

"Rules of Engagement"

scribed by T'ana Starflower

(Librarian's Note: Part of this document was lost in the fire)

Paladin	Cuchulain
Scout/Cleric	Nizer
Mage	Brianne
Fighter/Mage	Yalran
Catlord	Scratch

1 Frost 797

It was time I went on adventure again. Tyranth and I had come to know each other well, and I had learned the Spell of Finding from him, thinking that it might be of use in many an adventuring situation. I had made some headway in controlling the drake within, but I knew that I had to venture forth if I was to progress further.

I was most intrigued by a proposal presented by three brave warriors from off-plane, named Fhalanghan, Rao, and Herionious. They told the Guild that they sought to rescue a compatriot of theirs who had been foully imprisoned in a dungeon beneath a wasteland called the Howling Hills. It occurred to me that the Finding Spell might be of considerable use in this situation, so I volunteered to join their quest. Also with me stood Rowan, called Father Rowan by some, a witch who speaks of himself as a priest; and Melia, a Mind Mage more skilled than I in some things, though not as skilled in others.

I am called Lady T'ana Starflower, Knight of the Order of the Falcon, elven Sorceress, healer and were-drake. With me is Tyranth, my companion, who was once a mana-drake and whose mind now resides within the circlet I wear.

We briefly discussed the situation in the meeting room, and I offered to scribe on behalf of the Guild. The warriors explained that they were gathering together a group of heroes from different planes in the hope that the variety of abilities in such a group might enable them to overcome obstacles that would confound a less diverse group. Then they gave us bracelets that they said would act as portal keys, enabling us to use the Dead End Alley to transfer to their world, called GreyHawk.

2 Frost 797

There is a Dead End Alley to be found in every city frequented by adventurers they told us, and all are the same. So if one enters one Alley bearing a key, one shall find oneself elsewhere. Seagate's Dead End Alley proved to be in the maze of streets behind the docks. It was squalid and dirty, equally and identically as filthy as the alley it took to. Except that Alley was in a great city set on a plain. This was the Free City of GreyHawk. Above the city sat an imposing citadel called GreyHawk Castle. The warriors led us from the City's slums to a glorious Temple, built to honour a deity named Fhalanghan, apparently one and the same as the Fhalanghan among our employers. I cannot say that I have ever been employed by a power before!

There we met the remainder of the party. There was a person named Scratch, who was described as a Catlord, and was able to shape-change into a massive feline. There was a Paladin, Cuchulain, a doughty warrior who would lead the party; Nizer, a handsome scout; Yalran, a fighter-mage whose eyes glowed strangely red; and Brianne, a lady elemental mage in robes.

We spent most of the morning there in the temple while they tried to explain what it was all about. It seemed that an exceedingly unpleasant entity, a demi-power of wickedness named Iuz the Old had captured their friend, a mighty mage, named Quillarcaine Lawfakir, and imprisoned him in the Hollow Hills. This Iuz person used primarily mind magics and apparently could detect their use in his vicinity. This created something of a problem for myself and for Melia as Mind Mages, and I began to wonder what use we would be. One use was immediately apparent however, since it was clear that our new companions did not know where within the Hollow Hills their friend was hidden. I asked for maps, which they had, and for some item that had belonged to the man we sought.

That led to a trip into the city to a place best described as a literary emporium where the brother of the man showed us to the rooms that had been his. I choose a belt-buckle as most suitable for a pendulum, and we returned to the temple, where I cast the spell of Finding. The spell worked, although I did not feel that I cast it that well, perhaps because, as it was apparent, this was a high mana zone. The pendulum indicated a location some thirty miles north-west of where they had thought Quillarcaine Lawfakir was located. Then there was a disturbance as the Paladin declared he saw an orange thread stretching down to the buckle I had allowed to fall onto the map. Melia cast a limited precognition spell and said that she saw a goat-headed devil coming down the thread. Oops. I drew my tulwar in intention of slashing the thread which was dimly visible to my eyes. Yalran the warrior-mage drew an intricately carved dagger, warned me to leave the thread to him, then cleaved it with his dagger whereupon it vanished.

While I speak of devils I must describe the ninth member of the party. We were introduced to him on the temple steps. His name was Titvilius, and he could not enter because of his devilish nature. We were told that he could be trusted to a point. That being the point at which we find the creature he was determined to destroy. Then we would part company. In the meanwhile, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, as the elders say.

We repaired to an Inn to discuss our plan of action. It was impractical to fly into the Howling Hills since such magics would set off an alarm, so we considered using the Dead End Alley portal system. As we did so, there was a commotion in the corner. Scratch had come upon a ball of magically glowing string stuff and seemed hypnotised by it as he played with it. He would not let any approach so I cast telekinesis and mentally propelled the string into the fireplace where it burst into multi-coloured flame. We returned to our debate, and it was pointed out that the bracelets we Alusians had could only be used to return to Alusia. We needed electrum rings like the others had, and there was not enough of them to go round. That was until Titvilius the devil stated that he might have some in his bag. After rummaging around and discovering some obvious fakes, he produced three electrum rings. They were checked over and pronounced to be uncursed and effective, but there still remained some suspicion in our minds.

3 Frost 797

After a good night's sleep at the Inn, we set off for Dead End Alley, aiming to portal to a place called the Timeless Tree. To my dismay, I found myself with Rowan and Melia in a strange city,

a warm and airy place of pillars and archways, where the people wore tunics and robes. No trees in sight. The people moved aside as a huge dwarven figure approached, dressed in mithril plate and having gems for eyes. He announced that he was Dumithoin, and wanted to know what we were doing with his rings. I bowed to him, and began to explain politely, when the Paladin appeared. It seemed that the Paladin was known to Dumithoin, and permission was given to keep the rings. It almost went bad when Rowan insulted the dwarf's masculinity by offering him a potion of virility. However, I was able to apologise courteously, and was tossed a gem for my sweet words.

We portaled again and found ourselves standing before a gigantic tree. Around about were many who appeared to be elvenkind, but much shorter than those of Alusia. We were led into the tree which was all mirrors within. There we met with the Sage, Lasidus who was an ancient elf indeed, and of taller stature. It was explained to me that tall elves in this place are known as Shae. Apparently they believe I am one such, and capable of some talent called True Seeing. Someone called Brother James would be the best one to teach me. We were told of events in the Howling Hills. Apparently the actions of those who we were adventuring with had led to the dungeon being lifted above ground, with good and bad consequences. There were more orcs roaming the place, and Iuz had let loose the Insane Legion - a thousand mad spectres were lined up along the far side of the river. So they recommended that we went around the lake. Lasidus the Sage also stated that Tyranth would be a weapon. I did not understand it, though that drew the attention of the others to my companion. They claimed they saw threads linking us, which presaged Tyranth possessing me. I protested that that was not possible, but they would not believe me. Then there was a commotion from outside. Apparently someone had indentified Rowan as a witch and the elves were determined to burn him. They were deterred by Scratch who adopted cat-form and frightened them off.

-2-

4 Frost 797

The Timeless Tree stood in the Vesve Forest. The elves offered us guides to lead to its edge where we leave them to head up around the lake. We rendered ourselves invisible, and the elven guides led us on tracks through forest, past encampments of orcs and humans. We came upon a military road, raised above the forest floor, wide enough for ten to walk abreast. It was completely smooth yet the work of slaves not magic. Beside the road human skulls were raised on poles. Their eyes glowed of magic, so must be some kind of necromantic animate. One could only guess as to who watched the road through their eyes.

The road itself proved to radiate magic, presumably designed to detect unauthorised people crossing it. We debated ways to cross. Cuchulain levitated himself to look around. He told us that he saw a work crew of what I considered rather stunted orcs down the road, a hundred and fifty yards east. Intrigued we all walk that way in silence. We saw that one truly vertically challenged orc wore emblems that I was told showed he was a member of the Torch of Rammus, an anti-Iuz faction. He was being beaten up, yet his expression suggested that he was about to cast. At that moment came marching down the road a troop of what they called Urogs, and I called normal-sized orcs. The short orc turned on the other orcs, and taking advantage of the confusion and noise, we ran for it across the road. To our dismay, green footprints appeared behind us. The orcish mage saw the footprints heads for trees. The footprints started to float off towards the east, that is until Brianne cast a spell to dispel the magic.

After walking through the forest for some minutes, we heard the sounds of battle ahead. We approached stealthily and saw a messy battle of orc versus orc. The banners of the one eye (Grummish) were raised against the banners of the grinning skull (Iuz). I concentrated for a moment and sensed danger behind us to right. There were two orcs hiding, obviously intending to cut down any stragglers. They hadn't seen us as we sneaked past. Then Scratch scented a strange smell somewhat musk and acrid. After some concentration Cuchulain said it reminded him of Noel, an ex-party member who choose the dark side and had become something other than human. I cast ESP and sensed something brooding and malevolent. drifting towards us. Quickly the orcs were despatched by Cuchulain and Yalran, lest they alert the battle. I stood blades ready and concentrated on the danger. It was close, just two feet away, a vaguely humanoid form, putrescent and boiling full of maggots, on the brink of materilisation. Reflexily I sliced at it, as invisible hellfire struck it. The monstrous thing, the Wormskull, faded somehow into the distance in a direction at right angles to the plane. But it had left its mark in the form of maggots in the flesh. Maggots with faces that resembled this Noel person. Rowan cast a spell and tried to talk to the maggots. Then he looked about to vomit. "So good of you to come back," he said in Noel's voice. Suddenly Tivillus appeared. " Oh shit" he said, and then disappeared.

As evening approached we reached the edge of the forest. In front of us tussocky grasslands stretched as far as the eye could see. The elves left us there, after warning us to avoid the plains nomads, who would most likely treat us as servants of Iuz, and kill us on sight. Titvillius re-appears as we made camp, offering a red and black potion which he said would keep away maggots. Brianne said it was evil by reason of its colour, and it was refused. Cuchulain set a magical cage around us that we might rest more easily, and we ate. Scratch produced a potion for Mr T which he drank, It set his ears to fizzing, a most amazing sight indeed.

5 Frost 797

In the middle of night I was suddenly woken by a peculiar itching sensation between my breasts. After a moment I realised that it was being caused by my Amulet of Jade, and that I had felt it before when we encountered the thing in the forest. I alerted those on watch, but nothing attacked us. Rowan took out his cards and performed a divination. He deduced that the Paladin was protecting us together with my Amulet of Jade. After that, we slept until morning. Mr T reappeared with a potion for Scratch which was purple and gold flecks. Some kind of control according to Brianne. Is Iuz sending the worm-skull we wondered? So Rowan took out the cards and deduced that Mallorack, a name of great evil was sending it, that it had betrayed the others.

We rendered ourselves invisible and started walking across the plain. Every so often we found maggots in the sparse grass. Maggots with Noel's face. It seemed that our enemy preceeded us. After some hours we saw nomads on horses, a clannish lot, with wolf-tails hanging from the horse's manes. Towards the end of the day we found ourselves in rougher country.

Ahead we saw mounds on the far side of small river. The river glowed faintly of magic. There were menhirs standing on some of the mounds. Clearly this was a place of ancient power. Was the river some kind of elemental barrier? I looked into the water and saw faces floating in the midst, almost transparent, plainly human yet not unhappy. There was some kind of concealment magic around the mounds. Behind us I could sense darkness and danger. I cast limited precognition as we debated whether to cross, and saw that the water would rise around me and then fall.

Rowan spoke to the faces, and told us that they were guarding their graves. Then he made the mistake of pronouncing the name of Iuz. Clouds darkened all around us, as it started to rain more and more heavily. The ground cracked across the plain, and undead horsemen burst out of their graves. They charged us at a gallop, reached the thirty foot mark, and crashed as if into a solid barrier. It had to be the effect of my Amulet of Jade, its magic, alien to this place, somehow stronger here. The undead started tossing rocks, into the river. Rowan set a wall of thorns between them and the river, and set it alight. They burned merrily. Abruptly the remaining undead froze. In consternation, we made the mistake of moving forward. They sprang back into action and the melee began.

There was a scream as the worm-thing appears in the midst. Yalran reached out towards the thing and it began to rip into him. He somehow sucked the soul from its body, then spewed up something yellow. Brianne contrived to grab the yellow thing which she identified as Yalran's soul. Then Yalran's body burst into maggots and came straight for me, slashing at my face. I felt myself resist, and reflexively slashed back, just as Cuchulain's mighty sword cleaved straight through its back. Abruptly the undead fell into the ground and the storm ceased. In Noel's equipment we found a sword, named Stone-cleaver. Nizer and I both tried to remove curse on it, but it was not exactly cursed, but tainted in some other way.

6 Frost 797

At dawn a golden mote appeared and grew into Yairan, naked as the day he was first born. It was found by divination that the sword had been broken and raised as undead. Further more it had part of Noel's soul in it. Rowan performed a funeral service, at the end of which Cuchulain broke the sword. As he did so we heard the words, "So evil is reborn again!" in the voice of Noel. Methinks we have not killed him for the last time.

-3-

As we looked around we realised that there was something strange in that place. There was a blue glow which some could see and was declared to be good. Rowan and I thought that this could be consecrated ground. The central menhir glowed more strongly and was declared to be the focus. They checked and saw that there were no orange threads attached to any of us so we would not contaminate the place should we enter.

Cuchulain steps forward and asked if we could cross. There was no response so I cast Limited Precognition as to what would happen after we crossed and sensed that there would be no ill consequence. So we crossed the river. The water came up over our heads, but somehow it did not stop us from breathing. Now we could make out symbols on the menhirs. Symbols of rebirth, serenity and peace. The Hound. The Horse swallowing. Even I could see that the central pillar glowed blue. It was engraved with yet more symbols, including that of a griffon. Lying on the grass before it we saw a dagger glowing blue - which appeared to be made of something called Quaniron. Chuculain pulled out a shard of this mineral - which he told us had come from the plane of Escore. When studied it was clear that the dagger was designed to kill somebody or something.

Without consulting the rest of the party, Rowan reached out and touched the griffin and disappeared. Seeing this, and realising we had little choice if we were not to lose Rowan, Cuchulain followed, then the rest of the party.

We found ourselves in a black place. Someone made a light and we saw that we were standing

between the claws of the stylised representation of a huge griffon carved in the stone floor of the chamber. I found my direction sense was not working. We looked around the cavernous room and saw that some entranceways had been ripped into the chamber. By them I spotted footprints, humanoid with long wiggly toes. The others said they might be fass. I cast and my ESP detected something small and malevolent. Cuchulain placed a circle around us and the griffon in the floor glowed gold. I sensed sudden fear in the nasty little mind and felt it leave. The Catlord changed form into the shape of a griffon. Blue and gold light shot from the eyes of the griffon on the floor and struck one wall. Brianne rendered the wall transparent with a spell, and beyond we saw a corridor, hewn from the stone. Blue light touched the cat-lord's hand and showed us how the door might be opened.

We entered and walked down the corridor. Carvings of wolf, horse, crocodiloid, felinoids many animal types adorned the wall. All of the appeared to be natural forms. Then we came upon the symbol of the scales graven into the floor carved. This symbol could only represent the Balance. I cast ESP and sensed something malevolent behind us. We went back to close the door. Across the griffon's chamber we saw the nasty creature, a small vaguely humanoid earthy thing with roots for legs. We shut the door before it saw us and returned. The Catlord stared at one of the pictures of felinoids, which then seemed to come alive. Rowan said something seriously offensive to the Catlord, so the Catlord pissed on Rowan. What a stench!

We crossed the balance one by one. As the catlord crossed he tried to walk around. The balance started to rock. A voice intoned "Declare your alignment!" He confessed to neutrality, tending to good, but sometimes ruthless. When he turned around we saw that silver scales had appeared on his forehead, between his eyes.

As we continued down the corridor we saw more animal forms carved on the walls. Ahead we sensed an earthy smell, and then came upon an earthfall blocking the corridor. Out of the fall protruded a petrified hand which appeared to be of the same kind as the humanoid earthy thing we saw before. Had it been running away from something and caught by the rockfall? The strong fighters tunneled through the top of the fall to more corridor and rough-hewn steps leading up. Blue light flickered over us as we headed up into the greyish light of an overcast day. We had come out through a culvert from under a menhir.

Before we saw a broken land, twisted and stirred as if a giant had whipped it with a massive spoon, moving hills and molding valleys. We saw more menhirs scattered some distance away, and ruins also. The vegetation away from menhor looked odd, stunted and somehow warped. The only good thing was that my north sense was vaguely back. Scratch examined the wolf carved into the menhir behind us. Rowan tried to divinate the carving. It asked, "Who?" He gave his name, and it said "You may abide" after a pause. When we found that levitation did not seem to be working, we headed for a ridge point to get some idea of our location. All we could see was jumbled and ruined. The ruins further along the ridge felt quite unpleasant.

Night fell, and the stars were those of Escore. In the darkness we could see that our starting point glimmered blue. Some menhirs glowed blue, some red. We camped. I was on watch when something small came too near in the night. I cast ESP and the something yelped. It should not have been able to sense that! We moved camp to the next blue patch.

Cuchulain found the dagger pointed north and east. Brianne sensed Hahark to the west, a known place of sanctuary. So we headed that way. The terrain became more hilly, and we could see extensive ruins to the south. They felt somehow blank, yet grey and greasy. We spotted wolf-like things to the north, and then black glossy horse-like things to the south. Were these Nightmares? A wyvern lazily glided in the air above the ruins. As afternoon approached we could see a line of hills in distance. It began to look more and more as if we were being herded. So we ran for it! But no... as the horse-things approached, the wolf-things moved away. The horse-things started to circle around so we turned towards them. To our surprise, the nightmares ran away! I sensed danger to the west, but Cuchulain's dagger now pointed north and west. We realised that the beasts were following Rowan, by his odour. The catlord licked Rowan clean, after first stripping him. Rowan finally ceased to leave a smelly trail. We camped, and I made tea.

-6-

21 Frost 797

We were back in GreyHawk City, right where we'd started, having lost a great deal of time, and finding ourselves in a great deal more trouble. Melia was perhaps in greatest strife since she was now a child, and male at that! The universal mana level was on the rise, and there was a profound danger that Horrors might be able to break through into the world. Time to save the cosmos from a fate worse than Ragnarok again!

There appeared to be two options which might allow us to get close to our objective, as we had been before taking an unnecessary and unfruitful detour to another plane. Cuchulain had at some time acquired an ability to shadow-walk, and might be able to carry us all in his cloak. Alternatively they had previously managed to anchor something called the Library of Delvenbrasse in this city. This Library existed outside time and space and once cut loose may be able to take us where we needed to go.

The others took us to see the Library. It was a strange place indeed. The black basalt shelves and passages extended into the distance in an odd and disturbing fashion. There seemed to be some kind of pattern to the arrangement of books on the shelves, but it eluded me. Tyranth explained that it was based on some kind of draconic mathematics. Rowan spotted talon marks on one volume and it is evident that some treatises on draconic mathematics are missing. He was looking for books about something called the middlemarches, as an alternative extradimensional shortcut to the Howling Hills. He must have triggered something because there was a flash of light, a bell tolled, and an elderly gentleman appeared. He wanted to know who was interfering with the sealed volumes.

The Librarian proved to be very helpful. He explained that cutting loose the Library would only serve to return it to Delvenbrasse, but that there was a middlemarch there that could take us to the Howling Hills. The problem was that it was named Sheol and was inhabited by evil Djinni and Effreeti under the control of an unpleasant power named Iblis. The librarian could protect our minds against Iblis, but it still sounded exceedingly hazardous.

The alternative was starting to look more promising, but the danger there was that one or more of us would become lost in the shadows. We were told that holding hands would help, but we really needed to be bonded psychically. I suggested Mind Speech and it was agreed that that should be effective. So that is what we did. We went outside the City to use a druidic circle used for astral travel and suchlike. I linked the party with Mind Speech and we all joined hands. Cuchulain spread his cloak around us and we concentrated on the place where Yalran was killed

and reborn. The world turned monochromatic as we entered the shadows. Three images faded in and out; one of a old grave, another of freshly turned earth on a new grave, and a third of Yalran lying wounded. We made for that one, and saw him become a charred spot on the ground. The colours came back.

I countered the spell which had held us together. Then we set out to wade the river and it parted for us. Clearly we had been accepted by this place. Below the central menhir we saw a dagger glowing blue, but it was not the same as before. Cam, who had been Melia, took it since the boy had no magical weapon. We camped. Gradually we realised that something was not quite right. For one thing it was warmer, almost balmy. When the moon rose it was tinged with blue. And the stars had shifted slightly.

22 Frost 797

We set out that morning seriously concerned that we had become somewhat out of phase with the real world. There was a subtle sense of danger about all of us, except the paladin. Abruptly Nizer vanished to all save witchsight. Behind him was winter. We were still in the paladin's cloak! Cuchulain shook us loose and we all fell out onto the snow. We walked on and on across the barren landscape, and as it grew dark we camped.

23 Frost 797

When we woke, Rowan had grown hairy all over in a curious striped pattern. On investigation it became apparent that he had been bitten by the Catlord, when the Catlord cleaned off the scent, and now Rowan was a weretiger! We packed up and marched on. Mid-morning we came upon a wide river. On the far side we could see more skulls on poles and beyond them long mounds from which smoke rose. We had no choice but to cross however, and Brianne cast a spell which allowed us to walk on the water. We crept across unseen, stopping just before the rows of skulls. A fine tripwire was visible to witchsight, between each pair of sentinels. The Catlord disarmed it with one twitch of a claw.

Beyond we found a rough track between what might had been fields. The sky was leaden, and the sun seemed to hardly penetrate the clouds. We could see a snow-covered range of hills in the distance, which could only be our destination. As darkness became to fall, all too soon, we looked for a campsite, but it was no easy. In the hollows the mist would gather, on the ridges we would be too easy seen so we compromised.

I was woken by shouting in the night. Fortunately I was wearing my kraken skin to keep the damp out as much as anything, and I had only to gather up my swords and cast a force-shield. We were surrounded by mist, by an unnatural mist which chilled the very soul. I sensed danger out there and the cleric spoke of undead. Hand-axes came spinning out of the mist, nearly hitting Rowan. Next came ropey tentacles which appeared to be dried intestine. There was a cry, and we realised that whatever it was had the child. We had no honourable choice but to follow it. The trail led through the clammy mists to a tunnel and into a cavern.

There we saw an appalling sight. There was Cam, manacled to a dark and bloody altar. Over him stood a undead creature, perhaps a yeti. Cuchulain let out a yell, ran forward and struck the yeti down with a single blow, as Nizer set about freeing Cam. Only then did we see the skeletons in their coffins set into niches in the walls all around us, just as they started coming for us. It was a

strange and confused battle and I can only tell my side of it. The undead were not mere skeletons of course, but some strange kind of greater undead, they bled some kind of black radiance when cut. My amulet did not repel them, but it did seem to slow them so that I could easily dodge their blows. It did not help the others though. One of the skeletons reached out to Cuchulain and destroyed his holy symbol. Incensed, he stepped forwards and slew it with a blow. That moment I dropped my right tulwar, right into the path of a eyeball which was rolling across the floor, bisecting it neatly, and at the same time cleaved a skeleton in two with my left tulwar. Something which looked like a redly glowing word shot from one of the skeletons, which held a skull in one hand and a rod in the other, to the cleric bringing him to his knees. I fended off one skeleton with one tulwar, as I scooped my dropped sword. The skull began to scream, and pain wracked our bodies. Rowan had set up a wall of thorns before a number of the coffins and now ignited it. As their coffins burned those skeletons faded into non-existence. Clearly they were vulnerable to fire, but that was no help to Cuchulain, who, wounded in both arms went for the lead skeleton, the one with the skull. He felled it as I ran forward and swept the screaming skull with the flat of my blade straight into the altar, smashing the vile thing into fragments.

There was a wail of despair which echoed through my bones, and I fell to my knees. A second undead picked up the leader's rod and began an invocation over the altar. Rowan intervened, brandishing his holy symbol. There was a flash and a rumbling. Stones began to fall as we ran down the tunnel and away from the place, and out into the life-stealing mist. One fell on me, nearly initiating a shape-change which would killed me in the narrow confines of the tunnel.

We were exhausted. Yalran cast a globe of invulnerability around us, and we set about healing the damage. Cuchulain gave me a potion which healed my cracked skull and drank another for his broken arms. Only then did we think to inspect the child. His pulse was weak, but he was alive. We healed him, and then removed the black gem which had been set in one eye socket. It was lucky indeed that I had picked up the severed eye along with my sword, since between my skill as a healer and the cleric's healing power we were able to restore it to its place. I held out the black gem and the cleric blessed it, whereupon it turned clear.

-11-

We stood before the doors and cast what preparatory spells seemed wise including something called Haste which resembled Quickness in its effects. Mr Titvilius held a black object in one hand which he claimed would restrain the enemy for some short period of time. We went in. Cuchulain set free the Deva, while we less pure persons cut Lawfakir's bonds. A darkness roiled in the centre of the room. Then Cuchulain began to set certain statues in two circles about the darkness, while Titvilius set free an ugly creature which I assumed was the Ice Devil, the Glugan.

The statues began to shake. Rowan cast a light upon the darkness. Iggwilv appeared first, and was banished as she had wished. Then another figure, identified as Zygymy appeared. This one should not be here. Plainly Iuz has broken the Rules of Engagement. Zygymy too was banished. The darkness intensified. Again the statues shook. I saw a black ray flash between Titvilius and the Ice Devil and sensed some mental communication. We should not have trusted him! Lawfakir's form shimmered into that of a dragon, and back again. He had to be another weredrake!

Then one of the statues disappeared. The limper. Then the night-crawler. They were moving from ring to ring. Then behind us. I tried to TK the statue from behind back into place. It writhed and grew vastly into a hideous ancient form. Iuz! He spat, directly at me. I tried to dodge, but still the

vile stream struck my head. Tyranth's circlet fell to the floor, twisted and blackened. He had saved me, given his very existence for me. But this was not a time for mourning, but for anger!

Iuz threw his sword at the Deva. And the angelic form was sucked into the blade. I felt a death like to that of mine own sister. Brianne broke the blade with Mordenkainen's blade. Titvilius went for Iuz's second blade. Lawfakir disappeared with a flash. Cuchulain flicked a sword at Iuz and there was dark ichor everywhere. The Catlord leapt upon Iuz's feet and started clawing his way up. Rowan went for Iuz's rod. It wrapped around him and he was thrown across the room. Brianne cast inversion to restore normality. Somehow Iuz had inverted reality. Iuz clawed her face.

I went for the rod, and was shocked to see my sword of air being sucked into the thing. My left sword smashed through and into Iuz's clothing. I felt something break. Cuchulain struck through the breach, and Iuz's entrails were exposed, ghastly grey in the light. We thrust forward again. Nizer's mace shattered, and this time my second sword broke. I could see that Iuz was healing almost as fast as we could hit him! Titvilius sliced Iuz's hand and grabbed the rod. Then he disappeared. Traitor! Coward!

Rowan summoned Enchanted Creature and got the Glughan. Iuz bit down on one tooth and exhaled a vile green gas. Brianne threw up a wind-wall just in time. Yalran thrust forward to pierce Iuz with a dagger, glowing blue. He falls back hurt, although Iuz was also showing damage. Rowan tried to attack and was blinded by Iuz's claws. Nizer severed an artery in Iuz's leg and black ichor spat out. By now the CatLord was clawing at Iuz's groin. Iuz smiled as the pain healed him!

Brianne was felled by a spell. Now I had taken to casting healing spells for lack of effective weapons, but I saw that I must do something more belligerent. There was only one thing. Mental Attack. On a demi-power? You may think me mad, but it seemed that Iuz had no defence against the thrust of my mind's power. His mind fragmented before mine, so that I could sense other personalities in there, now separated. And he was hurting, from a wound he could not heal.

Cuchulain opened his eyepatch and told us that Titvilius was retreating into the distance where an entity with a scythe awaited him. Iuz cast and chain lightning flared around us. I was flash-blinded, and my armour ruined. When I could see again, I saw that Rowan and Brianne were down. My anger knew no bounds as I cast again. There was an audible snap, and Iuz began to shake. Half his face was paralyzed, as if he had had a stroke! Yalran struck again with the blue dagger, as Nizer cast a Holy Word. Iuz began to burn from the inside, as he bit down once more. One scaly hand reached out to touch a brass plate set in the floor, and before the CatLord could get him with the box for holding devils, he vanished. I cast telepathy and sensed him fading into the distance. To the 222nd layer of the Abyss Rowan said later.

The Gulgan was quivering in a corner, so it ended up in the devil cage. The roof had broken open, and sunlight streamed in. A wyvern bearing an orc flew past far above. We could not stay long, but we must somehow destroy this place of power that it might not be used for evil again. We healed each other, and then I cast limited precognition to divine the consequences of lifting the plates from the floor. I sensed the result would be beneficial, so I tried casting Telekinesis on the central plate to raise it, and felt the spell leave my mind. But nothing happened. Nor was triggering a spell of Opening at effective. I knew not what to do, but then saw the Catlord touching the plate and purring in pleasure as he drew power from it. I tried and felt something in me fill up with power.

There was knowledge too. I found knowledge of dragons and of shape-changing, of the philosophy of magic, of herbs, and of the assassin's craft. My lost spell returned to me, and with it another, the one they called Dimension Door. We each had one wish. I wished for the ability to cure and cause sicknesses of the mind, and suddenly I could see how, by means of a spell, it might be done. Camellia, restored by the cleric's magic, touched and grew older. She was now a young man of sixteen. Each of us, save Rowan alone touched and gained what he or she sought, from what had been sucked from those entities who had been cocooned here. I reasoned that after the power and knowledge was gone, the plates might be destroyed.

-12-

So it proved. The plates were lifted easily, revealing glassy rods. These we could not remove, so we left them. Looking through the doors we saw that the golems had fallen over. Brienne summoned phantom steeds, translucent flying unicorns which we rode into the air. When everyone was safely off the ground Rowan cast an Earthquake spell at the cavern roof. A greyish light roiled as the opening fell in on itself and the complex collapsed. There was a rolling crash like thunder, but we did not stay to see more. We flew across the landscape, heading for GreyHawk City and revelled in the signs of Iuz's downfall. Confused knots of humans, orcs and giants wandered what had once been the Lands of Iuz. The cities of Iuz, Dorakaa and Molag, were no longer shrouded in darkness, but open to the refulgent rays of the high shining sun. So much for the vampire lords! The Veng river flowed clear and sparkling in the brilliance of the day.

We diverted to the Timeless Tree to speak with the High Elves. The great Vesve Forest had taken back Iuz's highways, reducing them to rubble. We landed a safe distance from the Tree and sought audience with the Elder. There we told our tale, and were told that a great oppression had been lifted from the land. Yet even then I knew in my soul that it was not all over.

Landing some distance from GreyHawk City, we rode in. The Gate guards let us through and we headed to the Temples for healing and congratulations. Being already restored and a stranger here, I went out to visit the weaponsmiths and the armourers. The tulwar I had ordered when we were first here was now ready for me. This meteoric iron was an amazing material, more than simply magical it enhanced magic that was channelled through it, making it easier to cast with the weapon drawn and pointed at the target. I was also told that it was a Monopole Sword, though I did not know what that meant. For my second weapon they presented me with a Link Sword, a magical weapon made of links, and able to bend round corners. I could not see any great advantage to that, but nonetheless it was a novel device. They could not help me with my armour, other than to suggest that I go kill some Thri-Kheon, whatever they are.

When I returned to the temple I found that the priests of Celestrin had replaced Rowan's eyes with crystals. It gave him a strange appearance, but he said his vision was better than ever. The priests had also dealt to the Gulgan, by submersing the devil cage in a vat of holy water!

The others were in heated debate. It seems that the rod which Iuz had held, and Titvillius had stolen and given to the entity with the scythe, was in fact a Key. One part of a three-part Device which could unlock the Gates between the Planes and let the Horrors through to devastate the multiverse! Titvillius had given the Key to Nerull the Reaper, the Greater Power of Evil. Nerull's priesthood, the Scarlet Brotherhood, already had one Key. Which left the Gate. And that was

none other than the Dead End Alley portal. We had but a single day to prepare before the Grand Conjunction, when the moons would meet in the heavens, and the Gate might be opened.

13 Snow 797

That fateful evening we made our way to Dead End Alley, armed and ready. We were appalled, but not surprised to see a roiling darkness forming at the end of the Alley. In the murk we could just make out grey tentacles writhing and reaching out towards us. A Lurker in the Gate! But surely it could not break through, not without the Keys. Dark threads began to fall from the stars. The Dark Moon Kule moved across the face of the Bright Moon Raenai. Lawfakir's form shimmered and he became a silvery dragon, like to Tyranth as I once saw him. He stood before the Gate which now glowed purple rimmed with black. Somewhere there was chanting, a evil rhythm that chilled the soul. Brianne cast a Wall of Force, blocking the Alley behind us, and Cuclulain loosed a Forbiddance. We readied our weapons.

BOOM! The opposite wall fell in towards and we were thrown with bone-crushing force into the wall behind. We were faced by ranks of red-robed skull-masked priests formed into two wedges. The Forbiddance went down. Lawfakir's neck snaked around as several tentacles came out and grabbed at the Gate. Bolts of Darkness struck all save we Alusians. The Catlord spun to confront an assassin.

I saw little of what happened elsewhere in the fight since I was then occupied with four monks. The first threw some kind of gem, and pain shot through me for a moment, but was quenched by my talent. The second loosed some kind of telekinetic blast that hit me hard. I felt something crack in my chest, but ignored it. The third threw some kind of needle at me which I batted aside with my primary sword. The fourth flick-flacked towards me and I riposted him with the link sword. It wrapped around his ankle and his foot came clean off. One down, three to go.

Meanwhile the Catlord toppled the assassin off the roof. Chuculainn let loose a Flamestrike and some of the priests at the rear fell down burned to death. I felt them die. One of Cam's attackers started hitting another, under the influence of a Control Person spell. Then my opponents came in for another crack at me. The first was caught in the chest by the Monopole sword which somehow repelled his armour. He fell down in a tangle, but I wasn't able to keep out the blades of the other two and they sliced into me. I felt their poison enter my veins, but resisted the effects. Brianne cast, and a glittering Prismatic Sphere rose around us catching one of my opponents and turning him to stone. The CatLord leapt in the form of a bearcat across one wedge and was caught on the Blade Barrier that Nizer had placed there. Cuchulainn called Power Word Kill down on the lead priest. Somehow the spell was transferred to the back of that wedge, and one of the lesser priests fell. I slashed at my enemy, and he struck back, piercing one lung. My breath caught, but I slew him dead.

The monster was pushing forward into the Gate, its tentacles strangling Lawfakir. Brianne cast Temporal Stasis in an attempt to slow down the monster, but an evil voice gloated "I am always in temporal stasis!" Nizer flung a Holy Word at one of the lead priests. Some of those at the rear turned to ash. Rowan threw a Wall of Thorns down between the wedges of priests, and it burst instantly into flame. One of the priests ran forward, straight into the Prismatic Sphere which fell in a flash of darkness.

There was a sinister sucking sound as the Lurker in the Gate swallowed up Lawfakir! Brianne cast Wish to bring Lawfakir back, but all that came was a gem which she swept up. Cam cast Control Person on the front priests which bounced to one at the back who set to killing those around him. A dark tentacle reaches for Cuchulain and shrinks back crisped by one of his protective spells. The Gate looked like black porphyry, almost worn through. Cuchulain in desperation cast Slay living on the leader of one wedge. With an evil laugh the entire wedge fused into a giant worm with the human face of the priest. It writhed its way towards the Gate, inserted the Key and began to turn it. Not very far, as I cast Mental Attack, reasoning that the spell would shatter the linkages in the gestalt as it did with Iuz. It did. The worm fell apart in agonised dying fragments. I tried to TK the key, but it would not turn. Cuchulain reached for it with his metal gauntlet and somehow managed to turn it and remove it though it burned him. Light glimmered around us as the moons slid out of alignment. The few remaining of the second wedge of priests were picked off. Then Titvillus appeared, in a rage, and grabbed for the key. The Catlord deftly dropped the devil cage on him just in time.

A Horn tumbled to the ground between us. Cuchulain picked it up and blew. A shimmering went forth across the city. The air felt fresher, and as I breathed in I realised that my wounds were gone. But there was a burning on my arm. The bracelet. It must be time to go!

We said our farewells, and then embraced. The portal took us and we were back in Seagate. As we approached the Guild gates we saw three sainted elderly gentlemen. I bowed the knee as I realised that these were our employers, those who had introduced themselves as warriors, but I knew were worshipped as gods in the place where we had been. They assured us that we had their blessing and then they left. Something rattled at my belt and I found a small fortune in gems, the promised payment. Not that that was necessary. I had my reward. I had done what was right.