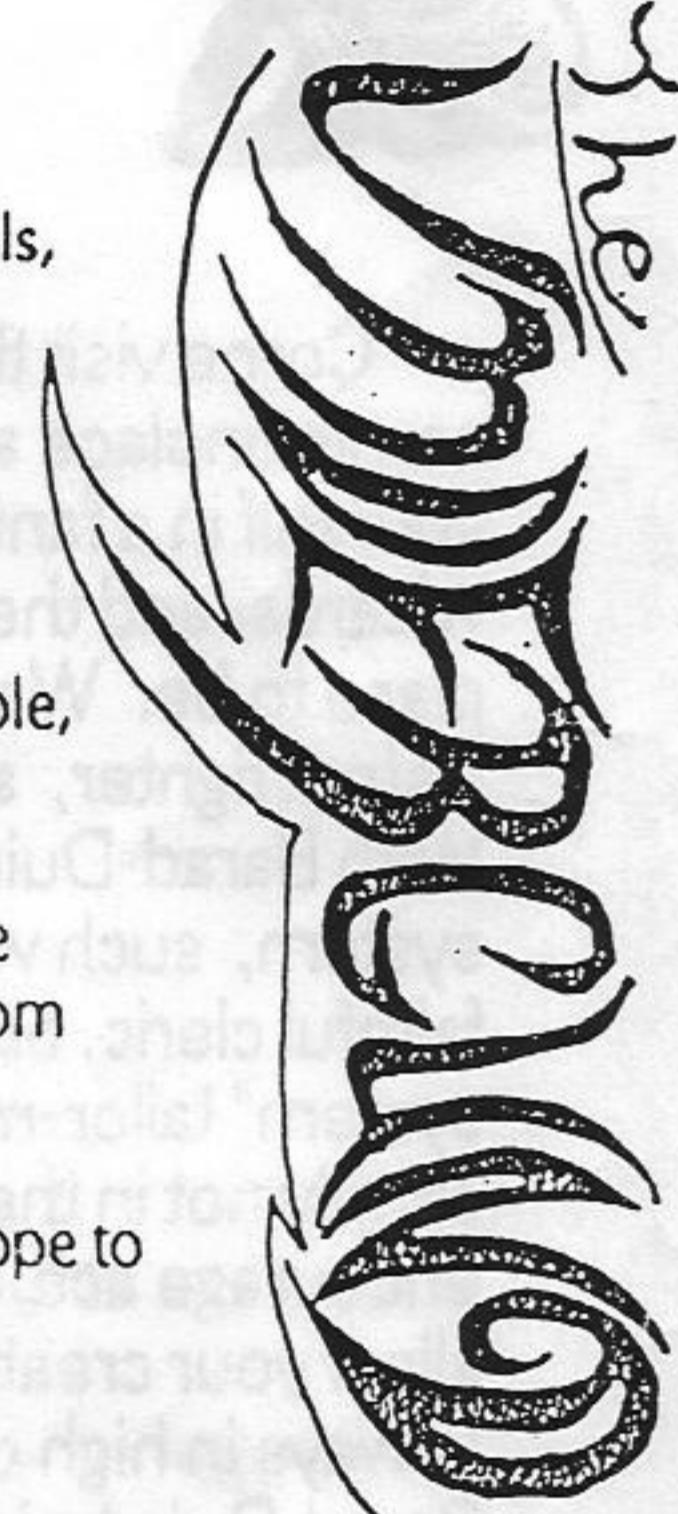
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So what are you waiting for? Our gates are open, the fire is lit, and we anxiously await your entrance into the bright, adventurous realms of Barad-Duin!

