

## **The Collected Keef Kronicle**

**by Keith Richards as transcribed by Alain Dawson**

**(All spellings and opinions are my own, so piss off)**

Right, so I've decided to write down some things about myself, as this will make things easier for my biographer when I'm the biggest fucking star in Stienhall and wherever else I decide to go. Also, I'm a bit forgetful after I've been down the boozier, and I don't want anyone pinning anything on me what I didn't do, or pinching the credit when I kill that damned leopard that's following me around. My parents have seen him too, so I know I'm not imagining it. He'd make a fab pair of trousers.

Anyway, a bit about myself by way of introduction. I live in the Kingdom of **Steinhall**, the Dukedom of **Shumacker**, the Barony of **Lubek**, and the town of **River's End**, which is ruled by **Lord Laura**, who is pretty bad-ass for a toff, and a bit of alright. Mage **Throntax** is a powerful magic user who lives nearby, and is pretty nice bit of crumpet as well. For those what is interested in this stuff, the town elders are Throntax; **Gunter**, the Blacksmith; **Randolf** the Mayor; **Billy Ray Bob Williams Sr.**, priest of Odin; and **Wormblott Upstein**, the banker. My parents, Bert and Doris, are farmers, which is okay for them, I guess. They do well enough that I don't have to stay home and help them, so when I was fourteen, I joined the town guard, which is a bit of a laugh (though the early mornings are bloody awful – almost as bad as the farm). But my real calling is music.

I'm eighteen, hung like a horse, and a goddamned brilliant musician. I play in a dive called the **Spitting Camel**, which is owned by **Helga**, and sometimes the soldier's pub, the **River's Arms**. Sometimes my lyrics are too ahead of their time for the gits round here, so I'm only allowed to play the guitar, but pretty soon I'm hitting the road to share my tunes with a more appreciative audience. Songs just go sleeting through my head, which can get tiresome, so sometimes I get away from the beggars with a bit of a pissup and fight down the pub, or some herbal experimentation. There's a fun bird who works there named **Colleen**. She tells me what it's like away from this town, and I let it slide when she gets in trouble.

There are a few other blokes around here the same age as me, though we all seem to do our own thing. **Billy Ray Bob Williams Jr.** is a priest in training, going into the family business you might say. Not too uptight for all that. **Luc** is a skinny git who spends all his time with his nose in a spell book. In the guard with me, there's **Hal**, a hairy lad who spends a lot of time in the woods with badgers and whatnot. He at least is a bit of help in finding interesting herbs. **Erose** is a good woman in a fight, and easy on the eyes, but she's got a bit of a mad look in her eye sometimes. She gets hit with moods the way I get hit with songs. Our taste in risktaking is quite different. **Dain** is a bit of a mystery. She was found by one of Mage Throntax's apprentices while in a pretty bad way. She recovered, and started working in the stable, training to get a gig in the guard too. I only know this much about her because she hangs out with Colleen, but she doesn't have much to say to me. There are a bunch of others in the guards, including **Hanz** and **Franz** (not much brains between them), and **Klaus von Bulow**, the sergeant, who has got it together, and lucky for us, too.

The only real excitement around here for me is my music. Mostly what I do in the guard is stand between two drunk blokes until they give up hitting each other, or kill the occasional orc or beast what wanders in from the woods. That's OK, because River's End needs protecting, but I wish I'd lived here in more interesting times.

Over 100 years ago, a lord named **Gunter von Draco** came from the south and created the protectorate of Lubek. He cleared out the monsters and built a castle that is now empty and haunted. He ruled with an iron fist, and dabbled in the black arts. Monsters overran the castle (that's what one gets for dabbling) and killed his wife. When peasants killed the monsters, he thought they killed his wife. He cursed them and left. Bit of a short fuse, if you know what I mean. Then about fifteen years ago, **Lord Arnold** (soon to be **Baron von Lubek**) came from the south and cleared out the monsters again. Sounds much more fun than now. I have got to get out of this burg.

Oh yeah, it's the year 274 GM.

*(Note from the editor: Despite the disclaimer above, I actually straightened out most of Keith's spelling and grammar – and that took some doing, I can tell you. However, to keep some of the original flavor, I have left in some Keefisms, not the least of which was his inability to spell Steinhall the same way twice. There were some things I simply couldn't decipher, and Keith has a very rocky memory, so I have inserted comments here and there that will hopefully be of use to the reader. If there's anything you still don't understand, it's Keith's fault.)*

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## **The Union of the Snake is on the Rise**

A group of us from the guard are called in to a meeting with Lord Laura. It's interrupted, as usual, by this mad old crone from the woods, flinging open the doors at a dramatic moment and prophesying doom. Once she is lead away, Lord Laura says that currently the orcs in the area are under control, but she wants us to get some bandits that have been plaguing the roads. She leaves her emissary, **Udo**, to liaise with us (that sounds quite dirty, but it just means he's the middleman).

We head into the woods at some ridiculous hour before noon, me with a bloody huge hangover that my shades don't even begin to help. We get into a fight with a boar, which was too fucking embarrassing for me to write down. When we recover, we catch three of the bandits, who are utter twats. They are mercenaries with the **Union of the Snake**, a gang out of Lubek. Their leader is a bloke named **Ferdinand**.

We find their camp without much fuss, then run into Ferdindand. He gets a bit shirty with us, so I chop his head off and take his sword, which is dead cool because it glows. We take the body back to town. Billy Ray Bob Jr.'s dad speaks with the dead (handy that) and learns that someone calling himself Lord Draco hired Ferdinand and his mob to cause

unrest. (That Draco's pretty lively for a dead bloke.) We also learn that there is a bloody traitor in the Guard.

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### **The Sword of Suckiness**

We go back to the camp, but the idiot mercenaries are all dead. There is a note:

This is what happens  
to those who fail me!

Draco

While we are looking things over, one of us triggers something and skeletons attack us. I find out that there's a reason a ponce like Ferdinand had a cool glowing sword: It sucks. I can't hit anything with it. Not only that, but nobody within yards of me can hit anything either, not even the skeletons. Eventually though, we kill them. Olé, olé olé olé! Hanz and Franz (two of my mates from the guards) die in the attack. I run to **Driestall**, a nearby town, and get **Fanny** to help heal us (she's a religious bird what Billy Ray likes). After we are in better shape, we go back to town and report. Emissary Udo and some guards arrest the three blokes we caught in the first place and take them away.

We are told to go to Lubek for the ascension of Baron von Lubek. Bit of local color, like. On the way, we see nine ogres eating cows. We tell the garrison at **Zoftcraft** (a town where we stop for night). **Sven** the Bad Ass (a cavalier of **Lord Johann**) goes with us to get them. We manage to find seven of them. We kill them and take their loot, including some potions. The little mage Luc shows that he can kick some ass when in a tight corner. He whacks one and takes it down with his staff like feeling a tree. He must've really wanted those potions.

Dain and I are unconscious after the fight (the Sword of Suckiness strikes again), so the others carry us back to town. We donate to Freya's church and get healed. (Pretty good investment, that. Always good to stay in tight with the gods. Otherwise, when they drop by, I have to listen to a lecture. Anyway, they've told me that I cannot be killed by conventional weapons, so I feel I owe a bit extra for that.)

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### **On the Loose in Lubek**

We finally get to Lubek and stay in the **Drowned Goose**. Eroze and I go to sell the Sword of Suckiness to a merchant (**Zack**). He wants to look it up. Bugger. Luc tries to get the potions identified. Billy Ray and Dain go to see lord Laura. Lord Laura comes to the inn, congratulates us, and says she'll talk to us at the party for the baron's ascension tomorrow.

We go to dinner at the **Scorched Duck**, courtesy of Eroze's master, then I play at the inn while others carouse. Colleen is kidnapped. Billy Ray Bob Jr. and Dain go after her, unsuccessfully. Billy Ray very gently kills a dog.

It turns out after all that that Colleen just had to pay a fee to the Thieves' Guild, then they let her go. We get 1000 gp for the sword from Zack. He says that he identified it as just a slightly magic shortsword. There must be some kind of deception spell on it. Oh well, caveat emperor, as they say in Greece. I'm glad to be rid of it, and with some cash in hand, too. We go to the celebration, and clap eyes on **Baron Arnold von Lubek**. He was just another lord, but apparently did something to get promoted. Looks like a regular old bugger to me, but I wish him well. He has good booze at his party.

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## **Down the Mine**

Oh well, that was a lark. We go home; Sven and his blokes are going to **Cinigal** to fight a border war so Lord Laura asks us to find and explore a gold mine for her. Don't know why, but she's the boss.

We get packed for our mission, and I find out who the traitor was in the town guard. Fred the guard has cleared out. Turns out he was a mercenary and had ties to the Union of the Snake. He may not have been the only one, so we'll have to watch our backs. I hate fucking sneaky lying bastards. Give me someone with a sword honestly trying to kill me any day.

The mine is called **Draco's Bane**. Dwarves mined it centuries ago. According to legend, they tunneled into a huge lake-filled cavern that housed creatures "mystical, non-mystical, and normal." Draco supposedly killed the dwarves. He seems a bit sodding drastic.

On our way to the mine, we run into **Guntar the Barbarian**. He knows where the mine is and takes us there. We go in, and the first people we run into are dwarves from **Rockhold**. They are mining in honor of the dwarves that Draco killed one hundred years ago. Rather touching, really. Then we go on and find eight orcs in a room. We kill them and score some gold, electrum and a magic bastard sword. Then we find a couple of goblins. I kill one, the other runs, yelling in their weird language, "Aaaaaagh! Bite me, assmunch!"

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## **Seven-Foot Mushrooms!**

We explore the goblin kingdom. They are ugly little blokes, and thick as two short planks. Their language is a laugh, really easy to learn. Some of us start to pick up a few useful phrases, such as "heh heh, he said 'magic missile'", "are you threatening me!?!",

and “fire’s cool!” We see some rooms with goblins who ignore us and goblin babies. Then we find a cave and fight. (*I’m assuming they fought goblins, not the cave. – ed.*) We win, and for a lark, we carve “This is what happens to people who displease Draco” on the wall. Then we go back where we came from and get attacked by wolf riders. (In a mine? What the fuck?) We win and leave the caves to make camp.

In the night, Hal is shot by unidentified horsemen, which is a hell of a way to be woken up. Next day, Dain and I go back to town for supplies and see locals fighting two mounted blokes. We break it up and bring the horsemen to town. We don’t know if these are the buggers who shot Hal or not, so we take them to the guardhouse.

When we rejoin our lot, we come upon some more dwarves from Rockhold. They tell us that down at the underwater lake there are many other races and things going on, just like in the legend. The mine goes down for ten levels before it reaches the lake. Sounds as if we have a ways to go. I’d be surprised if Lord Laura sent us here to check out the strata and metallurgical potential. I think we’re headed for the lake, sooner or later.

We find some other adventurers, lead by someone named **Franco**. They are utter prats. We leave them to their work. If they kill a few monsters, better for us. Then comes a moment that I will never forget – a magical sight, a sight to give meaning to my existence. We enter a room and see *seven-foot moving shrooms!!!* Apparently there were some electrum pieces and bones there, as well. Someone takes the electrum, and then, just as I was moving to commune with the shrooms, those bastards, my so-called friends, drag me away! Well, I didn’t want to shed blood, and I know where they are, so I’ll be back. Oh yes, they will be mine.

We go across the pit o’ bitter dykes (*don’t know if there were really bitter dykes in the pit. – ed.*). We come across gnomes and badgers (with whom Hal has an uncanny connection), then more goblins. They spring a trap, we fight, they die. We sleep. We fight R.O.U.S.s and stalagmite creatures, and vanquish them a lot. Then we smell sulfur and see a sign that says “Beware of Draco.”

We find a room with a large silver circle on the floor. Within it is a bloody horrible creature with eight arms and four heads, vaguely human-looking, if a human was an evil demon with eight arms and four heads. Behind it there is a bubbling spring, and past that there are stairs. Those of us what knows about these things urge caution and say we should research the demon before trying to pass it. I’m all for that.

(*Keith hasn't forgotten about the shrooms. – ed.*)

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## **I’m Gonna Kick Your Ass, Dillhole!**

We go home to rest and lose weight (*Not a clue. – ed.*) and investigate the demon. We dig up a lot of info about the history of the mine, which might have done us more good if

we'd had it sooner. Supposedly one of Draco's underlings set up a kingdom in the mine ages ago. More recently, some adventurers (not the wankers) named **Dryfus** and **Shön** went down the mines and didn't come back. Not long ago a mage went in looking for treasure on second level, and he never returned either. Some of these blokes may have decided to stay in the mine on purpose, to get up to some nefarious shit.

We go back to get the demon. On the way we meet three goblins. One of them, who says his name is **Joe**, has a chest (*I'm assuming Keith means a large wooden container, and not an upper torso. – ed.*). They are difficult little shites, and we end up killing two of them. Joe has an amulet, and he escapes us by running past the demon, yelling the magic incantation; "out of the way, buttmunch!" Billy Ray decides that if an idiot goblin can get past the demon, so can he, and he runs after Joe, repeating the incantation. He chases and catches him, and we find out that the chest contains 1000sp to pay tithe to Dryfus. Aha.

We go outside to rest and heal. When we return, Luke dispels the demon. It looks like we'll have to go through the goblin kingdom to get to this Dryfus bugger. We press on, meet some goblin guards, kill some, knock out some, and kill two bugbears. It turns out that in the fray we unfortunately killed the goblin leader. We question **Fred** the goblin. Then Colleen kills him (she really is too hasty sometimes). This sets off a huge row between the usual members of our group, drawing the attention of 50 goblins. Fuck.

Their leader, named **Frank** (aka **Uglypug**), gives us terms for avoiding a fight. We have to pay him 100gp and kill the spiders plaguing the goblins in order to win our freedom and pass through his kingdom (I guess it's his now). We give him an amethyst to cover the bill and agree to wipe out the spiders. Feeling expansive, he tells us that Dryfus is on the 3rd level. He takes us to a corridor and gives us directions, then leaves.

*(A brief word about goblin culture: It seems that goblins all have a name for themselves, such as "Bill," and another one by which they are known to all other goblins, such as "Smellyarse." Also, whoever is the leader assumes a slightly different, more dominant dialect of the language not spoken by any of the others. This has been labeled the "Butthead Dialect" by researchers. – ed.)*

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## Carved in Blood

We rest in an empty room, then proceed. We run into a hoard of centipedes as long as my arm, and squash them. Not really what I signed up for when I joined the guards, this extermination gig. We find spiderwebs and burn them, discovering in the process that standing in a network of web-filled tunnels and setting them alight is bloody stupid.

Once we are healed we investigate a large room containing dead goblins and silver. A spider grabs Colleen and another one attacks the party. Dain and I hit everything but the spiders, so Billy Ray explodes the one that took Colleen and Hal kills the other. Joe shows up and tells us that we have offed all of the spiders. He asks if we want to kill the

beetles as well. I'm a bit miffed that the goblins are taking us for well-armed bug killers. We decide to take the silver to Uglypug and come back later.

We hand over the silver (although I can't see why, since we already paid the bugger) and take a bath to get off the char and bug guts. (This mine has been hell on my clothes.) Frank tries to involve us in his revolution, but we're having none of it. We read the journal of **Zaltar the Mighty** (*Possibly the missing mage? – ed.*), which we found in the spider cave. We go looking for the rest of his stuff near the beetles, find it and run. He left a spellbook, two scrolls, and sweetwater potion, which might come in useful round here.

We take a rest and then go on to third level to find Dryfus. He's really starting to get on my tits, and I haven't even met him yet. Anyone who would willingly stay in this place is a raving nutter. We enter a room that smells like charnal house. On the wall, carved in blood, it reads, "Do not enter the domain of Draco." We shortly find the source of the smell, as four gasts appear. They kick our butts all over the cave with interest. By the grace of the gods, we live and hide and sleep. The group decides to get the hell out, on the way collecting one of the adventuring wankers who was captured by goblins and escaped through a secret passage. We get to town and train, because clearly we need to.

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### **Dumbocratic National Convention**

While we are in River's End, Billy Ray reaches some mysterious milestone and ascends to the priesthood of Odin. And there was much rejoicing. In local news, Lord Laura is building a castle. War is increasing in the Hellenic territory, which is pretty nearby. Franco (one of the prats from the mine), asks our help to get his mates away from the goblins. We go back to the bloody mine.

We head to the goblin kingdom, and hear some activity in a large cavern. There are cries of "Yea Hairytote!" and "Yea Uglypug!" and when we get close we see that they are holding their national convention, choosing a new leader. One of the captured adventurers is turning a spit. We manage to get the adventurers out of prison and free some other prisoners without being noticed (goblins not being very observant). We book out as Hairytote reaffirms his kingship.

Enough of this goblin bullshit. We go after Dryfus. Down on the third level again, we avoid the gasts and get to a new chamber. Within are two blokes with hair triggers. They set stuff on fire, then address us, saying that they are **Lucien** and **Munificens** (**Svabard** and **Jonsen**, more of the blokes who disappeared down the mine). They are minions of Dryfus, who tells them to slay us. Man, I'm tired of hearing that.

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### **In the Fresh Air Finally, Saving Driestall**

A huge fracas ensues. In the end, we rescue four people, and capture three guards, Jonsen and Shön (*aka Svabard, aka Lucien, I think – Keith's notes are a bit vague on who exactly is whom. – ed.*), and Dryfus (unconscious). Erode and I end up unconscious as well, and most of the others are injured. While Billy Ray patches us up so we can leave, some of the group search Dryfus' lair. There are letters to gnolls and orcs etc., controlling their movements. One letter commands an attack on Driestal the next day. We'll have to hurry if we want to prevent it. One thing is certain: these sods are only pretending to be Draco. They went to the 10th level of the mine and met a huge evil. They were working for it.

For our troubles, we take armor and papers and potions. We go back to town. I have acquired a large supply of mushrooms traipsing through the woods, although not from the magic moving mushrooms, which I have not forgotten. We drop off the bad guys, get healed and ride to save Driestall, which is distressingly empty. The townsfolk are hiding in church and tell us that the elves are helping them fight the gnolls. Colleen and Billy Ray go get **Sam** the druid and a centaur to help. When the attack comes, we kick ass. The druid throws lightening, which is a nice trick if you can do it. I could definitely use something like that for my gigs.

Once we have headed off the attack, we make inquiries about what has been happening. They think that the orders to attack have been coming from some wanker up in the hills, although we know that's not true. The villagers also say they saw the two mounted blokes we saved from the locals. They spoke Hellenic and were probably weapons smugglers. So they may have been the bastards what shot Hal, but why I don't know.

Then there is a new development: Erode has a bug up her arse about the guy in the hills who is supposedly organizing the attacks. She runs off without a word (or so we think). We go after her, and while we are en route, a windmill attacks us. (The others insist that it was a giant, but they must have been off their rockers. I know what I saw.) It kicks the shite out of us, but we press on.

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### **Something's Rotten in the State of Bergstadt (But Hell if We Know What It Is)**

We get away and go to a barn to recover, where we meet **Farmer Joe** and **Farmer Bob**. We heal, and hear that Erode has been through here. Bob says that Draco's son (Baron Gunter von Draco, like his dad) lives in the castle in **Bergstadt**. He's been there since before the expansion of Stienhall. There are very odd goings-on up there. In Bergstadt, no one is allowed outside after midnight and all windows must be shut at night. The rumor is that monsters roam free at night in exchange for leaving town alone during the day. Any bugger stupid enough to go out at night gets what he deserves.

We thank the farmers and head to Bergstadt. The inn there is called the **Inn of the Swinging Sign**. Before we check in, we go get healed at the temple of **Vidar**. He is the



strong, silent god, one of my favorites, because he likes to listen to my music, and doesn't natter on about himself. I've got enough noise in my head as it is. Since I'm skint, I offer to do a quest in exchange for my healing. The priest, **Lazlo**, says Vidar will contact me when it is time to fulfill my pledge. As I leave, I see a pasty white bird in sackcloth standing in front of the temple. Not my type.

We go to the inn and get rooms. The innkeep gives us change in non-Stienhall tender (it's illegal in Stienhal). The Union of Snake bloke had a ring with same insignia on it – a snake, what are the odds. The innkeeper's name is **Gunter**. (He is a half-elf, sent from Stienhal to investigate what happened to Draco's son.) We find Erose, who is safe as houses, the silly bint. She says she told Hal not to follow her, which he failed to mention. Dain dumps beer on him. All of our tempers are a bit tight, what with being wellied upon by that windmill and worrying about Erose.

Erose has a talk with Gunter about Draco's son. She tells us that bats swoop in at night, clear out unwanted animals and leave (the bats come from the castle). The baron has been here 30 years, and is supposed to have done good for the town. They pay tax to Stienhall, so the baron isn't a rogue, but the town never expands, supposedly due to the curse on town from the original Draco.

We find out about the chick in front of the temple. She's the mayor's daughter (**Lucy Swartzbiern**). She and Lazlo are always together. The townfolk don't trust her: she may spy for Draco. Billy Ray and Hal go to find out more about her. Hal stays with Lucy while Billy Ray talks to Lazlo. The priest says that Lucy will be Draco's if he visits her 12 times (once a month). While Billy Ray and Lazlo talk, Hal and Lucy stay in another part of the temple, surrounded by a flaming circle made by Lazlo for their protection. Hal sees the door blow silently in and a black spectre enters. Lazlo returns and sends it away.

This place is like a bad trip.

The bats come as usual that night. In an attempt to get to the bottom of things, Erose kills one, then stands with one foot outside the door of the inn. A driverless carriage, pulled by these bloody awful horses, goes past the inn. It swerves toward Erose, then goes on to a house, stops there awhile, comes back, and a cool black-dressed bloke with tall boots, black goatee and spiky black hair emerges. (Cue *Bad to the Bone* . . .) He is young Draco (bit too young for someone whose dad died 100 years ago) and he is dead pissed off at Erose for killing his bats and corrupting his servant Renwyn. Hmm, she didn't say anything about corrupting someone. We catch a glimpse of this Renwyn standing by the carriage. He looks like a sack of potatoes in a cloak, which makes me once again question Erose's judgement. Draco points a sword at her and she returns the bat. He gets back in his freakishly cool carriage and buggers off home.

I have had just about enough of this shit. Clearly someone needs to be pummeled round here, but damned if I know who. So I read Erose the riot act for keeping all of these effing secrets from us what just want to protect her. She stalks off, leaving me with nothing else to do but get wasted on the best wine in the house. Stupid tart.

Next morning, we find out the house that the baron visited is the mayor's house. Hmm. Eroze wants to get into the town garrison for her own reasons which I don't care about. Dain and Billy Ray visit Mrs. Mayor, and get us invited to the mayor's feast that evening. I shake off my hangover. Dain asks the innkeeper about Renwyn, and Gunter says the cloak makes him look shorter, he is actually dashing and well built.

We go to the party. Eroze tries to get an entrée to Draco through the mayor and is told to stay away (in a friendly way). I still haven't a clue why she's so fixated on Draco, aside from the fact that he is admittedly dead cool (got to get some trousers like that). I don't even know why we are staying in this burg. Oh right, trying to find out if Draco is evil (my money says yes) and is he controlling underlings who are setting up attacks (maybe, need more evidence). Billy Ray talks to Eroze, warning her to be careful. Fat lot of good that'll do. Renwyn is at the party, and at one point gestures for Eroze to follow him. We follow them at a distance. They have a *passionate* discussion and then his carriage takes him away. Some of the group thinks she is in thrall, I think she is using him. We discuss what to do.

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### **... Wherein a Lot More Stuff Happens, and Keith Gets Laid**

We go to the inn and sleep, then confer. When we confront Eroze about her meeting with Renwyn last night, at long last she reveals why she's been so mental. She tells us that Draco's symbol, a snake medallion, was found by her dead parents. Only 12 were made (by Draco?), and they were given to the leaders of the 12 divisions of the Union of the Snake. She now wants to investigate the U. of S. Dain wants to find out if this Draco is the same as the one supposedly controlling the orcs and such, which is the only real reason we have to be here. I'm all for it. In an effort to get us something concrete, Colleen says she'll steal some of Draco's correspondence and takes it from the town hall.

We drop by the temple once more. Billy Ray asks Lazlo if we can do anything to help. He says he'll call on me if he needs anything.

All of this weirdness has my head spinning, so I try to pull a couple of local birds. I utterly fail to score. That should just give you an idea how much this town is getting to me. I get stoned and commune with Vidar to try to get connected again.

Our lot decide to go back to River's End. Hanging around in Burgstadt is only screwing with our heads. We get some smart bugger in town to compare the letters Colleen stole with the letters from the Draco in the mine. The handwriting matches. Not conclusive, but if someone is impersonating him, he's doing a good job.

A new bloke named Mr. Vasser has turned up in town. He's a sneaky smooth bastard who's up to no good, and he has a bad effect on Colleen. She's a fun bird, but she's easily influenced by the wrong sort. So I kick his ass, by way of warning him off. There is also

a new emissary (**Bernhardt**) who asks us to watch River's End for a while. No more pelting off to bloody weird towns for a while.

We confer about all that we've discovered, and agree with Eroze that the U. of S. needs investigation. They have some connection to Draco, and he has some connection with the mine and attacking monsters and all. We decide to infiltrate the U. of S. and find Ferdinand's boss, who is called **Egon**. We discover from our sources that not all parts of the U. of S. are corrupt bloody incompetent bastards, so we need to find the right lot of corrupt bloody incompetent bastards and take them out, after asking some pointed questions about Eroze's parents.

Lord Laura returns victorious from war. We tell her all that we have discovered about Draco. She says he is supposed to appear in Lubbek soon, to discuss some border issues and other toff nonsense with Baron Arnold. Hal and I go to talk with some U. of S. guys down the pub, sort of feeling the way in preparation for joining up. We get info from a soldier named **Joe**. He says Egon is a scumbag. There are 14 generals in the U. of S., which means some of them didn't have snake medallions to begin with, or they joined later. We have to find out who had one that is now missing. We also find out a stray bit of history: apparently a dragon destroyed Lubek in Draco Sr.'s time.

In the following week, I score three times (Olé, olé olé olé!) and play several gigs. I feel much better now. Colleen finds out that Egon is in thick with the Thieves' Guild. She comes up with an excuse and meets him. He's a scum, but he has a Draco medallion, so he probably didn't off Eroze's parents. He might lead us to the culprit, though.

We go to the summit in Lubbek. Draco wants to keep the crappy hill land. Baron Arnold is fine with that. You'd think they could just write to each other, but the discussions and treaty signing will drag on for a couple of weeks. After the first meeting, Colleen approaches Draco and borrows money from him to start her bar, which just goes to show she's got bollocks. Billy Ray discovers Draco is not as evil as Renwyn (who is also there). When I ask Draco what the deal is with him and Lucy, he says he is trying to remove Lucy's curse, not strengthen it.

Colleen goes to have sex with Renwyn, the silly tart. Once again she needs saving from herself. I decide to beat him up, and Billy Ray decides to kill him (he's a bloodthirsty chap when the rage is on him, but then look who he worships). They are trysting in a room at the local inn. I bust down the door, see them fucking up against the wall, and pull him off her. Then I punch him. The rest of the group comes in to see what is going on. Billy Ray restrains Renwyn with hold person and they interrogate him while I take Colleen downstairs for a drink and a lecture. Renwyn maintains his innocence, and Billy Ray has no luck getting more info except that Ren is on year four of five, working off his father's debt to Draco. The town guard comes and throws me in jail, where I find out that Renwyn is a prince of Sandhaven. The guard frowns on beating up princes. I pay for the door and apologize, Ren doesn't press charges, and it's all over (for now).

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## Off to Never-Never Land

Hal and I manage to join up with a branch of the U. of S. that we suspect is the main source of corruption. I would have thought that it would be harder, but they take one look at us and say they think we'll do fine. We train with them for a week and a half (during which my birthday comes and goes. Happy nineteen years to me). But they aren't thick enough to trust us. We are going to have to kill someone to prove ourselves. The head of our branch is named **Rupert**. He had a snake medallion, but it's gone now. Looks like we found the fucker who did in Erose's parents, but we are being watched and can't communicate with the others.

There is a huge party in a field outside Lubek for the ratification of the treaty between Draco and the Duke. Rupert tells Hal and I that we have to go to the party and kill Draco to prove ourselves. That figures. It's a good thing we're not intending to follow orders, because I think Draco would take a lot of killing. The party is being held inside a fairy circle, which does not allow weapons to pass through, but Rupert gives us magic rings to circumvent the protection. We can see the others from River's End attending the festivities, as well as loads of toffs and townspeople.

*(Keith's notes on the events below were a bit confused, understandably. I straightened it out as much as possible, but this shouldn't be taken as an unimpeachable version. – ed.)*

As we walk through the circle, three other blokes (later found to be assassins from the north) come through as well. The circle of nobility empties out as they sense that danger is near. All of the bad guys break formation except for Hal and I. I knock Draco down and stab my dagger into the ground, pretending to kill him. Draco may be evil, but he's not slow on the uptake, and he goes along with it. I run back to Rupert and tell him the deed is done.

While all this is going on, things between Colleen and Renwyn come to a head. She tries to stab him in the back because he denied that he slept with her (a bit over the top if you ask me). When she hits, we all hear a soundless cosmic scream in our heads, or maybe our souls. We know instantly that it is the cry of her spirit. Ren says softly, "You shouldn't have done that, little one." (Apparently, when she bonked him she gave him some control over her soul.) Some of our lot kill the one assassin who hasn't bugged off. Draco has a dagger in him, don't know who got close enough to do that. He pulls it out and throws it into one of the other assassins, killing him at quite a distance. Bloody hell.

Dain tries to break up Renwyn and Colleen, but the silly cow won't leave off attacking him. Hal knocks out Rupert to prevent him getting up to any more nonsense. More assassins materialize and attack us. Erose tries to slap Rupert awake for some reason. The town guards show up and everyone drops weapons so we don't get killed by friendly swordplay. In the confusion, Colleen runs off and tries to kill Renwyn again. I'm afraid for her, and more than a bit pissed off now that she won't back off from someone who

can rend her soul. I get my sword again and go to draw him away from her, although I've got a bad feeling about this. Chaos ensues. There is fighting, more soul screaming, and I'm doing my best to keep him occupied. Then he turns into a demon. *Bloody fuckin' hell!* Bloody Colleen has been provoking a fucking *demon*! I keep attacking him because I can't figure out any way to stop and stay alive. Sweet Vidar save me. I don't even notice others joining in, but they must have done because eventually Eroze knocks him over. I impale him with all the strength of my terror, and deliver a killing blow, but before he dies he calls on his father. Dear gods, get me out of here.

I stand ready to fight, because there's nothing else I can do. But then Draco steps up, looking none the worse for having been stabbed. A hellish figure appears, and no one needs to explain that this is Renwyn's father. As the next few minutes pass I am in a strange state, a lot like being stoned. A bunch of vivid and intense things take place, but I can't really sort them out afterward. All I know is, Draco kicks daddy's ass! And I'm alive! It's all very well that I can't be killed by conventional weapons, but a demon is pretty damned unconventional.

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## Scourging the Shire

We recover from this very trying event, variously by leaving, drinking, and trying (unsuccessfully) to get stoned. I'm too pissed off to be in tune with my shrooms. I just can't see Colleen in the same way anymore. She's still my friend, I guess, but I'm not standing in the way of any more bloody demons for her sake. Billy Ray isn't as restrained as I am. He has a moral crisis, and decides under the influence to kill Colleen, but some clerics stop him. Eroze talks to Draco, but aside from saying that he did a lot of wrong things when he was young, he doesn't want to elaborate. She then interrogates Rupert, and finally gets the story about her parents' deaths.

We all go home. It's January now, 275 GM, and it's bloody cold. I just want to drink, play my guitar, and wench a bit to get the weight off my mind, but on the way into town some thieves try to waylay us. We are in no mood for this crap and we kick their asses. When we get to River's End, we find out that thieves and enforcers have taken over in our absence. We decide to clear them out. Personally I'm looking forward to some straight-ahead mayhem after all this skullduggery and supernatural shite.

We gather in the woods to prepare, and meet **Sanjay**, a straggly wood elf. He speaks badger too (guess there isn't a lot else to do in the woods). I realize while we are planning our assault that Colleen is behind this mess. She wanted to make the town a better place for a thief, and she certainly succeeded. That puts another massive crack in our friendship. I mean, River's End is boring and I want to get out of it, but nice people live here and there's no call to turn it into a shitheap.

We go back to town. Our plan is to provoke the interloping sods and then beat the tar out of them and send them off. There are two new pubs. The **Velvet Glove** and the **Bloody**

**Dagger.** I start playing in the Dagger. Dain and Hal are robbed while they are watching me. An enforcer tries to shake me down, and I scare him off. Dain plays darts, and another enforcer tries to recruit her. The place is thick with them. Sanjay horns in, to great comic effect.

Billy Ray and Erosee check out the Glove. Turns out it's a brothel. They concoct a scheme to find Wasser, that wanker I tried to teach a lesson before we left. Evidently it didn't stick. Colleen invited him to "build up" River's End, and he has been busy. Erosee convinces Wasser's procurer to take her to Wasser. We follow her to an isolated house. She goes in and lays it on hot and heavy. When next we see her, she is bonking Wasser's assistant. She gets him up against the window, and Sanjay climbs up and pulls the bugger out. We bust in and kick ass. Billy Ray, Erosee, and Sanjay get Wasser and kill him (hopefully that will take the homicidal edge off the both of them). We clear out all of the guards, but in the fray Hal takes a mortal wound and is mostly dead. Billy Ray heals him to a coma, and we take him along to Billy Ray Bob Williams Sr. I hope he can do something for Hal, because he's a great bloke, one of the few of our lot who doesn't argue like a fishwife. We also take lots of bookkeeping stuff from Wasser's place, which should help us find all of the wankers he recruited. We put all the buggers' heads on pikes in the town square as a bit of a warning.

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## **The Road to Valhalla**

We go get healed. Billy Ray and I do some training. I keep my eye out for Colleen so I can talk to her first. If any of the rest of our lot find her now, there might be bloodshed. We clean up a bunch more crooks. Billy Ray Sr. tells us that we have to rescue Hal's soul from Valhalla in one week. Apparently he was so close to death that the Valkyries swept down and took it, and it's busy quaffing in the heavenly longhouse. Hal is patched up and seems OK, but he is wearing a lot of black. I think his fingernails are painted black, and his eyes look dark like a tart's. Actually it's a pretty cool look.

We have a big argument about whether or not Colleen should come with or not. I talk them into giving her a chance, then I talk her into coming. She confesses all to the town guard, then us. Billy Ray punches her, then we all settle down and go. Billy Ray Sr. gives us incense, and tells us to find the **Dirin Dwarves**. We go to Bergstadt, which seems a bit less weird this time around. Draco pays for our rooms, which is pretty big of him considering that the jury's still out on him being an evil threat to our country.

In the morning, we head toward the dwarven kingdom. Sanjay makes a mango chutney Slushee with tequila. After trying it, everyone is taken ill, except for me. It's my new favorite drink. We spend the night at an outpost of Draco's with his tough soldier blokes. They sell us gems to trade with the dwarves, and I get some really strong booze that they make from lichen. We ride on. As we get close to the entrance into the mountain, the hill people ambush us. They are testy buggers (the northern assassins who tried to kill Draco

came from here). We get most of them, but Sanjay and Hal get hurt. Finally, we make it to the caves.

The next day, after some R&R and traveling through the caves, we meet a huge cold frog. Hal sets it on fire and we let the motherfucker burn. A dwarf rows over to us across this huge cavern lake. He congratulates us on besting the frost frog. He takes us to **Pierre**, an old dwarf who agrees to guide us, and they put us up in cool hotel rooms in **Parisheim** (aka **Nidavellir**).

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## **Valhalla-luia**

Four days have passed since we started. Hal has 3 days left. Pierre has sent **Henri** to take us to the bridge (owww! - a la James Brown, one of my favorite bards). Sanjay picks his nose. (? – *ed.*) When we are nearly to the bridge, we see a light. We are coming to the surface again. Henri tells us how to get to Valhalla from there. We see cave bear bones, then a bear corpse seething with acid. Henri says "the koala was here." We keep going and (of course) run into it. It runs away after Dain puts an arrow in it. We go out into a snowy area and see a rainbow bridge with a large person standing on it. He says one of us does not have a pure heart. It turns out to be the dwarf, who is not really a dwarf. When he is found out, he says "can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man" and runs up some invisible stairs and disappears. (He is Loki. What a prat.)

We hear some rumbling that sounds like an avalanche, but it turns out to be a bloody great giant. We try to throw rocks at him to scare him off. He gets pissed off at us and bonks Eroze and I on the head. Then Heimdall shows himself. (I've never spoken to him, but I recognize him). He was disguised as the bloke on the bridge. He and the giant run toward each other, with hate in their eyes. We join in the fray and help Hiemdall slay the giant. He allows us to cross the bridge. I'm totally down with Hiemdall.

I'm dead curious about Valhalla, since I talk to the folk here a fair amount. As we reach the far side of the bridge, we see a plain covered in blood with warriors' souls around a campfire. Looks like most battlefields, except for the aura around the blokes having a cuppa. We talk to someone who knows how things work round here, and he says Hal's body has to defeat his soul in combat in order to take it back. The soul is pretty lame; at one point it yells "This is how we hit in Valhalla!", then utterly fails to hit. But it has a retractable head; when Hal's body strikes right into its head, it retracts it like a turtle and yells "That is how we duck in Valhalla!" Hal's body wins the fight and Billy Ray reunites him. Hal goes looking for some fingernail varnish remover.

We hang around in Valhalla for a while, where there is much mighty quaffing, and a few other substances I manage to sample that are quite a treat. I write a song in honor of Hiemdall, and for once everybody seems to like hearing me sing it. They must be starting to appreciate my lyrics. We decide to get tattoos from Frigga. Hal and Eroze get Asgard, I

get the bridge with Heimdall. Dead cool. Then we decide to leave. When the gods start putting blue tac on their faces, it's time to go. (*Written under the influence, I think. I have no idea what he means. – ed.*) We meet up with Pierre and go to Parisheim and take a tour. Then we go home. I discover along the way that I glow in the dark. Must have been some of that weird shit I tried in the afterlife.

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## **Magna of Illusion**

*"Is that the look of a done god?"*

Weeks pass, and our Valhalla adventure fades to a memory. One day, we are sitting around the Spitting Camel. Sanjay is enjoying a chutney daquiri. A fuzzy form enters. (*I think he means indistinct, not hairy – ed.*) Helga hands her a beer. Her name is **Arden**, and she is an acquaintance of Dain's. She asks for discreetness and she and Dain repair to a back room to talk. Then a big guy in black furs, very old, enters with a miserable cold German Shepherd at his heels. I pet his doggie and he asks for Dain. He says he is her grandfather **Alasar** and it is her birthday tomorrow. What do you know. We'll have to have a bit of a piss-up for her.

Erose nips into the back room with Sanjay under her arm and alerts Dain. Introductions ensue. Meanwhile, the guy says his dog is named **Familiar**. Fair enough. When Dain shows up, he calls her Dainiella. He says he has been at sea for 20 years (which means she has never seen him before). Pandemonium ensues. He gives her a dead cool but evil-looking black mirror and ownership of the good ship **Plutonia**. Then he tells us the story of the black rock (Arrrrrrrrrrrrr!!!). We all pass out. Now that was unexpected.

The next day, Dain decides to get an expert opinion about the mirror. Billy Ray Bob Williams Sr. says that it is a possession of the god Tezcatlipocl (the smoking mirror). Apparently that's not such a good thing, but it's a bit outside Billy Ray Sr.'s expertise. Dain takes it to Throntax. A few days later, Throntax tells her that it will allow her to read people's minds, but then something bad will happen (don't know if it happens to her or to them). Also, it allows its owner to breathe under water.

We accompany Dain to Bremen, where the *Plutonia* is docked. We are supposed to meet Alasar there. On the way we see the city of Steinhall, which is huge. There must be over 10,000 people there. I must do some gigs here. We get to Bremen and meet Roberts, Alasar's first officer. He is a member of the sea folk race, tall and dark with smooth features. He is pretty, and he is sitting with a bunch of boys who are also pretty. Seems a bit elvish. Apparently the sea folk have elven blood in them. Robert's full name seems to be "Dread Pirate Roberts," which either means that his parents were strange, or we may have some trouble with him.

We wait with Dain for one month until the ice clears from the harbor.



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## Trouble in Los Cristobal

"I'm a weevil! Ngee, ngee, ngee, ngee!"

– Josh

To pass the time, I play gigs, Hal guards, Sanjay thieves, Colleen cheats at cards and her victims beat her up, and Billy Ray heals her. Continuing her campaign to die early, Colleen schemes to look in the black mirror on the *Plutonia* while Sanjay distracts the guards. She tries to reconnoiter but Sanjay blows it (probably on purpose, knowing the little bugger), so to play it off, she has to go to the ship and have sex with **Big Tom** and **Randy Randall**. When she gets back to town, Helga of the Ho's Guild beats her up for horning in on Ho territory.

I don't care for the effect that mirror is having on Dain. She's tired all of the time. Even though it is aboard the *Plutonia*, the distance doesn't seem to make her feel better. I wish the thing had never showed up.

At the end of the month, Dain goes to see Billy Ray about her malaise. He refers her to someone else, who says Dain has a problem with energy, but this new person can't figure out the cause. He says he will investigate further. Dain goes to see **Dais Conger**, the herb woman. That doesn't help. Back at River's End, Billy Ray Bob Williams Sr. told Dain that her lethargy was like a possession or a curse, but not quite. Fat lot of good that does her. Dain asks me for some uppers, and of course, the magic baggie provides.

*(This is the first reference Keith makes to the magic baggie in his journal. He doesn't recall when he first acquired it, but it wasn't until sometime after the first encounter with Draco. Most likely the event of him finding it and his celebrations of that happy occasion wiped it completely from his mind. Or perhaps Vidar provided. Who knows. – ed.)*

Because this whole thing seems so queer, our lot decide to go with Dain and the old man on their trip at sea – first stop, **Los Cristobal**. A cabin boy, **Slade**, gives Dain some tea to wake her up when we arrive. Hm, got to try some of that. When we get to Los Cristobal, I take three things from the magic baggie and freak. Dain, Dread, and Grandpa go to do business in town while the rest of us amuse ourselves.

Colleen sneaks in to where the mirror is being kept and takes a peek at it. She turns into an iguana, which is not an improvement. When Dain gets back and finds out, she throws a wobbler and kicks Colleen off the ship. Dread smuggles her back aboard, unbeknownst to us. Dain tells me that Colleen has gone, and I go looking for her, but I can't find her, so I leave her a note.

We sail away. Dain still feels like shite. Billy Ray tries to help her, to no avail. Then, to take our minds off of that, we are overrun by a pack of sea elves. They hold a knife to Alasar's throat and say that they want to go to his island (seems he has an island). **Apu**,

the leader (who sounds a bit like Sanjay), says that Grandpa is a murderer and a kidnapper. We negotiate for the hostage, then Hal, Grandpa, Sanjay, and I go with the sea elves, while Apu stays on the *Plutonia* and makes ready to sail along with us.

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### **Thank You, Please Come Again**

*Pam – "Is there a secret passage?"*

*Li – "No, but there's a buttload of doors, though."*

We discover that Hal can't swim, and he flaps around to the amusement of the elves, who imitate him. We get on the dolphins provided by the elves. (There are 50 dolphins, and 45 elves.) Hal's dolphin is VJ, mine is Bharaputra. Hal's mount has "a good spirit," and they tell him "not to take any shit from it." Much to their amazement, he surfs coolly on dolphinback. We bugger off to the island.

While we are gone, Slade approaches Dain and tells her that Grandpa is probably preparing to snuff someone. Dain discusses Mexico with Apu; apparently it has some connection to the mirror, or Grandpa was there, or something. She goes into Grandpa's room and sees preparations for sea folk magic.

We get to an island where Alasar's 20 henchmen are supposedly holding off the sea elves. **Sujatha** is the sea elf we are looking for – she is a princess, allegedly kidnapped by Grandpa. We go to shore in a dinghy (*don't know what happened to the dolphins. – ed.*), which gets tipped over by fishy blokes with tridents (sahuagan). The elves tell Grandpa to call them off, which he can't or won't do. The elves attack the sahuagan. I kick some fish-boy ass.

Meanwhile, Dread and his mates maroon us on the island. Twats. As Dread sails the *Plutonia* away, Dain is hurt in the fight on board, but makes it to shore. The elves say that they'll help us get the ship back if we help them rescue Sujatha. We talk to cover all the bases. Grandpa proves to be an asshole, freezing the elves and such, but will let us see Sujatha if the sahuagan have not taken over. There is an infestation of sahuagan in the castle.

A dolphin swims up, babbles, and flings the mirror to us. Apu translates: "don't forget this." I carry the mirror, since I'm so very buff and all.

The sea elves are nervous about the sahuagan. One (**Sendal** the sea elf) goes to scout the house. He never returns. Hal and I go after him with a strapping elf named **Niroon**. We find signs of a wet struggle, then tracks, but no little wet elf. A mysterious scream rings out. Hal and I investigate and find some zombies. We kill them, and still we don't find anyone. Sendal gets turned into a zombie and attacks us, so we kill him and bring his head back. The elves say "ewww" and bury him at sea. Dain looks in the mirror while I experiment with time-release amphetamines. Now she kills plants and reads minds.

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## Standard Damsel Rescuing

*"After we kick its ass we can get a goat."*  
– Marty

A cabin boy who is a member of PETA (Pretty Eccentric Twats who love Animals) lets Colleen go. She swims back toward us as we prepare to attack the castle. We sneak in but can't find the bloody armory because Grandpa is a wanker. (Sanjay says it might be a spell of confusion, but he's a wanker too.) Finally, we do a deal with a rat to find the armory. We get weapons and attack some zombies. Dain discovers her new abilities.

We follow the path as it goes underwater and run into more sahuagan, and lawyers at that. Dain decides to give them the mirror in exchange for Sujatha. They want 500 gp thrown in too, so we decide to kill them for being arrogant and greedy. We make pretend gold and go to exchange it. All hell breaks loose. Grandpa tries to break the gate, fails, and I come to his rescue and demolish it. We fight. Rescue the girl. Get out. Huzzah.

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## Iguana Woman vs. The Flying Hat God!!

*"Hal has a way with animals – or is that has **his** way with animals?"*

*"I think I need Heal Light Psychosis!"*  
– Pam

We stand around dripping, and decide to try to find the boat. Colleen shows up. Dain freaks out. For a while, everyone tries to calm things down, even Colleen, for once. She side-steps Dain's attack. Dain falls, and I help her up. She is talking about her head being on fire, and mine too. Then she passes out. Clearly, she's on some sort of bad trip, so I try to take care of her. Apu is very confused by all this. Later, she wakes up, eats some seaweed, and hurls. Then she and Colleen go at it again. Things are getting weird. Dain is having evil thoughts, and so is Billy Ray, for no apparent reason.

Then Grandpa kicks us off the island, the ungrateful git. We decide to go to Mexico. Dain seems very fixed on the idea. I'm not sure why the others want to go, but I'm game. I've heard that it's a really happening place. To get in the mood, and to fix the heavy vibes between certain people, I try to give Dain and Colleen something to help them, but only Hal is willing to eat it. He becomes *very calm*. He's a very connected bloke, must be all that time spent in the forest. Colleen buggers off into the water. The group argues about luggage, then argues about all kinds of other fucking things while I play air guitar. I swear I've never seen such a bunch of old women. At least Hal is mellow. Apu gives him

a silver choker with a diamond and says to break the gem if we get into trouble. That should take all of a few hours.

We reach Mexico, with Colleen following us about an hour behind. (*I don't know how they got to Mexico, since the sea elves hadn't located the Plutonia yet. Maybe Alasar had another ship somewhere. – ed.*) She crawls into the undergrowth and bumps into a Mexican, who screams. We investigate. We find him, heal him, exchange food. Dain is getting freaky about the mirror and takes a feather from a Mexican bloke's headdress. The natives seem to know something about what is happening to her, which is good 'cause she's worrying the piss out of me.

When we get to the nearby town, Dain wants the head bloke's hat. He gives it to her, and everyone goes "oooooooo." There's only one thing to do in a situation like this, so I take a hit from the magic baggie. Everyone is feeling the weirdness, so a party breaks out. A native woman speaking Common approaches me and tells me that the natives think Dain is the avatar of Tezcatlipocl. It soaks into my consciousness that this is bad.

A procession forms, taking Dain to some caves where they want to lock her up. The woman whispers that we should go along with it. The villagers throw her in a cave and go away. Eroze suggests that I get out the fucking mirror that started this whole thing. We go with the woman to find the secret entrance. Colleen tries to talk me into putting the mirror (*? Keith was clearly too stoned to write straight, even after the fact – ed.*), but I'm too out of it. We move the stone that conceals the secret entrance. Colleen uses her new freaky lizard strength to dig us into the cave. We head toward the jade cave where Dain is imprisoned, while Colleen stays behind to collapse the passage behind us.

The feathered hat flies out, looking really pissed off. It flies after us, Colleen in pursuit. Two jaguars come out of the jungle. Billy Ray says we don't want to hurt them, they told him they are just keeping us here for their boss. The hat shows up again. Billy Ray invokes Odin and it rains snakes. This all seems perfectly normal to me. Eroze clips a feather off the hat and is hit by a lightning bolt. We fight helplessly as the hat lands on Dain's head. She grows huge, snickers at us, turns Colleen into a human with a lizard hand and tongue, takes the mirror from me with no effort, and leaves us in the dust.

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## Destiny Plays a Power Chord

*"His lute-plucker just dropped dead from a severe case of knife."*

– Li

*"You deal with a grape floating around your breasts!"*

– Katherine

We are taken captive by the villagers, who are a lot less quaint than when we first met them. Dain's evil influence seems to have rubbed off on them. They kill, cook, and eat

Colleen (much to the chagrin of the diners). This has been a seriously fucking bad trip, literally and figuratively.

But things are looking up a bit. Stienhal conquistadors show up and rescue us. We end up in a former pirate town called **Tijuana**. Sanjay, who walked the plank while we were on the ship, got rescued also and we meet up with him here, to great rejoicing (except by Erore, whom he tries to sell). The people here are called the **Melata**.

We still have mourning to do. Erore mourns her armor. I mourn Colleen and my guitar. (I'm not sure which I'm saddest about, honestly.) I also mourn for poor Dain, who isn't dead exactly, but being the vessel for an evil god can't be doing her any good.

What we need is to get utterly pissed. We go into a dive called **Quetzalcoatl's Revenge** which looks like just the rathole to take away our worries, or at least show us some folk who are worse off. And we don't have to wait long. A soldier starts a fight with a bloke who apparently stole his chick, and ends up knifing him. Bad scene.

I hear someone making a stink, and clap eyes on a posh-looking elf having hysterics about the bloke that was killed. Not, apparently, because he cares what happened to the poor git, but because the poor git was his lute player. A weird feeling comes over me. I hear a strange roaring and humming in my ears, like a screaming crowd and an endless note on a guitar, but more intense, like a guitar would sound if it was alive. My vision narrows like a tunnel and the elf is the light at the other end. I feel a little like this sometimes when the music comes to me, but never this strong. The cosmic source of music must be telling me something. Either that, or this is one hell of a flashback.

I find out that the elf is named **Mick Jagger**. I offer to play for him. Conveniently, the dead bloke's lute didn't get stabbed as well. We jam, and it is the best gig I've ever played. Mick and I are definitely connected on some strange level, even though he's a bit of a prima donna. Everyone in the bar digs the sound we're laying down. Another elf, a snooty little git called **Vrba**, unbends enough to give us dancing lights. Erore parties with the conquistadors. The party just builds and builds until it's a pandemonium of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll! I wind up with a tattoo of Quetzalcoatl which I can't remember getting (those are the best kind in my experience). It goes nicely with my Hiemdall tattoo from Valhalla.

After the party dies down, I sit and talk with Mick. Seems he's on a quest to find the **Holy Amp of Fender**, a magic item used by **Presley** to bring great rock and roll to the people of ancient times. It goes to 11. I tell him that I've dreamt of such a thing, and have been wanting to quest for it, but didn't know where to start. Mick has a map of Fender's treasure. Meanwhile, Billy Ray talks to the conquistadors about converting. Everyone tells everyone everything.

Mick, being a bard, is a brainy chap who's done a huge bit of research on the amp. Fender was of the **Kepta** civilization, which had relations with the Egyptians. Fender knew **Martek**, an Egyptian mage. Erore's ears prick up; she's heard of this, and knows

the Kepta language (what a daft thing for a good Stienhall girl to know). Mick has the funds for an expedition to find the Holy Amp. He warns us that there is a magic tunnel to go through and a secret cave and a fire giant and restless natives in a swamp. Now we all definitely want to go.

Mick outfits us for the expedition and we hire four other blokes from the conquistadors; **Gunter, Udo, Swinehundt**, and **Schnellmaken**. For some unknown reason, Vrba decides to come too. He doesn't look like the type to rough it, but what the hell. We set out through **Ket's Rapids**, avoiding certain areas marked on Mick's map as dangerous. We get to the river and follow it upstream.

(Note to my readers: the travel descriptions are a bit sparse. Bards like to go on for pages describing this stuff in their adventures, but mostly it's just ass boring, and I got some really brilliant shit in Tijuana, so I spent most of the time stoned.)

#### *2nd day*

We follow the right branch of the river. We get to **Whitetooth** and there are spears and skulls strung across the water. Kind of a nice look, actually. Eroze slashes down the items, which gives everyone the willies. Later, we set up camp.

#### *3rd day*

We pass another fork. Something big moves in the jungle. Sanjay scouts, sees tigers, and runs back, screaming, "Never leave the boat, man, never leave the fucking boat!"

#### *4th day*

Nothin' happens.

#### *5th day*

Cliffs appear ahead, about 50 feet high. On the opposite bank, there is a glinty thing. It is a bejeweled dagger in a tree. I pull it out and decide to keep it. We look for the sign of lips, Fender's sign. We see more tigers, but they don't hassle us. We go up steep hills, then into a canyon with a trickle of a river in the middle. We take a rest, and while I'm noodling on my newly inherited guitar, huge lips appear on a tree and say, "To open the southern path, press the grey slab at its peak." Only my presence triggers the lips, they won't show up for anyone else. Kind of a neat symbol, actually. Sanjay climbs a nearby sheer slab and pushes it. It swings open like a garage door (whatever that may be).

We go in, find a spiral staircase, climb it to the top of the mountain, and find a path to a valley. A really *long* path. We round a corner to another valley and see four sleeping painted warriors. We back off, come up with a meager plan, and go past. We decide to go via a shrine rather than take the long way through the village and beg for trouble. The map is unclear about whether we have to go through the temple to get to the bog, which is the next stage of the trip. That's typical. These fucking maps never have the important stuff on them, like, "Here be a hundred orcs waiting to put the boot in to travelers," or "Here be dragons, so go this other way or the buggers'll eat you."

Sanjay walks up to the temple guards and makes them sleep. We all head inside, where there is a huge stone jaguar with green eyes and a box bursting with treasure between its paws. I ask you, could they be more obvious? There are six people in the temple, all asleep, and two live jaguars. Sanjay feeds them some sort of elf jerky called Slim Jims, and is impressed when they eat them.

When we leave the temple, we are in the bog. We decide to push on into the . . .

*6th day*

. . . so I give everybody cocaine to keep them moving along (you can get anything in Tijuana). We go into another box canyon and behind us there appears a hydra. Billy Ray and I are feeling our oats, and we charge the thing. Sanjay retreats, which is probably just as well. Mick stands back and shoots it with arrows. Gunter dies. Schnellmaken and Swinehundt run off. Then Erosee wades in and finishes it off.

We keep going, and get buzzed by a 9-foot dragonfly. At least, I think so – the others were reacting to it as well, but then I'd been dosing them a bit, so who knows. We find a less soggy bit of bog and sleep.

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## **Earth, Fire, and a Mighty Wind**

*7th day*

We do some stuff and walk. Mick tells us that there were two kingdoms that traded with each other. They were separated by a volcano, but they had a “magic tunnel” that allowed them to reach each other. The kingdoms were called Windgate and Tarabar, for whatever it's worth.

We come to a cave with a fire giant. He speaks Steinhalese, and greets us as brothers, which makes a nice change from most buggers we meet. Mick and I play some songs for him, which he digs. Behind him is a door with “Still is the Way to the Break of Day” written on it. The giant doesn't know what is written there. He is a raving nutter.

We carry on, through the possible “magic tunnel” which Mick told us of. We descend into the bowels of the earth, which isn't a pretty thought. A big iron door bars our way, and we can hear wind whistling behind it. We open it. We enter a room that is mostly full of shattered stuff. There is a mural of a man walking through a hoop with a cup on the left side and fire on the right, then mountains, then a hoop and a man walking out the other side.

We see another door, and open it. There is another room beyond, cylindrical, with soft white light. There is no decay. The room is completely white. There is a glass-like rod with a gem in it. We hear more wind noise, and follow the sound to a door made of rock.

I push it aside, and we enter a hexagonal room. Vrba and some of the other brainy chaps say that the stuff in the middle is used for summoning, but it has lain unused for these thousand years (they speak like that, these blokes).

We decide that we have to figure out about the wind, so they tie a rope to me and I walk down the wind tunnel. I go 200 feet according to the rope, but it looks to me like I've gone 400 feet. (I have actually experienced that sensation often, but this time I'm pretty sure it was the tunnel's fault.) I tell the others what I saw, and they follow me as I plunge back into the tunnel. Way later, we come across a pentagram gate. The lips appear again and say (in ancient Stienhalese):

Be wary, death guards this passage.  
Thine approach shalt cause the  
Death symbol to appear. Damnation  
Will follow. Thou hast been warned.

Well, that's clear enough. The gate has defenses, so we decide to go back. Billy Ray gets attacked by something invisible (it turns out to be a wind elemental). We fight it. Vrba learns the meaning of the saying "don't spit into the wind." We finally kill it.

We go to sleep, and dream "still is the way to the break of day."

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## **Ridin' the Tunnel o' Love**

### *8th day*

When we wake up, we decide to go the other way down the tunnel. We're in the middle of it, not at one end, if I didn't make that clear. We come to a stone wall and another hexagonal room. This one has an earth elemental summoning circle. Another pair of lips appears and says:

Beware, beware, lest greed for plunder  
The earthen one's chains burst asunder.

(The lips may be cool, but the lyrics are shite.) We find a door, and once inside a black thing mesmerizes Hal and Eroze. We fight it and it dies, but then exploding fire demons show up. We chase them and the smoking bloke who's controlling them away. When we finally get to look at the room, there is much interesting stuff that tells us about the tunnel. We open a cupboard and find embroidered crimson cloaks, one of which is in good condition. Vrba says it is a holy garment and pinches it for himself. There are rotting blue cloaks (apparently not holy, but certainly holey), shoes, and belts. There is some rotted rope, 500 gold pieces and some gems, which we split, some weapons, and vials with Fender's insignia. Billy Ray Bob Jr. takes the warhammer (Mighty Smiter) and



the electrum mace. Mick and I each take five of the ten vials. There is also a magic book, but it has crumbled to dust.

Some of us try the Fender water. Nothing seems to happen, but we then use the water to fill the cup, like in the picture on the wall, and we are able to take the tunnel through the mountain range. It's an incredible trip, great effects. Mick grooves on it too. (My kind of lad.) We emerge at a rundown, lava-filled terminus.

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## The Death of Hospitality

*"They killed Schweinhundt, the bastards!"*

We check out a hallway, where we can hear moaning. We get to a maintenance tunnel. We find some blob people, not in a circle this time. I guard the door while the others check out the closet. Inside are a suspiciously full chest and some papers. Anyone who reads one of the papers gets a fright, and most of them start running away. As if that's not enough, the chest metamorphoses into a heinous devil, a green, shiny, spiky creature (I swear, sometimes I can't tell if I'm high or not). The first I know of this, I hear some commotion and run into the room, where Billy Ray and Mick are fighting this thing. The whole group attacks, and eventually it falls under Eroze's mighty sword.

We regroup, and read the papers now that the trap is off them. They indicate that there is an emergency exit. Mick checks it out (it is in a wind tunnel). The tunnel pulses bigger and smaller which affects Mick not at all. He finds a door into the white room, which sends a flood of relief over the lot of us. Everyone assembles there and we sleep.

### *9th day*

We get out of the damned tunnels. We are in a canyon and we see a valley (wait, weren't we just here?). But no, it's different. The rocks are weird. We are headed into the Ashmire, a desert of ash. We decide not to travel in the heat of the day.

### *10th day*

We see gray shapes, which fade away from us. (I see a likely looking plant and decide to chew on it and see what happens. You never know. But the results are disappointing.) Then some blokes ride up on two-legged creatures. They speak Old Stienhalese, and they invite us to ride to their village. We decide why the hell not, and ride their striders. Their village welcomes us.

They help us read the map. They warn against going to the big temple. **Tuchas Delathet** is the protector of the temple. The villagers tell us that the last group of people who went there died, and then the priests wouldn't give the villagers any more water. (By the way, while all of this boring stuff is going on, Mick and I both score with some sultry desert tarts.)

The leader of the village, **Artech Faisatl**, asks Billy Ray to make water for them, and he promises to do it in the morning once Odin fills him up again. Then the worthless bastard traitors try to poison us at dinner! We kick their asses, the striders stampede, the town burns down, and we kill the mayor. That should teach them. I take the mayor's necklace (evil bastards do sometimes have good taste) and Mick takes his dagger.

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## Death to the Huge Zombie Monster

*"Elf recon, or El Freakon?"*

– Jose

### *11th day*

Having destroyed our intended sleeping place, we walk on through the night and catch a little sleep at dawn. Later today we see a spire rising above the desert. We reach the walls of a town by nightfall. There are dummies meant to look like guards manning the walls. The town gates are flapping in the wind. We kick them open and find a ruined town inside. We find our way to the spire we saw – it is a temple, and inside are a bunch of skeletal zombies. We fight the good fight, and destroy them, but we get pounded in the process.

### *12th and 13th days*

We rest and recuperate for a couple of days, then enter the temple again. **Kagen**, the priest, talks to us through a door. Ponce. He says the temple is dedicated to **Chalchiurice** (goddess of running water). Vrba opens the door and is struck down by its sigil, which leaves him in a coma. We hear retreating footsteps within, and Sanjay runs after them, so I follow because the little bloke is likely to get himself offed.

From behind an alter steps a huge dead monster with a huge two-handed sword, and it says we will die for invading the temple. Fuck. We both turn and run, slam the door closed behind us, and fight over who gets the first slug of tequila. Someone tells Billy Ray to detect evil, but I say, "I can save you a fucking spell. It's EVIL!" We find a gong and play some music to soften him up. A hideous woman comes out to sweep and I follow her and run into the big dead fucker again. The others run to help me and end up fighting ghouls first to get to me. I get knocked out. Everyone whacks at the thing to avenge me. Mick sets it on fire. Sanjay fails to bowl it over. Schnellmaken douses it in flaming oil. Then Sanjay stands back and WHACKS IT A GOOD ONE, SENDING IT BACK TO HELL!!! WHOO HOO!!!

Billy Ray gets me back on my feet. I pick up the big fucker's sword, the "Right Hand of Vengeance." Oh yeah, I'll be taking this. We hear retreating footsteps (again), and find some hidden doors. Sanjay goes through one of the doors, and Mick follows. Sanjay sees

another door with a sigil on it. Not having learned anything from Vrba, Sanjay goes through and triggers a blindness spell, but being a lucky beggar it doesn't take effect on him. We decide to leave the temple for a bit so we don't all die.

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## **More Fighting; More About the Amp; Laying Fender to Rest**

*14th day*

We are sucking wind. We recover.

*15th day*

I have run out of food, but my mates divvy theirs up and resupply me. Ta.

I am continuing to try to teach Eroze how to play bass. She has rhythm, but no ear, which is a bit painful for me. I've also introduced her to the wonderful world of the magic baggie. It provides well for her, as always, and she achieves a beautiful slow burn on drugs and booze, leading to some heavy flirtation with Mick (thank me later, mate).

We head back to the fucking Temple of Everybody Attack Us, Please, and find some snakes in a pit. Eroze and I act out three stooges skits for their entertainment, only there are only two of us, and I don't know who the bloody three stooges are anyway, but it seemed like a good idea at the time. Then Billy Ray takes over. Apparently, snakes and Odin are very tight. Billy Ray talks to the snakes, laying on some heavy flattery. They tell him the old guy brought them in to guard something, but they don't know what. Billy Ray sets them free, and we cross the now snakeless pit.

We find a piranha-headed statue of the goddess of water, who is getting right on my tits, I can tell you. Billy Ray yells "All right! More snakes!" as more snakes come wiggling at us. Billy Ray puts some to sleep, but some encircle us. We fight them like a pack of girls. On drugs. Except for Eroze, who fights like a WOMAN!! . . . on drugs. The evil old priest shows up and attacks. I've had just about enough of this git, and I really want his cool necklace, so I whack him a good one, but he's a tough old bugger. He calls some more ghouls and gasts. Does it ever end in this place? Sanjay attacks (got to admit, the little bloke has some bollocks on him) but shatters his stick with a knob on the end.

Billy Ray manages to turn most of the gasts. The rest of the group throws holy water and burns them. The old geezer and I give each other a last mighty blow and we both keel over. Unfortunately, that means I can't immediately take the necklace and do a victory dance. Schnellmaken and I are carried out of the temple, and Vrba stays with us (cheers mate) while the rest of them loot the priest's body. (Mick snags me the necklace. Well done.) The room is full of bottles of water, which turns out to be Fender holy water.

They decide to move on to the next spooky room, which contains inactive mummies and a statue of a green four-armed woman. The room is so spooky they are all scared and Sanjay runs away. The room hasn't been entered for 1000 years (or so said one of the smart buggers in our group, 'cause I wasn't there and I don't know how he knew). They decide to leave and we all rest for the night.

### *16<sup>th</sup> day*

Billy Ray heals us. In fact, he hits such a pulsing cosmic connection to Odin that the man himself appears to me and Erore and apologizes that Billy Ray only has the Cure Light Wounds spell. In Odin's honor, and also because our food is running low, we eat snakes.

### *17<sup>th</sup> day*

We go back to the large spooky room. Mick walks onto the floor mosaics, and realizes that it is a pictorial history of Fender. That's the sort of thing bards notice. Meanwhile, Billy Ray tries to bless the mummies. The floor collapses and Erore and Mick fall through, but they are OK. They hear meowing, which turns out to be from skeleton cats, which attack (of course). Sanjay throws me a rope and I let it down to them, and also drop some of the Fender water. It destroys some of the undead moggies. Mick climbs out and then I reel Erore in.

While this is going on, Billy Ray wakes up the mummies. We fight them. Since I've sussed out the Fender water, I use that to kill them. Vrba lights some of them on fire (regular firebug, he is). We kill them all.

We go into the next room. There are huge frescoes on the walls. Mick and some of the other folk figure them out, and tell me that they tell the story of Windgate before, during, and after the cataclysm.

It starts with Fender. His people had too much technology and too little worship. The good gods told him, "Change your ways or the bad gods will destroy you." Not being slow on the uptake, Fender straightened up and went out to convert other folk.

**Terazel** the evil king asked Fender to build the tunnel to conquer the Mexicans. Fender realized what was up and led some people to safety. He wanted to hook up with the Egyptians, but absolution was not granted him. This is his grave.

When I hear this, it makes me angry. All of the bad shit in this temple has gotten on my tits, but now I'm pissed off because these evil fuckers have been crawling all over Fender's resting place. Absolutely uncool.

Anyway, the Amp allowed Terazel to become powerful. He employed the greatest bards to sing of his greatness, and recruited a lot because he was rich. Fender gave the Amp to **Tutankhamen** to get it away from Terazel. Tut gave it to a prince (**Vassilis Xerxes**) who started up the Hellenic kingdom. They built their cities on rock and roll. That's just

fucking inspiring. These guys used something called Jefferson Starship, which sounds far out, whatever it is. Anyway, Mick seems to think now that the Amp is buried with Xerxes.

I restrain Sanjay from looting the tomb (good thing, as it comes to me in a dream later that the tomb was cursed). We find an ivory box that is not in the tomb. It has a good aura, so I open it. Inside is a magic vial with a beetle in it. The vial is attached to a piece of paper that says “crattle” which means “flow.” We leave the box, but take the vial and some red incense. Mick and I agree that we have to do something to lay Fender’s spirit to rest. We light the incense, and play him a fabulous concert. Everyone joins in, and it’s one of those amazing moments when everything synchs up, the musically ignorant can hammer out a beat, and after all of the shit we had to wade through to get here, our souls just fly. Udo beats on the sarcophagus with some augury sticks. The good vibes just flow back in. It’s a rockin’ good time.

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## Homeward Bound

*Katherine: “Are we going to meet Xena?”*

*Li: “You **are** Xena.”*

*Pam: “She’s a Xena wannabe.”*

*Jose: “Well I’m a **Xenaphobe**, so I don’t want to hear about it.”*

*18<sup>th</sup> day*

R&R.

*19<sup>th</sup> day*

We hear vibrations in the ground. More tribesmen show up – 360 mounted blokes on fire-breathing birds, which I must admit are cool. They are right pissed off that we killed their high priest, and they get very stroppy with us. They want the vial with the beetle that Sanjay has. We give it to them, along with the code word. They give us some of the fire-breathing birds they call “bic birds.”

Hm. Really not sure about giving them the vial. Anyone connected with the nutter priest can’t be good. Not much choice just now, though.

*20<sup>th</sup> day*

We get back to the Subway. We discover that we need to kill the blobby demons. Billy Ray has a sexual conversation with the bic bird (that bloke has unexpected depths). We go down a tunnel and meet more demons. Mick and Billy Ray scrub the blood pentagram with holy water, but a demon gets through before the hellgate closes. Billy Ray sluices him with holy water and he dies.

We get to the gate, and in preparation for the cool light show, I imbibe. We go through, and it is a fabulous trip, just like last time. When we get through Vrba takes the stuff off of the dead mage. We get to the river and wash, and rest.

*21<sup>st</sup> day*

We go back through the bog and cannibal town. Finally, we arrive back in Tijuana. Everyone reoutfits after being in the wilderness and through the ringer for so long. I haggle with a mariachi for his cool black velvet jacket with silver spangles. I top it off with a bandana with skulls and crossbones. I also buy Mick a cool belt. I burn my old clothes.

We get a transport to Bremen. Billy Ray and Vrba sold their bic birds in Tijuana, but the birds end up on the ship so Billy Ray vows to buy back his bird from the bards who bought it (he had named it after Fanny – bit of a sentimental thing).

On board, the soldiers say they heard of some guy asking for Dain (bit late). He had a helmet, blue armor, and a red cape. The soldiers sent him into the desert, which will just about do for him, I guess.

We arrive in Bremen. Hang out. We get our horses back, but the bards won't sell the bic bird to Billy Ray. We go to Stienhal. We get all of our loot appraised, then sell all of it except what we particularly fancy. I keep the priest's necklace and a skull. Sanjay keeps the head of a staff, to replace the one he broke. Eroze keeps a bracelet, Billy Ray keeps some holy stuff, and Mick keeps an ivory box and ivory dagger. Don't remember what Vrba kept. Probably something red.

With his cut of the loot, Sanjay sets up a scholarship for other wood elves to tell them what a spell book is. Mick and I go on a wicked shopping spree (after I tithe to Vidar and Odin, of course: lesson learned from Fender – keep you life balanced). We pay taxes. We train. Then Lord Laura asks to see me and all of the others in the guard.

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## **A Party, A Concert, and Some Evil Shit in Between**

*“Hal doesn't have anything else to do, he might as well do some interior decorating.”*  
– Mike

*Throntax: “Maybe you could sing.”*  
*Mick: “What, in front of everybody?”*

*Withnail: “He was offering to sell your magic baggie.”*  
*Eroze: “I don't have a magic baggie.” \*pause\* “Oh . . .”*

But before we talk to her, we do some research. (When I say “we,” I mean “Mick and some other swotty blokes.”) That chap Xerxes, the dead one with the Amp, is buried in Athens, which is complicated because of our shitty relationship with the Greeks. We learn what we can about what’s going on there.

Meanwhile, Erosee prepares to throw a kick-ass party, in celebration of the fact that we are still alive and in possession of some pocket change. During the preparations, Draco shows up with a chap named **Withnail**, who is in a bad way from being mugged. (Have to have a word with the guard blokes who are still in town; don’t like to see that sort of thing happening in River’s End. Hate to speak ill of the eaten, but Colleen did open the door for some nasty characters.) Mick meets my mum. Apparently, they get along well enough. Then both of them meet Withnail, who seems to be in a bad way even after recovering from being mugged. They all head to the party along with the rest of the town.

The party *rocks!!* HUGE KEG!! This is one of those parties that goes down in history, where funky, weird, fantastic shit goes down, and you wake up two days later in a different town wearing someone else’s clothes with some bird’s undergarments in your pocket and a warrant out for your arrest. (OK, that only happened to me once.) Got to hand it to Erosee, she throws a mean bash.

Mick tells me that early in the party, Throntax gave him hallucinogenic sex. A *great* hallucinogenic orgy. (Lucky bastard. He does pull the birds . . . must be something to do with the pointy ears.)

Lord Laura and Lord Draco arrive together. Mick takes Draco aside and talks to him about something called Public Relations. Some sort of bard thing, I shouldn’t wonder. Lord Laura finally gets to have a word with us (bit of a buzzkill, talking business during a party, but she’s like that). She says the king of Stienhall is sending emissaries to the Hellenes but she doesn’t think the emissaries are far sighted enough to make a good treaty. Just to add to the fun, **Baron von Sinegar** (the bloke who owns the Royal woods where most of the Greek/Stienhal border skirmishes have happened) may have sent an assassin to off the Greek leader. We guardsmen (and women) say we’ll go and sort things out, although to be honest, we’re better at kicking ass than diplomacy.

Throntax isn’t finished with Mick yet. She gets him to sing while I play. (Strange thing; after all of our gigging, Mick is still a bit nervous about performing in public. Time he got over that.) The women all swoon, but Throntax wants Mick for herself. I watch them leave together. Ooo er!

There’s clearly a great sexual vibe going on, so I do my best to spread it around. There’s a connection between Draco and Erosee that I’ve noticed before. Their auras are like heat waves in a desert when they’re around each other, but they have some resistance to having sex that I find pretty fucking puzzling. Something to do with moving up in society, and all of the rules the toffs have for themselves, which confirms my belief that the aristocracy is a bunch of bollocks. Anyway, I try to get their heads straight, but when I talk to Draco, he says that there are some complications, and he can’t just be with her. I

ask him why, and he takes off his dead cool shades and shows me his eyes, which are all yellow and slitted like snake eyes, and pretty dead cool, too. He seems to be working out some demonic issues, so I go tell Erore that I tried to help her get laid, but Draco can't sleep with her because he's feeling too snakey this evening. Somehow I don't think she appreciates my efforts on her behalf. They carry on in their own odd fashion. Erore gives Draco a stuffed bat. He is amused (apparently they met over the body of a dead bat). Oh well, it takes all sorts.

Mick, on the other hand, scores with a capital "OH!" (at least as he told it to me later, after having imbibed quite a bit in order to forget what happened). Throntax gave him some major shit, then created some sexual simulacra with transparent sparkly tentacles to fuck everybody sideways. Apparently Mick bit off a bit more than he could chew (so to speak). He's a pretty flexible bloke when it comes to mind-altering experiences, but that was beyond his tolerance. Sounds a good time to me, though. I'll have to see if I can get Throntax to do a repeat performance.

But in the meantime, I find a little lovin' for myself. No tentacles or anything fancy, just a good time with a friendly girl. Then I have the pill (*I don't know what "the pill" is, that's just what Keith wrote. – ed.*), but just get afterglow. After Erore's party, the whole town has afterglow.

A week later, we head to Greece. We are accompanied by 100 men-at-arms and some minor lords and a major lord, **Lord Switmore**, from Sinegar's barony. We see refugees passing us; strangely enough, they are Greek. After a week of travel, we get to the border where there is a big warning fence. No one is manning the tower at the gate. Dead bodies with no heads are littered everywhere. We go past a burning town, where we meet some black clad, sunglasses-wearing Zeus followers. They were sent there by the High Council because the town was declared treasonous. Dickheads. I try to get a pair of their shades, but they say no. Definate dickheads.

We don't have much choice but to leave, so we move on. But the next town we get to is also a smoldering ruin, and some soldiers who used to live there say that the Men in Black burned this one too, also on orders from the High Council. The soldiers are sad about their town, but they are heading out to the Stienhal front now.

We get closer to Athens, and the MIBs are everywhere. Apparently the mages have stopped talking to the High Council and moved north to start a minor rebellion.

Well, there's nothing for it when things turn shitty but to do a concert. As we are setting up, we get warned by a person in black sackcloth that music will bring the MIBs, and it does. I'm ready for a fight, but they don't attack us, they take away all of the locals who are listening to us instead. Fucking cheek. Their oppressive attitude pisses me off, and I try to kick their asses, but Erore and Hal stop me. Nothing to be gained by it, unfortunately, and getting arrested would bugger our mission.



We follow them to a temple where some soldiers tell us that the people's cases are being considered. After much rigamarole, we find out the background on the current mess. The Greeks build their cities on Rock and Roll, but then their economy went bollocks up along with Egypt's fall and the sea folk destroying the Greek navy. A despotic government arose, the bards up and left with all of the bard magic stuff, taking it from the famous bard school in Athens. That was the day the music died. (Gives me a pain in my heart just thinking about it.) The bards believed that the government went against the will of Xerxes, who was instrumental in creating the Hellenic Empire.

We continue on our way and finally reach Athens. We go up a hill and we can see a large fleet being constructed. Very interesting. I wonder how they plan to keep the sea folk from destroying it, and who the Greeks plan to attack with it.

We get a lead on Xerxes' tomb. Five or six years ago, the bard college was burnt to the ground. Xerxes' tomb is supposed to be in the cellar. We decide to go check it out that night. I meet another bloke in sackcloth like the one who warned us about the concert. This one says his name is **Frid**. He was a bard, but the MIBs burnt his electric guitar. Apparently he's not the only one. He says, "The poor people don't have anything because the MIBs burned their electric guitars." (Wonton fucking destruction, if you ask me. I'd give a testicle for one of those things.) He says the peace talks are bogus; the government just wants breathing room to go after the bards and mages. Frid tells us to go north and talk to **Flyn**, the head bard in Greece and also an elf. The little beggars do get around.

We report to Lord Switmore that the truce is fake, but he doesn't seem surprised. Apparently, he intends to tip off the sea folk about the ships. Nasty, but about what the Greek government deserves. Well, he doesn't seem to need us here, so we push on up north. A few hours after we leave, we see smoke rising from the Athens harbor.

Several days later, we start to see mage towers, and the people look much happier. We play a gig, this time without any hassles. We arrive at the Eastern Bard College and get in to see Flyn. He says he knows where the Amp is (hooray!) but he is worried that we'll die in our quest (cheers, mate), and wants us to do something for him first before he gives us the location (twat). He asks us to do a hit-and-run gig (OK, not such a twat after all), and then . . . he takes out *electric guitars* . . . and gives them to us!!! Oh my fucking gods!!! Flyn is not a twat at all, he's a fucking divine messenger! I scream out a chord, and I feel like I'm about to come. It's so beautiful, I don't know what to do. When I calm down a bit, I offer to show Flyn five-string open G tuning in exchange for the honor he has given us.

Mick and I ask him for another guitarist and he gives us **Steve Vie**. He'll do. We go to the town Flyn wants us to entertain, and the bard sympathizers, called "roadies" (maybe named after the Greek city of Rhodes) have everything set up for us. As we get on stage, six MIBs show up ready for a scrap. And after having to hold back the last time, we let them have it and put the boot in with interest. The concert goes on, the guitars shriek their cries of freedom, and we wash away our troubles in sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

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## Will the Real Evil Guys Please Stand Up

*“Oh I’m not great, I’m just Billy Ray.”*

We return to the bard college and ask Flynn to keep up his end of the bargain. Flynn tells us that Martek actually took the Amp back from Xerxes because he didn’t trust the Greek government. There is a legend that the Amp will appear in Greece after the government falls. Anyway, right now it is in Martek’s tomb in Egypt, 90 miles northwest on the caravan route. (Not another fucking trip into nowhere.) Flynn sets us up with some friends of his to help us find the place. His friends turn out to be nomads. We set out, make camp, and admire their cool tents. Apparently, Egypt is a wasteland now because it was smote (by Terazel?) when Fender tried to flee there.

While we sleep, we have weird dreams. Billy Ray dreams of Odin, who tells him that he has a friend named **Seker** (a hawk-headed Egyptian god) who he hasn’t seen in ages. He thinks it’s time that Seker awoke. There is going to be a great evil in the desert.

We go to the desert, splitting off from the group to follow a caravan track. We hear rumors about some things called **Star Gems** – they have great power, and they are part of a prophecy about the release of evil and the return of power to the land (to defeat the evil). We come to some bad obelisks (*That’s what Keith called them – don’t know why they were bad. – ed.*), but they are said to be part of Martek’s tomb. We head toward the gats of **Suel** and eventually reach them. Eroze translates the writing on them; “The Gates of Suel curse those who enter unbidden.” We go through anyway. I spot some plants I’ve never seen before, so I chew on them to see what effect they have. None, more’s the pity.

We come across a fallen obelisk, which bears the inscription, “Here lies the road of Kings to the garden city of **Pizar** (*Where Martek’s tomb is located. – ed.*) whilst there lies the road to **Terbikar**.” We go east to Pizar. Mick and I get stoned to pass the time as we walk through this bloody wasteland. We meet a group of ten desert people traveling on foot. They call themselves the **Thuns**. Mick asks them about the **Oasis of the White Palms** (don’t know where Mick learned of this place). The Thuns tell us that an evil cult called the **Symbians** lives there. They tell us that we should talk to their leader, then they continue on to catch up to the caravan.

Mick doesn’t want to go see these Symbian blokes – he thinks they’ll capture Billy Ray and make him create water for them. We argue, and finally decide to go to the Thun camp first. While we are on the way, we see flying horsemen attack the camp. Afterward, they fly over to us. We are understandably fussed about them, but they maintain that the Thuns are evil, and that they (the winged horsemen) are looking for a missing caravan. They turn out to be Symbian lancers. At this point, we don’t know what the fuck is going on, so we make polite noises and eventually they go away.

We make camp, then continue on to the Thun camp. As we are walking, we see a bloke in rags crest the hill ahead of us. He has on a dead cool leopard-skin coat (so that's where the leopard went!). He says his name is **Amon-Ra**, and he needs our help. He says that he wanted so badly to keep his tomb intact that he abused his people and plundered other countries in order to create a theft-proof tomb. He was helped by **Cordan**, a Greek mage. Amon-Ra's people rose up against him, and he cursed them with the Star Gem. **Osiris** (a bad-ass Egyptian god) got mad and wouldn't let Amon-Ra leave the mortal plane when he died. This walking dead evil ruler wants us to break in to his tomb to lift the curse.

We have a HUGE argument. This one is a ripper even for us. I mean, the bloke got what he deserved. Still, we could do with one less evil dead git walking the earth. The conversation shifts to Erore's breasts, which is a much better use of our time, if you ask me. We decide to go check things out.

Amon-Ra's tomb is located in the Thun encampment. They are having a camel roast and a big party when we get there. I never pass up a good party, so I join in. Billy Ray and Mick want to speak to the **Holy Iaseda**, the wise geezer of the village, as those first Thuns suggested. A chap named **Miguel** shows them the way. The guards around this leader are very surly. Billy Ray and Mick talk to the current leader, who says that the past leader went into a room and disappeared. He shows them the book that the leader was reading before he vanished. It is the memoir of Amon-Ra. Erore reads it, then they all look around, but don't see anything else of interest. Billy Ray makes okra for the Thuns before we leave.

We go to the east temple, which is the holy part where the old leader disappeared. We sit on a flaming bowl and it transports us to an octagonal room with four doors, one on each compass point. There is a skeleton in the middle pointing to one of the doors with its sword. There are tracks in the dust of all sorts of feet, hooves, and insect feet. A huge bloke with the head of a bull attacks us. (Mick tells me later that this thing is called a minotaur.) Billy Ray does a Hold Person spell and we talk to it, but it doesn't have much to say. Erore kills it. (During the fight, Sanjay finds a magic ring.)

Apparently minotaurs like to live in mazes, so we get some string out of our packs and use it to keep ourselves straight. Erore takes one end and goes through one of the four doors, watching her compass as she goes. There is mist behind the door, and while she is in the mist, the compass spins. It straightens when she reaches a room. We all go through the door and meet up with her, then follow a trail of gold. It's confusing, but Mick maps it as we go. We find a scroll and near 1,000 gp. Then two more minotaurs attack. We kill them. Erore collects 3,000 ep. We climb up into another large room that has a statue of Amon-Ra. It has a huge fake jewel in it (cheap bastard). Billy Ray stands on some rugs and says, "Up, up!" but nothing happens. I think he may have been at my stash.

There are a lot of murals on the wall, which Vrba calls "hieroglyphs." They are the Egyptian way of writing. Some swotty bloke in our group reads about **Munific**, who was a priest (now a lich) who speaks for Amon-Ra. (Perhaps that's who we were really speaking to in the desert.) He read at the library of Terbikar, the town around the pyramid

(which was mentioned on one of the obelisks we passed).

Elsewhere in the room we find a waterfall. When we pass through it, we find another huge room with two altars covered in runes. It also has a dome, and palm trees with some kind of fruit called a pineapple. Mick climbs up to get one, and when he accidentally knocks one down, the bloody thing explodes, putting a serious dent in my nice armor. Mick picks another more carefully and brings it down with him. We talk to a gnome named **Prit** who is a miner and just happens to be in the tomb as well. Then Erore and Sanjay manage to reverse the gravity in the room (what the fuck?!?) and we all fall into the dome along with the pineapples. Bugger. Fortunately, they don't have far to fall, so we don't get entirely killed. While we lie there moaning, the dome starts to fill with water from the waterfall, which doesn't have any drainage on the ceiling. We get out of the room, but we're in a bad way.

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### **Enter Elspeth, and Let the River Flow**

*Marty: "They have powers beyond your comprehension."*

*Mike: "Not after they're dead."*

*"You see me drooling with respect."*

*– Erore*

*"Let's pineapple the heart, dudes."*

*– Erore*

We sleep it off in a hallway, after I talk to Prit, the nutter. He dug a huge cavern with a spoon inside the pyramid. Hal gives him a new spoon. Prit offers us treasure.

After we sleep, Sanjay figures out the ring and the scroll (ring: magnus protector – scroll: flying and fireball). Then we go into Prit's cavern. There is a huge clay statue in front of a small cave with glittery stuff (a bell jar). The statue stops me when I try to go past it. We huddle to figure out what to do. Mick throws stones at the statue: no response. But when he hits the bell jar, the statue **WHACKS** him, shattering his ribcage. It gives me a bad turn until I can see that Mick is still alive. We all fight the statue. Hal notices that there is a beating heart in the bell jar, but he can't open it. The golem (I get this name later) stomps our tonkers. We back off. Prit comes back, and we discover that he can move past the golem. We regroup. The golem isn't moving any longer. Sanjay goes between its legs and retrieves the bell jar. We leave. We argue. Then the group agrees to keep the jar until we can discover if it's evil. Hal talks to Prit about Munific.

As we sleep, we hear sounds of battle. Erore, Hal and I investigate. We see four sacks, and send word to Sanjay to loot them (they are full of gold, which Sanjay pinches). We open a door and see a large, red-haired female figure with a bright aura (which apparently other people besides me can see) fighting off eight dark-robed figures. We come to her

aid. We whack the shit out of the ghouls in the dark robes, but I get paralyzed (as opposed to paralytic).

The group meets up with us, and we ask the woman for an explanation. She says her name is **Elsbeth**. She worships Thor (good bloke, that) and is on a quest to destroy the evil coming to the desert. She's nearly as big as me, and handy in a fight. Since our sleep was interrupted, we finish our kip while she and Erosee stand guard. Erosee is smitten with her.

When we wake up, Elsbeth tells us that the heart is evil. Billy Ray says that she is good, so she's probably not lying about that. (*I don't know why Billy Ray didn't detect evil on the heart himself – ed.*) I tell her about the shrooms. She is amazed at the organization (or lack thereof) of our little group. We decide not to go through the doom door. Yet. (Speaking of shrooms, Keef must have been on something when he wrote this, because it doesn't make much sense – ed.)

We go instead to a room with water pouring from ceiling to floor. The abyss woman comes out, shocks Hal, likes Mick, and reverses the water, pulling him up. We all jump in and follow. We go up. We go through some doors, and end up in a very trippy room. Inside is a big boat with a setting for a huge gem. Opposite the boat is a mural on the wall of a flying boat, which is identical to the one in the room, only the one in the painting has a gem in place. Someone figures out that you can actually go into the picture, but the painted boat is floating over a drop of 10,000 feet or thereabouts, and is about twenty feet away from the opening into the room. The gem is the **Star of Mopilar** (according to some smart bugger). The next room along is the burial room of Amon-Ra; there is a statue and a sarcophagus with a gold staff. About bloody time – I'm tired of this distraction from the Amp.

Sanjay hocks a loogie out the painting.

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## Midnight at the Oasis

We check out the burial room, the inner sanctum. Mick finds hundreds of platinum pieces in the jars on the boat. We take them for our troubles. We rest. When we awake, we have breakfast burritos, courtesy of Billy Ray (he learned about them in Tijuana).

Erosee grapples the boat in the painting and pulls it close enough for us to enter. We tie a rope around Sanjay and send him to investigate. He takes the gem. Hal stares at it and notices that things look *really* clear through it. Billy Ray decides to be the bearer of the gem. Mick finds a door behind the statue, but it only leads to a dead end. Hal takes the staff off the sarcophagus, and a mummy comes out, but Sanjay kills it (or renders it more dead – never quite sure with these things). We decide to throw the evil heart (remember the evil heart?) out of the window.

We try to get out of the tomb, and there is more arguing, but eventually we get transported to the main temple. The Holy Iaseda is there. He rejoices that we saw Amon-Ra, and water pours into the desert from the destroyed heart, starting the Nile anew. All right, that was worth this silly side trip.

Throughout this adventure, Eroze and Billy Ray have been going at each other like rabid weasles, and we've all just about had enough, so I pass round the magic baggie and we all get stoned.

We head toward the fascist oasis and the sunken city of Pizar, where we will hopefully find the Amp. A sandstorm chases us into the entrance of the city. We kill some naf spiders. We sleep and dream of things that we would like. When we awake, we find a room full of doors, one of them gold. Vrba reads the magic runes on the gold door. They say, "Do not disturb the Vanquished. He is the treasure that must be kept." We try out the other doors before entering that door. The first one is some sort of library, and the blokes in our group who like to read enjoy themselves. Through another door, there are statues, but we read how to get past them, so we do.

We see a huge lamp on an altar, like Aladdin's lamp from the story. It is sealed with two interlacing triangles. We have heard that this is the symbol of **The Doors**, a group of bards lead by a bloke named **Jim Morrison**. We discuss if we should open it, and eventually Sanjay just does it. A bloke comes out, wearing red and looking royal. He is a Pasha, advisor to the Sultan (as he says, "Pasha of the Efreet, Vizir to the Fire Sultan"). He, it really, is not evil. Sanjay asks it to get him out of this mess. It grants his wish by leaving. Git. Elspeth told us it wasn't evil, but she has a bad feeling about what may happen because of this encounter.

We continue on. We meet an outrider for the **Capitalist Army of the Light**, headed by **Bachman** and **Turner**. We go down the trade route with them. We come upon a 40-man army, slain and lying in the dust with horses, camels, and pegasi. Only one bloke is left alive. He says that his lot is from the **White Palms Oasis**. They found out that the **Oasis of Akir** had been burned, so they went to investigate, but in pursuing the culprits, a fire thing came for revenge and unleashed undead upon them. Then the chap gives Billy Ray a medallion and says to take it to and give it to his leader, **King Kassim**. (I'm getting right tired of everyone in the bloody desert asking us to run errands for them.) The bloke gasps out, "The place was set, and no man knew the time," then croaks.

We see the tracks of the undead leading away from the massacre, and the tracks of a small caravan heading the same way we were going. We part ways with the Capitalist Army and press on, passing the burnt Oasis of Akir. Some blokes on pegasi (got to get one of those) land near us, and say they will come with us to the oasis. En route, they tell us rumors of a glittering palace in the north. And a bit of a poem. And look out for frogs.

When we arrive at the White Palms Oasis, we are shown to the sheik. Billy Ray gives him the medallion. King Kassim waves off his retainers (all except for a sulky lad, who isn't introduced) and asks for our help. **Shadala**, the First Bride (some sort of royal post),

who has a sacred symbol on her palm, was betrothed to his firstborn son **Hassan**. The king says “The place was set, and no man knew the time.” (Hm, just like the dead soldier.) When the king sent the army away, she was kidnapped, and the army still hasn’t come back. We tell him that some of them won’t be back, but we learn that the army is much larger than just the dead blokes we saw. The king thinks that Shadala might still be in this oasis somewhere, hidden by trickery or magic.

Billy Ray goes to see the local cleric. The man greets him with “The place was set, and no man knew the time.” The priest explains that this comes from the prophesy of **Anu** (a god?). This priest is the one that puts the symbol on the palm of the bride of the man who will be sheik, so he marked Shadala. He talks to Billy Ray about fighting the Thuns.

The rest of us go to the merchants’ camp. There is an inn, a guild (the **Sand Travelers’ Guild**), a temple, a bazaar, and a pub called **Happy Hogan’s Desert Igloo**.

We check in to the inn and take a bath. There is a bad minstrel named Rolando playing there, but I expect you can’t get good talent in the sodding desert. We decide to head over to Happy Hogan’s, which looks much more interesting. Hogan turns out to be a halfling, and a blond at that. Mick and I get a gig there. Hogan is apparently *very* rich. He talks to us about the kidnapping. It’s his opinion that the Sand Travelers did it, possibly because their guild is diminishing in power. Thurnis Metmaster is the current head of the guild. (The last head, Tumnis Granicus, left a month ago under mysterious circumstances.) Thurnis is well liked, and not much influenced by the sheik. Thurnis hasn’t been seen lately, but he did send a note to Hogan for booze. Hogan also tells us that Hassan knows how to drive a sand sled.

Hal goes to the guildhouse and tries to meet Thurnis, but they throw him out. Billy Ray visits the temple, which is empty and strewn with rubble. Human runes spell out that Martek is involved with whatever will happen at “the place” and “the time.” Udo talks to Rolando, the bad minstrel. He says there are ruins beneath this town, and others further off in **Phoenix**. The ruins were temples of Martek, and after they fell, people erected temples of Set over them, but Martek is still using them. Morrison is the one who passed on this information (Martek being a big roadie). **Koros**, the second son of the sheik (the younger twin), isn’t happy about the marriage, and has been sulking and skulking about a lot. It was him we saw with the sheik when we first arrived. He is mostly seen at night (which doesn’t mean much, because I prefer mostly to be seen at night).

Back at Hogan’s, Mick and I play our gig. It’s a great success, but of course, the buggers have been stuck here with no one to listen to for months but Rolando. We make 150 gp.

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### **Dirty Deeds, Done Dirt Cheap**

*“We’re not going to patronize your oasis any more!”*  
– Billy Ray

The next day, Hogan's daughter **Rose** shows us around. We meet Hassan, the firstborn. He seems OK. We also see Koros again, and the water bearer, **Zorath**, a scraggly bloke in black. He's been hanging out at the STG since the former head disappeared. (*Not clear whether Keith meant Koros or Zorath here. – ed.*)

Our lot get together to talk. Rose told us that one of the twins can get into the STG by a secret entrance. We set up a plan for our pursuit of the bride.

The general consensus among folk in the White Palms is that the burny-bloke that trashed Akir is more worrisome than the bride going missing. They think he came from Bidar al-Massak, an evil place.

I decide to talk to Koros, and it turns out he's rather my style, despite the chip on his shoulder. Since I hit it off with him, we go for a drink and shoot the breeze. He thinks the STG are kidnapping slaves and that they kidnapped Shadala.

Mick and Erosee take a decco at the STG with the Star Gem. They see invisible people with a sledge leave through a secret door. They come back and report this to the rest of us, and we decide that Erosee and I should set up a distraction so that Mick and Sanjay can sneak in the secret door. I stagger up to the front door and pound on it, screaming about using the bathroom. Erosee attacks me for sleeping with the slave girl. Guards pour out, and mayhem ensues.

Sanjay and Mick sneak in as planned, find a girl, and release her. They also find a ledger of the slave trade and the entrance to the basement where the slaves are kept. Pretty substantial evidence. Sanjay takes a peek at the basement and sees a stumpy bugbear and two drow. *Two drow!?! What the fuck are they doing in the desert?* Mick finds out that the STG sent Zorath to kidnap Shadala, but she was already gone. They had a contract with the Thuns, but they think the Thuns went back on the deal and got someone else to take her.

Sanjay meets Tulinis, the former head of the STG who is also imprisoned in the basement. He says he thinks Shadala is with the efreet, because she has power over him (maybe she got him to take her away). He also says that the Thuns plan to assassinate the sheik. Mick sneaks down to the basement after the STG guards go to sleep. They kill the bugbear and take a stab (literally) at the drow, but get their asses handed to them, so they make good their escape.

In the mean time, I get worried about Koros and go looking for him along with Erosee. He's a bit like Colleen was, a trouble magnet. We go along to the obelisk that Koros named as a meeting place (*don't know who was supposed to meet there. – ed.*), and we see three blokes in robes and gold masks move it aside and descend below ground. We follow them to a temple of Set. There are masses of zombies inside. For once they don't attack us. We keep going and come upon a gathering of 13 people chanting (**Korga** is their leader). We decide this is a bit much for the two of us, but we can't leave because



we can't raise the obelisk, which is now covering the entrance. We wait in the zombie room.

Meanwhile, Mick, Sanjay, and Tulnis put on Fine Clothes™ and run through the guard room after Sanjay lets off Stinking Cloud. At the same time, Billy Ray sees an invisible bloke and gives him a pounding, then does Hold Person, and is sitting scratching in the dirt when Mick, Sanjay and Co. come running out of the STG. They run away from there, passing by Billy Ray without notice, and return to the inn to consult.

Mick takes Elspeth and Udo to talk to Koros about my whereabouts (cheers for the concern, mate). The guards at the sheik's compound stall them, but Koros shows up and they manage to get to him. They tell him everything they have discovered tonight. He thanks them for the information and goes to sleep. They meet up with Billy Ray and everybody catches up on events.

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### **Requiescat en Pace, Keef**

*"You hear these charred-looking screams."*  
—Li

With nothing better to do, Erore and I begin to investigate the temple again. From the entrance, a hall passes the zombie room, then goes to a cave-like room full of wading pools. A door to the left leads into the main temple, which contains two rows of pillars decorated with chaotic designs. At one end is a pit in front of a statue. Across the room is a door into a smaller room with three basins of liquid.

While we are looking around, we capture two Set worshippers. We start to ask them questions, but they do a darkness spell, so we kill them. Erore and I put on their robes and go to investigate the room with the basins. I dip a finger in the crimson liquid to taste it (you never know), and the sodding stuff takes some of my soul. I am not happy about this.

We find another room with a gold falcon, and past that is a room containing three skeletons. They attack and I kill them. I feel much better now. One of the skellys has gold armbands and a dead cool gold necklace, which I nick and put on. It instantly constricts, cutting off my breathing. I can't get so much as a fingernail under it to pry it off. Bugger. As the roaring blackness swallows me, I think, "well here's a fucking unconventional weapon . . ."

According to Erore, the next thing I do is die.

(This next bit I have to take on faith, 'cause I was dead and didn't see it.) Meanwhile, Mick is going mental looking for me. He grabs Billy Ray and then gets Hal to track me. Hal makes quick work of it and soon they are at the obelisk, whereupon Elspeth rises out

of the sand like a spectre, scaring the piss out of them. She came out here earlier in the evening and she's been watching the parade of people going in and out. She joins with the others to pry the obelisks away from the entrance and they manage to squeak inside. In the process, they set off the sigil of protection on the door. Hal goes blind, they all get toasted, and the zombies empty out of their room to attack the interlopers. But the undead run like whipped curs from Billy Ray and his holy symbol.

Mick, Hal, Elspeth, and Billy Ray then continue their search for me. They go through some rooms that Eroze and I didn't get to, using Locate Object on my baggie (brilliant, that). They find me (seemingly asleep) and Eroze (seemingly asleep) and **Boris Broadblade**, a bloke they've never seen before, awake and holding my sword. They start yelling, and Eroze wakes up. She calms everybody down, and then tells them that she found Boris in a torture chamber and asked him to help. She also found another Star Gem.

Not wanting to hang around, Elspeth picks me up and we all leave. Billy Ray asks how Eroze and I ended up down there. Eroze explains. Boris is the captain of the STG guard. He was captured by the Thuns. They asked him where the bride is, but he didn't do it, so he couldn't tell them. The efreet told them to get the bride, then he left.

We get to the cleric, and he says he can raise me, but it'll cost 21,000 gp. (Argh!!) Fortunately, my mates don't hesitate (double cheers to all of you). The first I know of it, I'm sitting across from Vidar, and he sort of smiles and shakes his head, then pow! I'm back on the mortal coil.

Once the deed is done, I sleep for a bit while the others go to talk to the sheik. Mick tells him everything. He gives us an amulet and special undead-killing scimitars so that we can go clean house. We rest and everyone gets healed in preparation to bring on the ultra-violence. Once we are all fighting fit, we head back to the place of evil where the efreet is raising an army of undead. Don't know what his gripe is, but I definitely feel like killing something, and he fits the bill. We go down a shaft that has traps . . .

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### Message in a Bottle

Or

**"Seker? You Seker, she's your wife!"**

*"I am not a chew toy for the army of the undead."*

*– Billy Ray*

. . . and get into a fight with some wights. Billy Ray turns them with his riteousness. Sanjay finds two scrolls (Protection from Undead, Dimension Door/ Remove Curse, Minor Invulnerability), two potions, and a dagger called Fang. A bloke appears later and says "Seker asks," then disappears. We look around the room we are in and see runes and an altar. Our smart lads read the runes, which say that Seker shall grant a boon in

exchange for a sacrifice. Billy Ray, in a mighty gesture of faith, gives up his mace, Mighty Smiter. He lays it upon the altar, where it disappears, to be replaced by a metal glove that goes up and around his neck. As Billy Ray dons the glove, a voice in his head says, "I will help you fight evil, and in time of need you may call on Seker." Far out.

We continue to investigate. We find a bottomless circular pit with a skeleton endlessly plummeting and rising again. We throw in a piece of rope, and it circles back around to the top. Fucking bad place to fall in. We climb up to another level and see 1,000 points of light. A reflective room is filled with the reflected beams of four lights. The lights are bad, so our magic blokes Magic Missile them. Next we go into a dark room. Eroze is wearing the sheik's amulet, and it glows with intense blue light. Then a beam of light shoots from it and hits the efreet pasha, who was in the room unbeknownst to us. He screams in pain from the booby beam, and we take that as a good sign to attack. As we lay into him, he disappears in a gout of fire, leaving behind him a bottle with a tiny figure of the First Bride inside. Well, that was a job well done.

We sleep, while Mick investigates another room with a floor of illusions. Nothing to that, really; I've got things in the baggie that'll create that effect. We wake up and find another Star Gem, a red one this time. We open up the bottle and let the girl out. We give her the amulet and on her hand it's matched with her symbol.

*(Keith's notes were unclear about whether the following text was written on the amulet, or spoken by Shadala, or discovered in some other fashion. – ed.)*

City of Phoenix over the House of Set  
Is where there is salvation.  
There speak Atmo Pritmo.

(Oh, the place was *Set*. All of the sudden, the light dawns.) OK, now we know the place, but still no man knows the . . . oh, you know. We decide that we must go to Phoenix. Shadala comes with us. When we get there, she says "Atmo Pritmo" and a storm rolls up, lightning strikes and a giant blue man appears. He is the vizir of the Great Djinn who must fight the efreet (aha, so that's why the bugger wanted her kept in a bottle), but all he does is leave us a blue bottle. This bottle is home to **Joe**, the minor genie who beats stuff up. Sure to come in useful at some point

We go back to the oasis and return the First Bride. It turns out that Koros, the twin I liked, was caught communing with Set and is in big trouble with daddy (what did I tell you, just like Colleen – can't stay away from evil). In gratitude, the sheik lets us train for free, and we learn cool desert combat tricks.

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## **Martek, Finally**

*"Sanjay has now done the honorable thing and done reconnaissance by fire."*

– Jose

*“Well, my life feels complete. I’ve had an adventure inside a metaphysical penis.”*

– Katherine

Hassan marries Shadala, and there is much rejoicing. Mick and I play at the reception, and there is even more rejoicing.

Billy Ray talks to some pegasi.

The army finally returns, escorting lots of refugees from the efreet vs. djinn fight. Apparently we don’t get to see any of that.

I buy the ex-slave girl dinner (the one rescued from the STG), and get laid. A lot. And there is much rejoicing.

We gather more rumors about Martek (remember him?). According to what we hear, his knowledge of magic and architecture were second to none. Martek captured the efreet with a sphere of power that was three leagues wide. There are obelisks on the way that speak of Martek. He has a temple shaped like a penis. And he’s loaded. Sounds like a rock star to me.

We head out to Martek’s tomb. And about bloody time, too. We fight with sandmen and vanquish them. Sanjay nukes a starfish. Mick and I get its teeth. (*As far as I know, starfish have no teeth. I don’t know what Keith is talking about. – ed.*) We get to where the earth meets the sky (and here I thought that was just an expression). It looks very cool; the ground looks like the sky. Beneath our feet is a slippery, mirror-like substance. If I had more leisure, I’d take a hit and groove for a while. But I am starting to feel the pull of the Amp, and after all of the false starts, dead ends, and goose chases we’ve been on, I don’t want any more delay.

An island appears where the horizon should be, like a coastline. The island is about 10 miles away over very hot footing. We fart around, waiting until day to see how hot it gets. *Very effing hot.* We find an ice-skate boat (convenient, that) and Vrba sails it for us (didn’t know he was nautical, or icicle, in this case). Storm clouds gather and lightning rends the sky. A naked Indian on the shore points to a ruined city. We dock and find the city and an obelisk. The obelisk is very chatty for a chunk of stone; it asks us for a Star Gem. Billy Ray puts one into the convenient Star-Gem niche, and Jim Morrison appears. Fuckin’ a. I get a very cool vibe from him, but I feel that we’re spiritually very different. He’s much less attached to this plane than I am. Anyway, he tells us to go to the towers. Then we jam. He’s definitely tuned in to the cosmic source of music, and as we play, I feel this strange reverberation, and the Amp calls me.

Jim buggers off home and Billy Ray gets the Star Gem back. It now indicates where we should go, and we follow it to a monument of three spires of crystal covered with runes. We step into a light and it transports us to Martek’s tomb. As soon as we get there,

twenty people come up to us, cheering. They are Martek groupies, and they are happy to welcome new people to Martek – what they call “The Place.” A drow approaches, and all of us go on the alert, except for the elves, who start to go mental. The drow says he’s good (we’ll see about that). He’s been here four years. His name is **Pawnis**. The leader of this group is called Chafakis (he’s a sea folk). Sardok (a Greek) is Pawnis’ other friend. They have dinner with us. They tell us some interesting things; apparently, one of the Martek obelisks has a prophesy about us. The prophesy tells how to use the stones, which is handy. While we’re eating, some kids steal some of Billy Ray’s stuff.

When we’re done, we take a try at using the Star Gems. We put in the stones as directed, but we have some name problems. Billy Ray, through tremendous perseverance, opens the doors (1,001 of them) made of glassteel. We reach another set of doors, gold ones, with further instructions. (No wonder the leader of The Doors guards this place.)

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### **Where’s the Amp, Already!?!**

*“Poof him and take his money.”*  
– *Alain*

The doors are inscribed: “My monument to Phoenix, Good friend and true . . .” Oh, the hell with it. No one wants to hear the poems made up by these dead geezers.

When we open the door, we see light and fire reflecting into infinity. Nice. There is a big pit of fire with two crossing bridges and a glassteel walkway surrounding it. In the middle is a dias and above that is a phoenix. It swoops at us but doesn’t hit. We step on a circle in the middle and it sinks slowly into another room, a *huge* room, like a crystal cathedral. Martek’s decorating is far out, but I wouldn’t want to live here.

We go back up and drug the horses (did I mention we brought the horses in here with us?), then take them down with us (now that I write this down, it sounds daft), unfortunately losing Mick’s prized horse in the process. Sanjay explores the dias. According to the prophesy on the obelisk, we need to find three minarets, so we explore the bases of the towers. Sanjay steps on a disk and disappears. We all follow, with the horses (like I said, daft).

The first minaret is in a room frozen in time. A scary bloke appears and we fight and kill him. Then we see some more frozen people; a sheik with an arrow inches from his chest, and a woman. Although her body is frozen, her spirit appears and talks to Mick, but it turns out she’s a banshee, so we kill her.

The next room has more frozen people. We come across a red bloke with flaming red hair. Joe the genie fights him and they disappear, leaving a wand behind, which Vrba nicks. The next room has even more frozen people. We find a bunch of platinum pieces and gems on a dead adventurer, and take them off him. He doesn’t need them now. A

ghost speaks to us. His name is **Aldosok** and he was the captain of the guard here back in the day. Not intending to piss about with undead, Billy Ray turns him. Some crinkly eyeless blokes show up and we dispatch them.

We go upstairs and find an hourglass, which is probably not used for timing eggs. Someone turns it upside down and we go backward in time until we get back to the disk. This time Hal stays with the horses. Then we do all of that stuff over again, leaving out the boring bits. (With all of this going on, I haven't felt the need to imbibe from the baggie. What would be the point? This whole place is high.)

We find a map on another dead adventurer (the place is littered with them) and we completely ignore it. He's dead, isn't he? The map couldn't have been that good. In a throne room we meet a bloke who is a guardian of time (there seems to be a lot of it round here, or maybe not enough of it). He's the one who froze everything. He helps us; we go back in time, this time with the first minaret. When we get back, Hal says the three blokes we had dinner with flew down and went to another tower. They are up to no good, and it seems they just helped us so that we would open the 1,001 doors for them. Twats.

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## THE AMP!!!

*"Billy Ray, the human jackhammer."*

*"They do more damage, if you want to be lame in a D&D sort of way."*  
– Mike

Time to check out the third tower, the one the bad blokes didn't go into. Sanjay looks in a crystal ball and sees the next minaret on an island with red clouds. We show up in a white cavern with a topiary (at least that's what Mick called it). There are two statues that are labeled "Time" and "Space." Billy Ray draws mustaches on them (I really don't know about that lad sometimes). There is an obelisk with another stupid Martek poem. We follow the instructions and go on an acid trip.

*(I take no responsibility for the content of the next paragraph. – ed.)*

We are outside under the red clouds. They make a tunnel, then the ground drops away and we go in a huge wind on a 100-foot-wide spiraling path. Everything shrinks, so the path becomes 10 feet wide. There's a hole in front of us, then some troglodytes show up. We put the boot in. Then the hole is 2,000 feet, then it is 10 feet in front of us. The troglodyte we saved is called Eric. Then a thing eats him. Time is warping, space is not. The things like metal, we feed them. We see the naked Indian again, he points us onward. We fight another monstrosity and kill it. We sleep. We go to this island on a flying rock. We get the next minaret. We go back.

(At least I think we're back to reality. Things are moving very fast for me, and I keep hearing this sustained hum. My mind is restless. I'm almost there . . .)

The three buggers who want to double cross us managed to find a minaret in the other tower. That's the last one. They put the minaret that they have into position. We wait until they leave to go looking for us and put in the two that we have, completing the instructions from the prophesy. Suddenly we shrink, and fly into the tiny model of the tomb. We drink healing water from a beautiful reflecting pool. Then we find Martek's resting place. A beam of light reflects off his crown, lighting three statues with holes for the Star Gems. Billy Ray inserts them, and the door to Martek's burial chamber swings open . . .

. . . and I . . .

. . . see . . .

The Amp.

Praise be to Vidar. Praise be to all gods anywhere who have given me a good thought.  
Praise be to Fender, and Martek, and all those old geezers who wrote the bad lyrics.  
Praise be to Billy Ray, Sanjay, Erosee, Mick, Hal, Elspeth, and Vrba.  
Praise be to anyone who has ever helped us.  
Praise be to all the women who have given their all to me.  
Praise be to Rock and Roll.

At first it is all I can see, and I hear it, whispering the promise of a thousand gigs, screaming hoards, and burning fame. I approach it, and I sense Mick next to me, spellbound, in the moment.

While we are so occupied, our lot checks out the room. They find a bloke who died of a heart attack years ago at the sight of all Martek's loot. There is a ton of shit in this room. Something for everyone.

Our presence wakes up the man himself. Martek commands us to help with the fight in the desert. We go with him, and he destroys the efreet. When we return, he tells us that we may each take three things from the tomb. At first, all I can think of is the Amp, but the others ask me to carry some stuff. The rest of the gang take swords, gems, platinum, magic books, and scrolls. Whatever.

I have the Amp.

*(Editor's note: This is the end of Keith's official journal. I am given to understand that he said "Mick, you're a swotty bloke, you start a journal." Apparently he was too absorbed by the Amp to think about anything else. He never started his journal again, but did give some notes to Mick later, which are included in Mick's writings.)*