

Morphayel vs
Tholeqnt'nn the Ancient (Bert)

Syril looked up from his third cup of grogan tea, his eyes searching the dark rafters. He put the cup down carefully on their ancient hardwood table and closed his eyes. He pinched the bridge of his nose hard to help slow his breathing and open his mind. A shiver ran from his groin to the base of his skull when he found it. Presences and emotions were spilling over their emotional edges. There was still enough time be with Mayria and the children, to share in the memories and emotions that made up their lives together. There were great times coming, great and terrible. Syril smiled.

Massive scales shrugged slowly over the pebbles and shards ground from the yards thick granite of the lair floor. Even after all this time the smallest flex caused the walls to vibrate and sent deep frequency rumblings echoing throughout the cavern network. He stretched his neck to scratch his chin on a precipice sharp enough to split a man in full armor. Shifting his huge bulk once again (a move that actually cracked a new fissure near the far wall), he eyed the light edging in through meters of rock, dirt and life. With giant eyes still closed he sniffed deeply and licked the air. The light tasted different. It would soon be time. 'Pfah, not soon enough', the dragon thought. He was old and tired ... and he was anxious to be done with it.

Morphayel had no idea how long he had been here. Neither here staring at the sky nor traveling the now familiar geography of this once strange world. Without his human companions he had fallen back into the eternal now of elven life. But right now, a piercing cry captured his thoughts as effectively as crushing talons. Pfeiffer, it seemed, was hungry. Staring into those cold, black eyes, he started chanting a song of changing. No louder than a whisper the ancient words rang in the air like thunder. Form and voice flowed and folded, shrank and stretched. The final note ended in a shrill cry, high and sharp and as wild as the large, golden/red hawk leaping from the canyon wall to soar on the growing thermals. Pfeiffer rose gracefully to join him on the hunt.

Later on a roomy ledge he called home, Morphayel tended to the few domestic rituals he followed here. A simple mend spell repaired the tears and frays in his clothing and equipment. He laid out the centuries old golden tunic, the black leather boots still smooth and supple after centuries of use, and his two treasured swords, Lady Red and Lady Ice. Elegant, agile, flawless, and so very, very sharp. No woman of flesh could match the excitement he felt dancing with these two. Running his fingers along their cool metal, tracing the fine lines of the inlaid runes Morphayel ached for the brutally fluid movements that could only be found when facing opponents. Clearing his head with a sudden shake, Morphayel started replacing his few possessions into a shoulder pack, one by one. He juggled the unbreakable crystal globes, agitating the small skeletal frogs caged within. They snapped and clawed, futilely trying to silence the life they sensed but could not reach. He scooped up two little scrubbing bubbles from an armor crease they were frantically working on. He cradled them in cupped hands for a moment, enjoying the cat tongue feel of their bristles, before placing them gingerly back in their case. He pulled out the toy dragon Wardlaw had given him. Pushing and tickling smoke and flame from the little automaton gave his hands something to do while his mind wandered.

The changes to the land were no longer subtle. Rivers had not only dried up, but had re-filled in on different courses. The shape of shorelines, both lakeside and oceanic, had altered. Distant peaks were missing, others newly risen and some were just different. Forests and lakes had shrunk. Smaller game animals were still ample, but larger ones were strangely absent. The savage cat-like creatures and great flocks of small, flying reptiles were once prevalent throughout the hill country but he couldn't remember the last time they had run across any of them. Scanning the muddy, pale blue water of a lowland lake, he decided it didn't match the picture in his mind. Nothing did. The whole world seemed colder and less alive. It was no longer a place to be. It was time to leave.

He snatched the tiny dragon as it ambled past, calming its wings and turning it over to trace the small, jeweled details. He set the toy down on a nearby rock as he finished stowing his belongings for travel, gazing fondly at the tiny fanged grin. "So little dragon, have you learned any new tricks? Speak? Dance? Whistle? Grow?" Laughing quietly, he turned to gather his swords, buckling them on under a suddenly darkening sky.

Syril swore softly as hot coffee flowed over his hand. Dropping the mug and waving his reddening hand to cool it, he glanced nervously around. Something was wrong. Something had happened. Breakfast forgotten, he moved out from under the flimsy covering of his work porch, all he really needed as a bachelor tradesman. It was darker than it should be. There was a slight trace of sulfur in the air. His heart tightened in his chest. This was a fragile time, a time of great changes and even greater dangers. There was no room for surprises. He had thought the defeat of the ice creature had been the end of unknowns. The outsiders had left and the womb had returned to normal. Now, something new had gone wrong. And Syril had no idea what to do.

The rock surrounding him hummed quietly. The resonant voices of the granite, deep and powerful, were counter-pointed by the brief, clear notes of crystals and sharp tones from the rarer metals. The rocks always sang, adding a constant, ever changing tapestry to the background. These notes defined his path, that which lesser beings called life. Lesser life forms were greedy and only gave up their notes on the moment of their death. He absorbed those notes and weaved them together with the harmony of the rocks to form the song that was him. The timing and tempo were as vital as the notes themselves. The rhythm had shifted some time ago, hinting at the final chorus to come. The complexity of each measure had increased predictably and dramatically as more registers came in with greater frequency. He frowned. The movement caused musculature changes that snapped several crystalline stalagmites from their eons old grip. This section was ... unexpected. It was too complex, too soon. Something had shifted the scale and only something foreign of vast age and power could do that. The sanctity of his refuge had once again been breached, at a time when such annoyances could ill be afforded. He raised a snout the size of a foothill, looking for egress. Moving would be dangerous, but if he could not find a suitable agent, he would have to go out. Timing his movements to the rhythms of the rock songs softened the damage, but chunks of marble and granite larger than steamships, bounced and shattered harmlessly against his hide. He sifted through beat, scale and counterpart, looking for the most expedient method of dealing with this annoyance. Looking for ah.

A choking gasp pulled sulfurous air into Morphayel's lungs, while his heart slammed against the cage formed by his ribs. Panting, gasping and retching, he struggled to his knees, not quite remembering the terrible roar that had slammed him into the rock. He heard nothing, but felt a terrible roaring vibrate through him. He could see nothing through the swirling curtain of poisonous fumes. Smoke, fire and terrible, relentless heat engulfed him.

Gripping his head to keep it from splitting, he faintly felt Pfeffer through the link they shared. She was in a frenzy, but did not seem to be harmed. Gritting teeth that cracked and shifted from the effort, he projected calm to the enraged raptor. He could see through her eyes, but only if she made room for him. In the unnatural silence, riding the bucking earth on elbows and knees, he struggled to see through the eyes of his companion. Straining with the effort not to strain, Morphayel allowed the vision to clear on its own.

There was flame everywhere. The air was burning. The rocks were burning. Billowing clouds of black ash and yellow smoke filled the blue sky, bringing night to this world for the first time. At the heart of the raging dance, was a creature born in nightmares. It was the source of every bogeyman, every grandmother-eating wolf, and every lost child that never came home. It was taller than the peaks around it, larger than the lakebed in which it stood. The lake was evaporating into clouds of super heated steam swirling around the creature. Its cavernous beak spewed an endless river of red, yellow and white flames. Its snake-like neck swayed back and forth, washing the valley and the surrounding peaks in searing death. It was the mindless end of everything foretold in the darkest elfin legends. It was death that walked.

A small movement caught her attention and Pfeffer turned her hunter's eyes towards something that wasn't smoke or flame. Shaking in the darkness it looked fragile and small. Surrounded by flame, rolling over the smoking ground, holding its head and screaming. It looked up and Morphayel locked eyes with himself, screaming in terror. Losing consciousness seemed almost reasonable at this point.

Syrill woke. He lay on the bare white cot of his spartan cell and pondered the white stone of the ceiling. The wind still whistled weakly through the jagged peaks and cliffs surrounding his isolated retreat. It was the only sound he had heard since walking through the portal. With a single step he had left whatever his life had been in order to prepare for what would come. His was a life of service. He was happiest with purpose given to him, a task to carry out. He was missing some details, of course, but he knew he still was serving the same the presence that had directed his life for as long as he could remember. It was enough. He smiled and closed his eyes.

It would appear that all the roles in this little Passion play had finally been cast, both major and supporting. His protagonist, all noise and shadow, was busying itself ad-libbing lines and slashing scenes. The other foreign specks flitted about his stage far less purposefully. These he could use. With some rewrites and edits they could balance the sulky prima donna, maybe even eclipse it. These entities were both pen and brush for paper woven from the very energy of his world. His own breath would be his ink as he marked out set and populated the stage. He needed to replace lost words, re-direct wandering plot lines and bring things back to the intended conclusion. This was his production and he wasn't going to fold the show due to some opening night jitters. Everything was invested in how this ended, everything he was and would be. A low growl from ancient lungs shook loose debris from cliffs miles away. Ancient eyes glittered in the shadowing gloom. Another of his kind would have noticed the slight flavor of fear.

Waking was painful. He assumed he was awake as no dream should hurt this much. His crusted eyes fused and cracked as they opened. The air was thick with soot, the light muted and yellow. There was no sound at all. He felt himself breathing in great ragged heaves, but felt little relief. He lurched to his feet, swaying in the poisonous air. Through tearing eyes, he scanned the bleak terrain.

Rock - broken, scarred, melted, and smoking - was all there was to see. There were no trees or dirt, only bare and shattered rock. Shuffling forward, his dragging feet disturbed something hard. He reached down but ended up falling instead, eyes squinting in pain when his chin impacted on something hard and smooth. Fumbling through the grit, his fingers curled around a familiar form and Lady Ice came scraping out, filthy but undamaged. Dragging her in one trembling hand, he frantically flailed through the rubble. He tore a knuckle as slammed into Lady Red where she lay covered by debris. He rolled over in ash, hugging the blissfully cool steel of the two swords to his bare chest. His sobs were dry heaves. Apparently there were no tears in hell. Finally his empty gaze found Pfeiffer. The rock she stood on must have been hot, as she kept shuffling from one foot to the other, staring straight at him. As their gaze met she slowly and deliberately turned to a figure so very slowly fading into the distance. It flew with a sweep of giant wings, a movement both graceful and ungainly. The fading light scattered across jeweled scales. That was when he knew. That was his dragon. That was Bert. His TOY had somehow caused all this. That silly little automaton had come to horrible life, laying waste to the country side and it was his fault.

A fist circled his heart and started to squeeze. He had felt the rage and hate that fueled this terrible flame. There would be more killing, more terror, more devastation and it was his fault. Red blood ran from where his hands gripped the bare blades. He looked at Pfeiffer. Moments later she flew off to follow the dragon as Morphayel forced himself into the smoking rubble. He coughed out words that would guide him through the destruction to the rest of his gear. He would need his armor, his other weapons and most of all he would need his spell book. In his mind he pictured his need and let it draw him, as fast as it would. He would rest, and then study. Then he would hunt.

Syriis felt the voice fill his head. He tasted the stern, ancient life force that saturated every part of him. For some reason it reminded him of apples, whatever they were. He no longer saw the world around him, or sensed it in any way. Those parts were needed elsewhere. Syriis was no longer aware of his body. He was part of an ocean of power - ancient, controlled and immense. He was as much a part of the presence as it was of him. He understood what was at stake and what the cost would be, win or lose. The circumstances were unusual but, in the end, this was why he existed. Closing eyes he no longer had, Syriis was content.

This new COTS unit was so very limited. Weak expansion capabilities, pitiful redundancy. The energy conversion system was hopelessly bottlenecked by weak bandwidth but it did have some ports left that he could access. The drivers had to be rewritten though. The unit had crashed hard and would not have rebooted without a BIOS replacement. He tried not to introduce any new features but a small upgrade did allow the unit to process it's secondary input far more efficiently. Subroutines and daemons would wait to insert viruses directly into the new base code, allowing him to patch code in real time without bringing down the system. Primarily these were to rebuild code lost in the crash as quickly as possible. Secondarily they would upgrade some of the units existing subroutines, adding robustness and buffer space. It was a tribute to his skill and passion that this husk had been saved at all. Anticipating further damage, he cannibalized his own devices as stubs to feed data to the new components until the working environment could be locked down. Growling, he committed to sacrificing some mainframe resources to shunt and absorb enough rogue energy to keep the units circuits from frying completely. This was going to put him way over his operating budget and seriously affect his bottom line. Someone was going to pay.

Hours later Morphayel looked up. Standing, stretching, breathing, all for what seemed like the first time. Gathering and focusing the magic always felt like being reborn. Closing his eyes he found Pfeiffer. Her wild presence was small, but constant near the base of his soul. She was well and very far away. He could not see through her eyes from this distance, but he could feel her agitation and fury. Only another predator brought out this level of intensity. Her fury washed through him, scouring him down to a bare necessity of purpose. He adjusted his armor and checked the play of swords in their scabbards. The book he left were it lay. He doubted he would need it again. He looked inside himself and found Pfeiffer. Using her fierce presence as a beacon he crushed the tiny glass travelers' charm under his boot heel and felt himself spread across space.

He coalesced on the small ledge where Pfeiffer perched and together they looked down on the storm of destruction below. His cracked lips curling back in a hunter's smile, Morphayel called down his magics. He laid down a skin of stone and overlaid protections from fire and claw. He used magic to quicken the rhythm of life inside him, speeding his perceptions and reactions. Lastly, he reached out and slammed his own rage directly into the face of the flying horror, laying down a challenge across the void. The answer was immediate. A psychic scream of malice, flame and hate struck Morphayel between his eyes like a knife. Lady Red, the red dragon slayer, trembled with divine purpose. Lady Ice, the frost blade, burned with cold terrible light. Crossing the blades over his heart Morphayell threw himself into the thin, blistering air on shimmering wings of magic, canines bared and an elfin curse flying ahead of him.

He dodged a sheet of stinking flame by the thinnest of margins. The edge of the attack washed through his shields and Morphayel clenched his teeth at the pain. He threw a double handful of sparkling gravel at the massive hide as he came around the head, gripping his swords in his teeth for one precarious moment. The snakelike neck twisted to catch him in a fiery spray as he doubled back toward the creature's wings, each of which were larger than the sails of an ocean going vessel. He tore through the near wing and drug both blades hilt deep down a spinal ridge as wide as any king's road. Lady Red parted dragon scales like magma with her vicious song. The cold brilliance of Lady Ice stilled the creature's molten blood as it sought the fiery heart. The moment stank of destiny and death as the great creature folded in on itself, too damaged to remain aloft. Clinging to his swords, buffeted by wind and wings and screams, Morphayel rode the raging creature down, sliding against scales as hard as iron and sharp as glass.

The dragon absorbed most of the blow when it slammed into a granite peak, sending wagon sized boulders exploding in the air. Choking dust was everywhere and the screams of the hateful creature filled the sky, the rock and Morphayel's skull. He attempted to rise and found himself staring directly into swirling eyes of elemental hate as the wounded creature slid off the ledge toward the valley floor far below. Morphayel crossed his arms across his chest as the air around him exploded. There was no dodging this time as the full attack washed over and through his shields. He held his breath and felt his lungs catch fire anyway. He shut his eyes tight and still felt them bubble away. He was adrift in a sea of pain and crashing noise as the force of the attack carried him above and beyond the range of the wounded dragon. He rode a pillar of flame through smoking pines into cracked rock. As the world disappeared for a second time, he thought he saw an old villager smiling peacefully and reaching out to catch him.

Humming to himself, he worked his abacus with blinding speed and meticulous care. The beads were either worlds or atoms depending on his purpose and the wires were ley lines, fault lines and soul strands. He kept a steady rhythm to the clacking of the beads as his talons blurred, repositioning his resources. Each piece reacted to each movement and positioning with a different quality of sound. Together they formed a symphony. And the symphony formed the world. Accounting as a musical instrument.

Using his own creatures as a supporting tones, he leveled the sharp chords and notes of the foreign score, playing minor chords against the major ones. Discordance could not be avoided but it could be directed to build up an anticipation in the audience that would amplify the response when the chorus hit. Keeping the base beat steady he brought in the choral foundation slowly so not to break the fragile thematic elements while replacing their lost notes and chords. Restoration work was always more difficult but he needed this particular theme intact no matter how flawed and damaged. These next measures were so very delicate that the entire piece could unwind with the wrong rest, note or chord.

He allowed the tempo to slow and formed a companion score to wrap around the main theme, slowly bringing the tempo back up as the sympathetic notes strengthened and amplified the composition. He hit the slider, bringing down the base while building the mid-tone trebles. Finally he brought it all together into one clear note on the trumpet, full gain. He paused as the note faded. Then faintly he heard a clapping of hands. Then another. Then more as the audience rose to their feet. The applause were deafening. The critics would have a field day of course, but he could always eat them.

Morphayel heard a beautiful piercing, unrelenting cry. He folded himself around it, using familiarity to center himself while his mind slowly uncurled from the fetal ball it had retreated into. Slowly the sharp edged, monochrome world that Pfeffer saw came into focus. It took several more moments to put meaning to the smoking lump of charred meat at the center of the scene. It wore shreds smoking armor and soot stained boots. Its skin was cracked, melted and uniformly blackened. It had no hair or any recognizable facial features. Oddly it's gold weave belt was shiny and whole. The pristine condition of the accessory only intensified the horror of the pathetic wreck it encircled. With dizzying speed the superlative vision of the hawk, spun sideways and enlarged to take in the whole plateau. The broken mountain of red scales surrounding the ruined creature seemed to be talking to itself. The powerful low-frequency vibrations, felt rather than heard, had the sing-song rhythms of building magic. It was time to finish this.

Tilting his head back Morphayel searched the world for the charm that matched the one melted to the flesh of his left hand, the one attached to the hilt of Lady Red. His own eyes melted way, Morphayel watched through Pfeffer's as the broken figure opened its lipless face into a horrible cracked parody of a smile and started to hiss the whispered beginnings of his final spell. A ruined hand rose up, a ring glowing through sliding skin as a dark panel shimmered tentatively into its path. Spitting the last syllable, he lurched through the ancient doorway, a ram shaped force exploding from the ring and aimed toward the pinging call that marked his lovely blade, currently buried alongside her sister in the spine of the creature.

Through a fog of pain and dimensional distortion, Morph felt the rams head slam into both blades forcing them deep into the base of the creature's skull. He felt them pulse and flare, adding powerful magics to the bite of their killing edges. He shoved his melted hand deep into the molten blood and razor sharp scales, pouring long memories, fierce passions, treasured comrades, incredible adventures and blinding pain through the ring to drive the blades deeper. The swords broke gleefully through the skull of the creature and slid into its brain, slicing through the dense fibrous tissue like water. And the huge, ancient monster simply ...died.

Oh sweet Lorien, he was tired. He felt Pfeffer calling sternly but told her he was just going to rest for a bit. Her fierce black eyes followed him into darkness.

Shit. shitshitshitshit. If this thing died on him he would be left to clean up the mess and there was just no way he could deal with energies this foreign. The meat was no problem but souls and life force and all that crap were something entirely different. Shit.

That's when he notice the figure, someone who had not been there a moment before. A very small man who said in a very big voice, "I think I can help you with that."

"Bigby," growled the dragon.

... to be continues

Prologue ...

After the battle with the dark guy in the dark cape in the black and gray dimension, you ended up in the attic where Jarl was almost killed by a huge mimic. Defeating it took you all down the stairs that were inside the animated dragon statue. You noticed that the stairs had changed from wooden planks to ribs and tissue as if inside a real dragon. After everyone spilled out of the stairwell, the dragon, looking much more skeletal than before sort of melted into the wall and disappeared. Greysun immediately stabbed Jarl with her sword, healing him, but doing nothing to for the partially digested state of his wardrobe. Ick the smell!!

After regrouping the mirror shards were placed in the mirror frame that was found under the cloak, along with a book, after the dark guy was defeated. Immediately the cracks sealed with a brilliant white light and a swirling effect looking like sun beams in soft blue light shown up from the mirror. Slowly a figure took form in the center of the beam about a foot off the floor. After several minutes the light stopped with an audible snap and the body of a middle aged woman, quite pretty and dressed in thick white robes, fell to the ground. Immediate medical actions were taken, which failed to revive her. Wardlaw determined that she was resting comfortably but would simply not awaken.

WDK took her down to the games room and laid her on one of the large felt covered tables where she could be attended to. He and Morphayel then went to explore the house which had begun to change around them. The light was much brighter, a significant improvement over the constant twilight of before. Upon reaching the front door they found they could open it and that the steps were still rubble far below. They could see the ship however and Pfeiffer reported that all was well there.

Almaye eventually woke up and greeted her deliverers. She immediately became concerned about her charge, whom she called the Young One. Rising determinedly but somewhat shakily, she walked up to the dragon statue room. Opening the door revealed that a different dragon statue had appeared on the back wall. There was only a head, the size of the oldest, largest dragon imaginable. The markings and forms were different from any dragon you had previously experienced. Almaye stood in front of the statue and sang a haunting song in a language unfamiliar to any of you. As she finished the huge maw opened to reveal a circular hole about a meter in diameter. Immediately a forceful blast of the coldest air you had ever felt erupted from the opening. Through frosted, blue lips a soft cry of anguish escaped Almaye, answering the unasked question of whether this was the normal state of events. Her form started to melt in upon itself and in a moment there stood where she once had a large beautiful swan who immediately launched itself into the hole. Without thinking twice, Morphayel took hawk form and followed here.

After several minutes, the rest of the team decided to take swigs of the polymorph potion, changing into different animals with swifter movement rates in an attempt to catch up,

WDK leaving before the others. In Jarl's case several different animals were tried in succession. The tunnel was gray and featureless and visibility seemed to be limited to several feet ahead or behind. The entrance was soon lost to sight. After an indeterminate amount of time and distance the tunnel turned upward to a hole about 20 feet above. Several jumps and changes later everyone emerged into a completely silent world devoid of any color or motion. The air was dangerously cold. Those people not protected by the rings of warmth immediately started to take damage. The grass powdered as you stepped on it. The many trees and plants within your vision were bone white. The area looked for all the world like a tropical rain forest carved from ice.

Changing to bird forms, they flew into the still, gray sky (some in quite a bumbling and unskilled manner). It didn't take long to see that the only movement visible were two small dots falling toward the forest some distance ahead. As they flew toward the spot where they lost sight of what they thought were their friends they saw that the landscape below matched their initial observations. Forests, swamps, and plains spread out as far as they could see and everything was a silent cold sculpture in white. Occasionally a still figure could be seen in the clearings or in the trees, silent and frozen. They were quite surprised to encounter several huge reptilian heads above and within the tree lines, caught between routine gestures. Ahead of them they saw a huge mountain rising into the clouds. Behind them an endless, still ocean of white.

As they neared the spot several figures erupted from a hole in the canopy below with the sound of a hundred mirrors being smashed. A medium sized dragon, covered with frost and carrying a still bundle was speeding toward the entrance, followed by a large black crow. Everyone fell in behind. At the hole the dragon touched down and in a gravelly version of Morphayel's voice shouted that they had to take Almaye back to the house immediately. Those not protected by rings would agree as they had taken several points of damage from the cold themselves. Changing into wolves and taking turns carrying the wrapped swan, Everyone ran back through the tunnel.

After much ministrations and some time, Almaye, and everyone else, was brought back to health and questions were asked and answered. Some time ago a wreck of a ship had found its way into their atmosphere. Investigation turned up a sole survivor, a male with gray skin and long white hair, gaunt and unconscious in the remains of a cabin. The Sisters of the Celestial Companions took the figure into the house and placed him in a bedroom to care for him. It took many weeks before he regained his senses, coming at first into a wild and frenzied state. As he calmed down and could speak with coherence he said his name was K'Mayerr and that his vessel had been struck by a magic storm in Wildspace, destroying his helm and most of his atmosphere. He did not really remember how long he had been unconscious as he drifted in desperation, searching for a source of air in the vast empty reaches. He seemed very thankful and very weak. Life continued on as normal as their guest slowly recuperated. It was another several weeks before Almaye noticed that something was different, perhaps wrong. She had not seen several

of the sisters for some time. While everyone spent time both here and on the womb world with the Tribes, and there was no real tracking of anyone's activities, it struck her as strange that there were so few sisters around the house. And the house too seemed different, sluggish and slow to respond, especially on the upper floors where the light never seemed quite as bright as it should be. Her alarm grew as her investigations found neither her sisters nor their guest. Still the realization of the possible source of the trouble escaped her until she turned and looked into one of the nooks of the main hallways and saw the stony features of her sister ValAnna staring back at her, locked in granite and still as death.

Running toward the portal to seek help from the Tribes she ran into the tall gaunt figure of K'Mayerr, now dressed in a long black robe, the hood pulled back. He smiled and asked her if she would like to see her friends, tossing a medium sized object to her. Without thinking she caught it and looked down, and was immediately held by her own gaze reflecting from the iron bound hand mirror she now held. Her image seemed to grow and grow and grow until her mind shut down in protest. Her last memory was of flinging the mirror behind her to the lower story, just before her own image overwhelmed her.

She then explained that Womb World was a tropical planet where the baby Celestial Dragon she called the Young One lived, cared for by the Tribes of Draconians and the Sisters, who traveled from their asteroid home by means of the portal. The cold and ice they had encountered were completely unnatural and she was greatly concerned about her young charge.

A plan was developed for surviving the cold to investigate the situation. Morph and Wardlaw, wearing the rings of warmth would take the shapes of dragons and carry the others as bundled as possible for as long as the others could stand it. They would then land, erect tents they had built and regain their hit points, strength and spells. People would take turns wearing the rings on watch. It was discovered that the house could create a limited number of healing potions and an experiment revealed that it could also copy somewhat the functions of a ring of warmth and create a functional replica. One such ring was formed. Once all preparations were taken, everyone entered the portal. Wheeled sleds were built to carry the non-morphed individuals at best speed through the featureless gray tunnel that connected the two worlds.

Upon entering Womb World it seemed even colder than before. Breath came out as ice particles finer than sand. It was discovered that about an hour of exposure was all the unprotected individuals could take without damage occurring so a cycle of flying for 1 hour and resting in tents was adopted. It was determined that 3 such cycles would put them at the false summit where Almaye indicated the entrance to the womb to be. Side investigations by those on watch discovered huge frozen dinosaurs as well as an abundance of other life frozen in moments of day to day life, locked in battle, sleeping,

eating, etc. Several beasts were found with huge bites taken from them, inspection indicating that the 2 meter chunks were removed after the beasts were frozen. At one point near the base of the mountain the party was attacked by what appeared to be bats made of ice. Their bite was so cold that it appeared to almost freeze the blood of those they attacked. They were easily dispatched but Greysun had a chilling close call.

Upon reaching the summit, the cold, which had been building in intensity, became nearly unbearable. It was now effecting even those wearing the rings and those not protected had to fight it as though it were a physical presence. Just breathing caused damage. The false summit was approximately 100 by 50 yd. Dominating the view was a huge stone throne, formed from the cliff of the mountain as it continued up to the true summit. With a strangled cry, Almaye pointed toward the door sized white rectangle sitting on top of the throne seat. Just looking at it made your brain freeze and it was obvious that the cold emanated from it. Before any further inspection could be taken, a shout from Jarl crashed on everyone's ears in the silence. Turning it seemed as though the frosted rocks themselves were rising up, appearing over the cliff that was the downward side of the mountain. The impossibly long neck kept rising, glistening white scales shifting in the featureless twilight. The huge head with its hand sized yellow orbs pointed itself at the party and opened its 2 meter wide maw.

Roll Initiative.....

The hard, white beak yawned wide and the dragon breath blew over the party, the unearthly cold seeping not only into flesh, but into the soul as well. Eyes closed against the strength of those gigantic lungs, the world seemed filled with the roaring, numbing cold. It was over in a moment but it took several more for their bodies to believe it. Those protected by enchantment acted first, Ithyll loading his sling as Wardlaw recited the arcane formula which ended in an impossibly bright bead of orange yellow light streaking toward the rising form of the wyrm, where it blossomed into a great ball of fire. As its great wings dispersed the magical flames, a spreading stain of darkness appeared near its right shoulder accompanied by a shout of triumph from Ithyll as he prepared for another shot. The others were now recovered from the initial shock. Wdk pulled a hand-sized statuette from a pocket in his outermost garment, tossing it to the ground while shouting a command word. Greysun load a gently glowing bullet into her sling and Wardlaw prepared for another spell. The gust of wind came from nowhere, driven by those sail-like wings and the magic of the dragon. Hands and scarves were raised to protect fragile eyes from the stinging gravel and ice kicked up by the gale, as the party was momentarily blinded by swirling maelstrom. The roar of the wind covered the muted cry from Jarl as, caught by surprise, fell into the hole leading to the dragon womb.

Almost as one energies and projectiles flew towards the beast. Greysun's sling became a fierce blue-white aura, which broke into 4 glowing daggers of magic unerringly impacting on the scaled body. Another gigantic fireball consumed the body of dragon as

it shuddered under the impact of the heavy iron bullet Ithyll had launched. The biting cold swallowed the sound and stench of the beast as it dove out of site around the mountain. Hurrying, the party began make preparations for descending into the pit, only now noticing the absence of Jarl and Almaye. Spikes were driven into the frozen rock of the mountain and an attached rope was thrown into the ice darkness. Wardlaw had determined that the shaft appeared to curve after about 60 feet. No sound came from the dark hole. As Greysun began preparing to scout shaft a loud bugle of warning came from Morphayel, as he hovered over them still in his draconne form.

The dragon came from the left, screaming in rage fueled equally by pain and arrogance. The party dove for cover, scant as it was on this exposed plateau. At full speed the great wings slammed into the party members, scattering them like ten-pins. Ithyll and Wdk were slammed into the great stone chair protruding from the cliff face, the others were simply bowled over by the force of the attack. Without stopping, the white dragon continued its flight, disappearing around the other side of the plateau, followed this time by Morphayel.

Picking themselves up with groans and sharp intakes of frigid air the rest of the party regrouped around the hole. Grasping the rope as firmly as her aching hands would allow, Greysun descended into the pit, carrying a glowing pellet of light in her clenched teeth. Those watching above saw her disappear from sight as the shaft turned to the horizontal. Wdk went next, his huge frame filling much more of the hole than the slight body of the fur-clad elfin female. The rope creaked with the cold as Wdk worked his way down the slippery surface. As he rounded the corner Wardlaw took his turn at descending into the pit, his gaunt frame out of placed dressed in only his standard robe. The magic of the glowing ring on his left hand held the numbing cold at bay more effectively than any layering of garments could. Splitting his attention between the skies and his descending comrades, Ithyll anchored the rope and watch for the return of Morphayel and or the white dragon. As Wardlaw disappeared from view, two flying figures appeared from above and to the left.

Morphayel, now wearing the form of his beloved Pfeiffer, was streaking downward with the full speed of a striking hawk. Close behind him, obviously laboring and angry was the white dragon, torn and bleeding from several wounds. Ithyll ducked as Morphayel streaked by his face, pulling up just before slamming into the throne. Looking up a heartfelt curse came from Ithyll as he leapt for cover on the other side of that same throne, leaving a heartbeat before the white dragon slammed into the space where he had just stood. The dragon's leg buckled under him as he landed causing him to fall forward into the throne with an echoing thud that Ithyll felt more than heard. Small rocks from above rained down on the gleaming red scales of his armor as he leaped over the throne, mace in hand.

Landing next under the great jaw, Ithyll connected a shattering blow on the beast's neck. Shaking off the effects of the jarring landing the dragon engulfed Ithyll's entire left side in his jaws, cracking armor, flesh and bone between its gleaming teeth, pinning Ithyll's left arm to his side. Blood filling his vision and shouting his own war cry into the cold, Ithyll drove his other mace, the frost brand glowing madly in the frigid air, directly between the eyes of the beast. The muted crack of breaking bone was barely audible. The pinching jaws relaxed and the great beast fell directly onto Ithyll, pinning him under its massive weight. Laying in the frozen gravel, Ithyll tried to work his arm loose and gain some leverage when two furry claws grabbed the scaly nose and lifted it, just enough for Ithyll to worm his way free. The quick battle stance he assumed relaxed as Morphayel's familiar eyes peeked out above the sinister smile of the laughing werewolf.

The white dragon lay defeated as Ithyll and Morphayel regarded each other with amusement and triumph, both covered in the gore and stench of battle. Blood ran freely from Ithyll's left side where moments before it had been impaled on the bleached white fangs of the giant lizard. He pulled a strip from his shirt and dressed the torn flesh with an unconcerned, business-like air. Morphayel stood there, dripping dragon blood from the matted fur on the lower half of his werewolf form, and the savage lupine smile breaking his features. A sudden shift in the light caused them to tense, each assume their own battle stance. The still form of the great lizard began to shimmer and glow, changing to single ball of pure white light. So sudden was the transformation that the dragon form seemed to hang in the air as a ghostly image. The light ball streaked around in mad spiral. As it passed between, forcing them to jump aside to avoid contact, they felt the cold even through their protective enchantments. So quickly that their eyes could only register a trail of light the ball entered the glowing door way atop the throne and disappeared, or maybe blended into the glowing energy of rectangle.

After a moment the two companions shrugged and entered the hole after the others, Morphayel in the form of a wren and Ithyll down the rope. They met up with them after the tunnel began to corkscrew, waiting in the valley between loops. Greysun was standing on Wdk's shoulders pounding another spike at the top of the next rise. Wardlaw explained patiently to Morphayel why he should fly back up and undo the rope, as they were currently at the end of its length and would need it to continue. Morphayel happily ignored him, preening his feathers a whistling a familiar tavern ditty, which echoed strangely in the close quarters of the cold tunnel. After Wardlaw had given up, the wren shudders and melted to become ferret which scampered up the ice, ran a couple of circles around Greysun and headed down the end of tunnel Greysun had reported. The others came up with just enough rope to reach the opening and once more sent Greysun down to scout. No sign or sound had yet been detected from either Jarl or Almaye. Tying the rope to her ankles Wdk carefully lowered Greysun towards the opening. At full length of the rope, her head and shoulders popped out of the tunnel and an exclamation of wonder popped from her lips.

Before was a huge chamber, 50 meters to the other side and twice that to the bottom and again to the top. The entire cavern was softly and completely lit, offering no shadows and making the estimation of distance difficult. In the exact middle floated the form of small dragon, curled into a ball.. All through the chamber in a slow dance, floated innumerable chunks of ice all in a similar but irregular shapes of all different sizes form that of a small wagon to no bigger than her hand. As she worked the rope loose from her ankles she watched Almeye and a strange figure seem to race each over the chunks, vectoring toward the same large ball. As the rope came loose, Greysun kick on from the wall, dagger in hand to catch herself on a largish nearby chunk. Her foot slipped just slightly at takeoff but it was enough to cause her to undershoot her target. Her mind raced wildly as the ground loomed painfully far away as she fell toward it. It only took moments to notice that she was falling much slower than she expected to be, floating really rather than falling. With no other option than to accept it, she pulled her whip from her waist and snagged another floating chunk, using it to swing her towards yet another. The slower gravity allowing her plenty of time to release the whip and grab new chunks, swinging through the flow like an ape in an underwater jungle. In the meantime Wdk and the others had began to descend from the tunnel and were coping with the strange situation with varying degrees of success.

Standing there on an ice ball, floating in the cradle of an infant Celestial Dragon, waiting for a creature, who looked for all the world like a pudgy animate pudding gone bad to come do whatever assuredly nasty thing it meant to do to him, Jarl once again had time to consider a thought which was becoming disturbingly familiar lately. *“How did I get into this mess, anyway?”*

Shaking his head, Jarl quickly reviewed the lack of practicality of using flashbacks as a battle tactic. He decided there was little value added and resolved to purge it from his arsenal. The pudding creature was near enough for his musky odor to permeate the frigid air. Oddly it brought to mind campfires and the rare spice vanilla. Pleasant really except for the fangs, claws and that odd glow at the back of its throat.

Was it hot in here or was it just him? Three interesting things happened just then, all at the same time. A sickly yellow flame spat out from the throat of the pudding person, just as Jarl let loose a cracking good front kick to, hopefully, the private parts of the thing. At exactly that instant, Ithyll appeared between them with a small but distinct “pop”, absorbing both the washing flame and Jarl’s kick on the beautiful red armor that he wore. Jarl put it down to a trick of the heat that the armor seemed to writhe and shift as the flame danced over it. The pudding creature and Ithyll floated away, locked in an embrace both intimate and deadly, propelled by the force of Jarl’s kick. The great black mace that Ithyll called Honor sang, literally, as it crashed into the surprisingly firm flesh of the creature. The creature shrieked in strange slobbering notes as it used the claws on its frying pan sized hands to shred and tear at Ithyll’s body, its square, stunted fangs seeking purchase in his face or neck. With a strong kick, Ithyll pushed the slavering thing away,

just as Almaye leapt from a nearby ice float. Her flaming long sword cut a smoking swath through the brown flesh as it fell passed her. Ithyll once again appeared from nowhere directly in the path of the creature. As its chest expanded and its mouth gaped open to spit more foul flame, Honor once again sang through the cold air, impacting for the last time on the misshapen skull. The force of the blow propelled the creature toward the smooth floor of the cavern far below.

Everyone followed Almaye across the ice floats to the curled form of the baby dragon. Gathered around the astoundingly large infant, they noticed that the stool-size chunks of ice they were walking on were the frozen results of the dragon's soft breathing. Everyone was so enthralled they did not notice that some of the ice chunks were alive, and hungry. Their cracking shrieks sounding small and thin in the immensity of the frozen chamber, a cloud of ice bats poured onto the adventurers. Hands up to protect exposed skin, the weapons of the companions flashed in the cold light, reflecting back from the wings and bodies of the insanely hungry creatures. Several flocked around Greysun and Wardlaw, perhaps sensing more flesh and less armor. Greysun's short sword struck too swiftly to be seen, shattering the frozen terror diving at her. Darts of magical fire sped from Wardlaw's finger tip and exploded 2 of the bats from within, their bodies expanding outward as frozen dust. Mace, sword and knife met ice-hard flesh again and again as the terrors dove at the party locking their cold fangs to warm flesh and hanging on whenever they could. Several had already felt the numbing cold from a bite, managing to remove the creature before the effect could advance. Jarl was not so lucky. As he dispatched one foe, another came from behind and bit into his forearm and Jarl simply stopped moving. The bat simply hunk there drinking the icy slush that had moments ago been Jarl's life blood. Screaming in rage Almaye swept down on the beast and brought her flaming weapon down on the crystalline body. As the magical flames touched it, the creature simply melted away, leaving nothing behind but large, heavy seeming drops which gathered and broke apart in the strange, cold air of the cavern. Sustaining some wounds, the rest of the party made short work of the remaining ice bats.

With no other real option, Greysun slammed her glowing short sword to its hilt in Jarl's still chest. Everyone except Almaye had seen this before, many had been on the receiving end, but it still made them queasy. Maybe it was just the savage joy in Greysun's eyes that unnerved them. The familiar white glow built up from the sword to envelope Jarl's entire body in a blinding flash. There was a sickening sucking sound as Greysun pulled the blade from its human sheath, the wound closing behind it as the glow faded. The magic seemed to do the trick though as Jarl took a sharp intake of breath. After several moments he seemed fully recovered except for the chattering of his teeth. Morphayel, back in his elfin form, offered him a ring of warmth, which brought him welcome relief from the unrelenting cold within him.

The others went back to investigate the condition of the baby dragon. After much inspection and consultation, Almaye and Wardlaw agreed that the creature was sleeping, apparently unharmed and apparently unawakable. Various healing magics bathed the

gently breathing form to no effect.. Finally the other ring of warmth as well as the house-made copy were placed on separate digits of the sleeping waif and the party settled down to wait. Though the temperature seemed just as cold here as outside and it was extremely uncomfortable, no one felt the cold damaging effects they had outside, where simply breathing caused damage to fragile tissue. They found it was possible to use the flame tongue to weld several of the ice floats together to form single platform of considerable size on which they could set up their tents. Anchoring it to the side wall kept it from floating down to the ground below, featureless except for one small brown stain. Time passed in the cold, still quiet.

Jarl and Morphayel, exploring the surroundings, found a treasure trove of sorts, cast in the ice near the ceiling of the cave. Some enthusiastic, yet cautious carving turned out several flasks, full of frozen, colorful liquid as well as a mound of gold coins and some uncut gems. Almeye did not recognize them and did not think the baby dragon had yet developed a horde. It was, she said with tight lips, a much discussed topic. The white dragon may have appropriated it from the Dragonian villages she suggested, not noticing some of the raised eyebrows and hunched shoulders this statement produced.

After much time the baby dragon began to stir, not quite wakening but certainly a positive sign. By this time Morphayel had by this time flown through the tunnel to the house to reassure Pfeiffer that all was well and to check on the condition of the house and ship. Repairs on both were proceeding very well, though there was only so much that Sahjay could do on his own. When he returned Morphayel excitedly entreated that everyone who could come up top side to see something really cool. This kind of statement, coming from Morphayel, was not always greeted with enthusiasm, but many of the party were bored enough to brave the biting cold for a short time anyway. They came up into a world much as they left except the dangerous bite of the air seemed to be missing. Not giving them a moment to analyze the difference, Morphayel pointed toward the stone throne. The gleaming rectangle, previously the size of a standard house door had shrunk to the approximately half that size. It was still far too cold to touch or even go close to but it was definitely shrinking. Jarl wondered aloud what would happen if a fireball were launched into it. Morphayel greeted this idea with boundless enthusiasm, conveniently forgetting the price in pain that this spell caused him. The clincher was when Wardlaw expressed an interest in the experiment, especially when someone suggested all the wizards should try it at once. A plan was made and spells selected. They informed Almeye who, not surprisingly, elected to remain with her charge. The others were ferried down to the foot of the mountain. Wardlaw, Morphayel and Wdk's animated lizard witch floated in the sky at the maximum range of their spells and at the agreed upon signal cast as one. The effect was more spectacular than they had dreamed.

Three intensely glowing beads of compressed rage sped toward the gleaming rectangle. Everyone below had their eyes shaded in anticipation of the spectacular blossom of fire they were expecting. They held their breath and waited ... and waited ... and waited. Just

as they were turning to each other, wondering what had happened the world opened up and fell down around them. The land went mad as chunks of frozen mountain rushed to meet the ground below as it, in turn, bucked and leaped as if to gain the mountain heights. Scrambling wildly, the party members on the ground dodged furiously to keep from being crushed. They could spare no effort or concern for their friends in the air. There was little they could do for them anyway. Eventually the world quieted down to the odd clacking of single rocks or the shifting his of frozen gravel. Digging out from under debris, the party members came limping and staggering out to a clearing in the rubble, looking around them at a world greatly changed. Greysun's sharp cry caused everyone to follow her gaze upward at the limp figure falling from the sky and the other rushing toward it. The met so close to those on the ground they could see the broken way Morphayel's body hung in Wardlaw's grasp as the mage tried desperately to land. He managed an almost controlled fall as both bodies crashed heavily into the ground. The others rushed over, not quite believing what they were seeing, as they gazed at Morphayel, blood running from wounds covering his entire body. Pushing the others aside, Greysun rushed in, unsheathing her sword as she did. Without pausing for even a heartbeat she plunged it into his breast, the white glow forcing its way through the broken form of the injured elf. Moments passed, breathes were held, the moment stretching until Morphayel opened his eyes and whistled. "Cool!", " he said. The powerful enchantment of the sword had brought him back from the threshold of death, as good as new. He wanted eagerly to go back to the false summit to inspect the damage. After tending to Wardlaw, in bad shape if not actually close to death., everyone gathered around Morphayel as she changed to dragon form and ferried them slowly up the side of the mountain.

The destruction was awesome. A quarter of the mountain, centered on the throne, had been blasted away into the surrounding landscape. The throne clung to the mountain, but it was the single remaining feature. The ledge was gone, the entrance to the womb had vanished, the entire face of the mountain had vanished. Circling closer, Morphayel looked in vain for a landing place, finally settling carefully on the throne. This close it became apparent that it had not escaped unscathed. A hairline crack ran down the center of the back. Compared to the bulk of the destruction around them it shouldn't matter but somehow it did. From behind him he heard Wardlaw chanted the strange broken phrases of a spell and his form began to waver, darken, becoming vaguely smoke-like. The wraith form leapt from dragon back and began to flow over the ruined face of the mountain, seeking an entrance to the womb somewhere inside. Sliding over the exposed rock with no more substance than a shadow, he found a crack and flowed inside out of sight of the others. With nothing more to see Morphayel flew them down then attained human form just long enough gain wraith form himself. Launching into the sky the wraith dragon sought the crack Wardlaw had disappeared through. Finding it he ghosted himself into the bowels of the mountain..

The womb was dark, completely dark, absolutely dark. Dark and still and quiet. Like space. Like death. Morphayel's infra-vision showed two bodies far below him. As he was spiraling down another bright form popped into being next to the others. As he watched the new form merged with the others. Before he landed he saw a new flood of warmth flow through the smaller of the three forms. As he came within the sphere of Wardlaw's light bullet, Morphayel could see that the other mage was pouring the contents of the healing potions he carried carefully down the throat of the baby dragon. The empty flask that rolled around on the rock-hard ice of the cavern floor bore testament that the same operation had already been carried out on Almaye, who was stirring weakly without waking up. Silently the two friends cared for the two injured bodies, doing what they could to make the surroundings more comfortable while they rested. It would be several hours before Morphayel could again cast the spells which had allowed him entrance to the ruined cavern, so they decided that they would stay here while Wardlaw returned to the world above to report and bring back supplies. After he left Morphayel covered the light bullet to better keep track of the health of his charges and pulled his flute from its special pocket. Soon the haunting notes of an ancient elfin ballad echoed somberly from the frozen walls.

It was several days before Almaye and the dragon were ready to leave the womb. Greysun allowed the use of her wondrous sword to heal the victims, bringing them back to full vigor. Everyone agreed it was a good thing that the dragon had not been conscious when the treatment was applied. By the time Wardlaw was able to teleport them both to the skies overlooking the ruined face of the mountain a wondrous change had worked its way through the landscape. Two days of storms, frighteningly intense, had finally passed as the weather systems of the planet righted themselves. The temperature had climbed into the temperate and the sounds of melting were heard everywhere as a world came back to life. Of course, as these goes, there was darkness within the joy.

Much of the indigenous life did not survive the thaw. Everywhere lay the hulks of huge dinosaurs which had never woken from their sudden sleep. Littered about were the bodies of their smaller cousins as well as the husks of ruined plants and trees. It became painfully obvious that more than half of the life previously existing here had been cut down. This staggering statistic held true within the Draconian population also. Many tribe members awoke, staggering from the soggy ground where they had been frozen to find that friends, families, even entire villages were gone, rotting away in the every warming air. The songs and smell of death was everywhere.

Not everyone felt the sadness and horror of the situation. The baby dragon was overjoyed at the quantity of food lying around. He was more upset about the damage to the mountain. The adventurers soon found out that the entire mountain was a great helm, the throne being the access point. This incredible device theoretically would allow a mature Celestial Dragon to pilot the entire planet wherever it willed. No one knew how long it had been there, by whom it had been built or what the damage would do to the

functioning of the device. Only a mature Celestial Dragon could hope to activate and it would be many years before the infant would be ready. The party did what they could to help the local populace adjust to their new world, trying to avoid the baby dragon as much as possible. He was unclear really as to what exactly had happened but he knew the adventurers were strangers to his world and that they did not show him the proper respect. It was much simpler to spend much of their time on their ship, coming through the tunnel to help when the baby took one of its numerous naps. After several days they began to make preparations for departure, as they still had responsibilities to Sahjay, to repairing their ship and still had to deal with the prisoners they had taken.

On the day of their departure, Almayer met them at the dock with two of her Sisters. They had happily discovered that a number of the order had survived on Womb World, much to the gratification of Almayer. Apparently their group was cutoff from whatever organization had spawned them and she was daunted by the task of rebuilding the order from scratch, by herself, while caring for the dragon and helping the tribes people rebuild their lives. Now that she had some of her own people around her again her eyes had lost some of the haunted look they had held since emerging from the womb. She thanked them for freeing her from her captor and the dragon from its prison, especially as the endeavor had almost cost them some of their own. The dragon was too young to understand the debt he owed but she, in his stead, gave them each a twinkling, iridescent scale from its hide. "Keep them as tokens," she said, "and as identification should you run into any of his people so that they would know you have done a service to one of their kind." She paused for a moment before adding, "Be careful if you do meet another such a being. They are most wondrous, but each is ... unique. Nothing can be taken for granted." She then offered them each a gift, each appropriate to their individual likes or talents. As she came to Morphayel he bowed his head, falling to one knee and doffing his hat in his most courtly manner. "Dear lady," he stated, "it would be my most humble honor to stay with you and your people a while, learning what I can from your order and the Dragonians, and helping wherever I might be of service. I find the need to spend some time with a world under my feet and a single sky above and for all its recent tragedy yours is a lovely world. Please, allow me to serve." Upon concluding he remained bowed, head down, awaiting her answer.

"Your offer is most kind, sir, and the work ahead is so daunting that I gratefully accept your aid." Morphayel rose then and shook her hand in agreement, saying only, "Cool!" The other members of the party were watching this entire transaction with varying amounts of shock on their faces. They all began to speak at once, including Morphayel. It was several minutes before any sort of actual communication could take place. "I'm just a little tired of ship life and would like the chance to explore a new world for a month or so. I know where you're heading and should be able to find you with ease, considering the amount of damage we usually leave in our wake. I'll miss you all too much to be gone for very long." After some more discussion and leave-taking, everyone else climbed on board the Star Runner and eased her away from the dock. Morphayel

waved until they could no longer see him, Pfeiffer sitting on his shoulder and Bert zipping around his head, small spurts of flame coming from his unmoving mouth. For his part Morphayel waved until the ship disappeared from even his hawk vision, the lump in his throat growing larger with each moment. As the Sky Runner finally winked away, he looked to the sky, tears brimming in his azure eyes, and sang to the stars an old elfin ballad, full of pain and longing and loneliness. The last notes drifted from his lips, chased by a great shout, a word in Ancient Backlandish that only Morphayel knew the meaning of. Turning, he wiped his eyes, nuzzling Pfeiffer and looked at Almayer. "Ready?" he said and they turned back to the house, high atop the rocky cliffs.

frying pan sized hands to shred and tear at Ithyll's body, its square, stunted fangs seeking purchase in his face or neck. With a strong kick, Ithyll pushed the slavering thing away, just as Almayer leapt from a nearby ice float. Her flaming long sword cut a smoking swath through the brown flesh as it fell passed her. Ithyll once again appeared from nowhere directly in the path of the creature. As its chest expanded and its mouth gaped open to spit more foul flame, Honor once again sang through the cold air, impacting for the last time on the misshapen skull. The force of the blow propelled the creature toward the smooth floor of the cavern far below.

Everyone followed Almayer across the ice floats to the curled form of the baby dragon. Gathered around the astoundingly large infant, they noticed that the stool-size chunks of ice they were walking on were the frozen results of the dragon's soft breathing. Everyone was so enthralled they did not notice that some of the ice chunks were alive, and hungry. Their cracking shrieks sounding small and thin in the immensity of the frozen chamber, a cloud of ice bats poured onto the adventurers. Hands up to protect exposed skin, the weapons of the companions flashed in the cold light, reflecting back from the wings and bodies of the insanely hungry creatures. Several flocked around Greysun and Wardlaw, perhaps sensing more flesh and less armor. Greysun's short sword struck too swiftly to be seen, shattering the frozen terror diving at her. Darts of magical fire sped from Wardlaw's finger tip and exploded 2 of the bats from within, their bodies expanding outward as frozen dust. Mace, sword and knife met ice-hard flesh again and again as the terrors dove at the party locking their cold fangs to warm flesh and hanging on whenever they could. Several had already felt the numbing cold from a bite, managing to remove the creature before the effect could advance. Jarl was not so lucky. As he dispatched one foe, another came from behind and bit into his forearm and Jarl simply stopped moving. The bat simply hunk there drinking the icy slush that had moments ago been Jarl's life blood. Screaming in rage Almayer swept down on the beast and brought her flaming weapon down on the crystalline body. As the magical flames touched it, the creature simply melted away, leaving nothing behind but large, heavy seeming drops which gathered and broke apart in the strange, cold air of the cavern. Sustaining some wounds, the rest of the party made short work of the remaining ice bats.

With no other real option, Greysun slammed her glowing short sword to its hilt in Jarl's still chest. Everyone except Almayer had seen this before, many had been on the receiving end, but it still made them queasy. Maybe it was just the savage joy in

Greysun's eyes that unnerved them. The familiar white glow built up from the sword to envelope Jarl's entire body in a blinding flash. There was a sickening sucking sound as Greysun pulled the blade from its human sheath, the wound closing behind it as the glow faded. The magic seemed to do the trick though as Jarl took a sharp intake of breath. After several moments he seemed fully recovered except for the chattering of his teeth. Morphayel, back in his elfin form, offered him a ring of warmth, which brought him welcome relief from the unrelenting cold within him.

The others went back to investigate the condition of the baby dragon. After much inspection and consultation, Almaye and Wardlaw agreed that the creature was sleeping, apparently unharmed and apparently unawake. Various healing magics bathed the gently breathing form to no effect. Finally the other ring of warmth as well as the house-made copy were placed on separate digits of the sleeping waif and the party settled down to wait. Though the temperature seemed just as cold here as outside and it was extremely uncomfortable, no one felt the cold damaging effects they had outside, where simply breathing caused damage to fragile tissue. They found it was possible to use the flame tongue to weld several of the ice floats together to form a single platform of considerable size on which they could set up their tents. Anchoring it to the side wall kept it from floating down to the ground below, featureless except for one small brown stain. Time passed in the cold, still quiet.

Jarl and Morphayel, exploring the surroundings, found a treasure trove of sorts, cast in the ice near the ceiling of the cave. Some enthusiastic, yet cautious carving turned out several flasks, full of frozen, colorful liquid as well as a mound of gold coins and some uncut gems. Almaye did not recognize them and did not think the baby dragon had yet developed a hoard. It was, she said with tight lips, a much discussed topic. The white dragon may have appropriated it from the Dragonian villages she suggested, not noticing some of the raised eyebrows and hunched shoulders this statement produced.

After much time the baby dragon began to stir, not quite waking but certainly a positive sign. By this time Morphayel had by this time flown through the tunnel to the house to reassure Pfeffer that all was well and to check on the condition of the house and ship. Repairs on both were proceeding very well, though there was only so much that Sahjay could do on his own. When he returned Morphayel excitedly entreated that everyone who could come up top side to see something really cool. This kind of statement, coming from Morphayel, was not always greeted with enthusiasm, but many of the party were bored enough to brave the biting cold for a short time anyway. They came up into a world much as they left except the dangerous bite of the air seemed to be missing. Not giving them a moment to analyze the difference, Morphayel pointed toward the stone throne. The gleaming rectangle, previously the size of a standard house door had shrunk to the approximately half that size. It was still far too cold to touch or even go close to but it was definitely shrinking. Jarl wondered aloud what would happen if a fireball were launched into it. Morphayel greeted this idea with boundless enthusiasm,

conveniently forgetting the price in pain that this spell caused him. The clincher was when Wardlaw expressed an interest in the experiment, especially when someone suggested all the wizards should try it at once. A plan was made and spells selected. They informed Almaye who, not surprisingly, elected to remain with her charge. The others were ferried down to the foot of the mountain. Wardlaw, Morphayel and Wdk's animated lizard witch floated in the sky at the maximum range of their spells and at the agreed upon signal cast as one. The effect was more spectacular than they had dreamed.

Three intensely glowing beads of compressed rage sped toward the gleaming rectangle. Everyone below had their eyes shaded in anticipation of the spectacular blossom of fire they were expecting. They held their breath and waited ... and waited ... and waited. Just as they were turning to each other, wondering what had happened the world opened up and fell down around them. The land went mad as chunks of frozen mountain rushed to meet the ground below as it, in turn, bucked and leaped as if to gain the mountain heights. Scrambling wildly, the party members on the ground dodged furiously to keep from being crushed. They could spare no effort or concern for their friends in the air. There was little they could do for them anyway. Eventually the world quieted down to the odd clacking of single rocks or the shifting his of frozen gravel. Digging out from under debris, the party members came limping and staggering out to a clearing in the rubble, looking around them at a world greatly changed. Greysun's sharp cry caused everyone to follow her gaze upward at the limp figure falling from the sky and the other rushing toward it. The met so close to those on the ground they could see the broken way Morphayel's body hung in Wardlaw's grasp as the mage tried desperately to land. He managed an almost controlled fall as both bodies crashed heavily into the ground. The others rushed over, not quite believing what they were seeing, as they gazed at Morphayel, blood running from wounds covering his entire body. Pushing the others aside, Greysun rushed in, unsheathing her sword as she did. Without pausing for even a heartbeat she plunged it into his breast, the white glow forcing its way through the broken form of the injured elf. Moments passed, breathes were held, the moment stretching until Morphayel opened his eyes and whistled. "Cool!", he said. The powerful enchantment of the sword had brought him back from the threshold of death, as good as new. He wanted eagerly to go back to the false summit to inspect the damage. After tending to Wardlaw, in bad shape if not actually close to death., everyone gathered around Morphayel as she changed to dragon form and ferried them slowly up the side of the mountain.

The destruction was awesome. A quarter of the mountain, centered on the throne, had been blasted away into the surrounding landscape. The throne clung to the mountain, but it was the single remaining feature. The ledge was gone, the entrance to the womb had vanished, the entire face of the mountain had vanished. Circling closer, Morphayel looked in vain for a landing place, finally settling carefully on the throne. This close it became apparent that it had not escaped unscathed. A hairline crack ran down the center of the back. Compared to the bulk of the destruction around them it shouldn't matter but

somehow it did. From behind him he heard Wardlaw chanted the strange broken phrases of a spell and his form began to waver, darken, becoming vaguely smoke-like. The wraith form leapt from dragon back and began to flow over the ruined face of the mountain, seeking an entrance to the womb somewhere inside. Sliding over the exposed rock with no more substance than a shadow, he found a crack and flowed inside out of sight of the others. With nothing more to see Morphayel flew them down then attained human form just long enough gain wraith form himself. Launching into the sky the wraith dragon sought the crack Wardlaw had disappeared through. Finding it he ghosted himself into the bowels of the mountain..

The womb was dark, completely dark, absolutely dark. Dark and still and quiet. Like space. Like death. Morphayel's infra-vision showed two bodies far below him. As he was spiraling down another bright form popped into being next to the others. As he watched the new form merged with the others. Before he landed he saw a new flood of warmth flow through the smaller of the three forms. As he came within the sphere of Wardlaw's light bullet, Morphayel could see that the other mage was pouring the contents of the healing potions he carried carefully down the throat of the baby dragon. The empty flask that rolled around on the rock-hard ice of the cavern floor bore testament that the same operation had already been carried out on Almaye, who was stirring weakly without waking up. Silently the two friends cared for the two injured bodies, doing what they could to make the surroundings more comfortable while the rested. It would be several hours before Morphayel could again cast the spells which had allowed him entrance to the ruined cavern, so they decided that they would stay here while Wardlaw returned to the world above to report and bring back supplies. After he left Morphayel covered the light bullet to better keep track of the health of his charges and pulled his flute from its special pocket. Soon the haunting notes of an ancient elfin ballad echoed somberly from the frozen walls.

It was several days before Almaye and the dragon were ready to leave the womb. Greysun allowed the use of her wondrous sword to heal the victims, bringing them back to full vigor. Everyone agreed it was a good thing that the dragon had not been conscious when the treatment was applied. By the time Wardlaw was able to teleport them both to the skies overlooking the ruined face of the mountain a wondrous change had worked its way through the landscape. Two days of storms, frighteningly intense, had finally passed as the weather systems of the planet righted themselves. The temperature had climbed into the temperate and the sounds of melting were heard everywhere as a world came back to life. Of course, as these goes, there was darkness within the joy.

Much of the indigenous life did not survive the thaw. Everywhere lay the hulks of huge dinosaurs which had never woken from their sudden sleep. Littered about were the bodies of their smaller cousins as well as the husks of ruined plants and trees. It became painfully obvious that more than half of the life previously existing here had been cut down. This staggering statistic held true within the Dragonian population also. Many

tribe members awoke, staggering from the soggy ground where they had been frozen to find that friends, families, even entire villages were gone, rotting away in the every warming air. The songs and smell of death was everywhere.

Not everyone felt the sadness and horror of the situation. The baby dragon was overjoyed at the quantity of food lying around. He was more upset about the damage to the mountain. The adventurers soon found out that the entire mountain was a great helm, the throne being the access point. This incredible device theoretically would allow a mature Celestial Dragon to pilot the entire planet wherever it willed. No one knew how long it had been there, by whom it had been built or what the damage would do to the functioning of the device. Only a mature Celestial Dragon could hope to activate and it would be many years before the infant would be ready. The party did what they could to help the local populace adjust to their new world, trying to avoid the baby dragon as much as possible. He was unclear really as to what exactly had happened but he knew the adventurers were strangers to his world and that they did not show him the proper respect. It was much simpler to spend much of their time on their ship, coming through the tunnel to help when the baby took one of its numerous naps. After several days they began to make preparations for departure, as they still had responsibilities to Sahjay, to repairing their ship and still had to deal with the prisoners they had taken.

On the day of their departure, Almaye met them at the dock with two of her Sisters. They had happily discovered that a number of the order had survived on Womb World, much to the gratification of Almaye. Apparently their group was cutoff from whatever organization had spawned them and she was daunted by the task of rebuilding the order from scratch, by herself, while caring for the dragon and helping the tribes people rebuild their lives. Now that she had some of her own people around her again her eyes had lost some of the haunted look they had held since emerging from the womb. She thanked them for freeing her from her captor and the dragon from its prison, especially as the endeavor had almost cost them some of their own. The dragon was too young to understand the debt he owed but she, in his stead, gave them each a twinkling, iridescent scale from its hide. "Keep them as tokens," she said, "and as identification should you run into any of his people so that they would know you have done a service to one of their kind." She paused for a moment before adding, "Be careful if you do meet another such a being. They are most wondrous, but each is ... unique. Nothing can be taken for granted." She then offered them each a gift, each appropriate to their individual likes or talents. As she came to Morphayel he bowed his head, falling to one knee and doffing his hat in his most courtly manner. "Dear lady," he stated, "it would be my most humble honor to stay with you and your people a while, learning what I can from your order and the Dragonians, and helping wherever I might be of service. I find the need to spend some time with a world under my feet and a single sky above and for all its recent tragedy yours is a lovely world. Please, allow me to serve." Upon concluding he remained bowed, head down, awaiting her answer.

“Your offer is most kind, sir, and the work ahead is so daunting that I gratefully accept your aid.” Morphayel rose then and shook her hand in agreement, saying only, “Cool!” The other members of the party were watching this entire transaction with varying amounts of shock on their faces. They all began to speak at once, including Morphayel. It was several minutes before any sort of actual communication could take place. “I’m just a little tired of ship life and would like the chance to explore a new world for a month or so. I know where you’re heading and should be able to find you with ease, considering the amount of damage we usually leave in our wake. I’ll miss you all too much to be gone for very long.” After some more discussion and leave-taking, everyone else climbed on board the Star Runner and eased her away from the dock. Morphayel waved until they could no longer see him, Pfeiffer sitting on his shoulder and Bert zipping around his head, small spurts of flame coming from his unmoving mouth. For his part Morphayel waved until the ship disappeared from even his hawk vision, the lump in his throat growing larger with each moment. As the Sky Runner finally winked away, he looked to the sky, tears brimming in his azure eyes, and sang to the stars an old elfin ballad, full of pain and longing and loneliness. The last notes drifted from his lips, chased by a great shout, a word in Ancient Backlandish that only Morphayel knew the meaning of. Turning, he wiped his eyes, nuzzling Pfeiffer and looked at Almaye. “Ready?” he said and they turned back to the house, high atop the rocky cliffs.

Ship Logs

Larenth

2 weeks from Rock when battle with the Lich Queen takes place

1 week after that when this account is penned. It is only now that I have the time and inclination to continue my log.

The fight with the Dark ship of the Undead was costly beyond measure. The material damage is obvious. The Sun Runner is destroyed. ... The enormity of that sentence to any true sailor is indescribable. While, brave and skilled, my employers are not mariners, either of water or wild space, and do not seem to have developed the bond that a true sailor has for the ship he sails. The Sun Runner has been reduced to a shattered spine between a partial fore deck and a decimated aft. There is no *ship* remaining. No mast or sails, no decks or cargo hold. Her every corner is exposed to space and no longer has the mass to hold the atmosphere the crew requires. That may be a blessing as the only thing left of the dark ship is the tainted stench of ancient, undead evil. Even if we were able to leave this place, the poisonous fumes we were forced to breathe could kill us all before port is made.

The captured wreck of the Tradesman we encountered earlier survived the battle as intact as it entered into it, which did not say much. Still it was our only hope. The deadly status of our air both fueled our efforts and hindered our efficiency. It did not help that we carried our life and death struggle under the baleful eye of the terrible planet below. We needed the atmosphere a planet would grant us but that evil mass of *something* would grant us no succor. It held a certain dark humor that our only hope lie in the small, drab companion to this frightful orb. If we could be make it there.

It did not take long to do all that we could. We took what there was from the shattered Sun Runner and bound the Tradesman into something only slightly more space worthy than a ball of wood, cloth and rope. The ship was serviceable though severely overloaded. It would sail, however ungainly, but the larger issue was in landing and, hopefully, leaving again. Once any spell jamming ship enters a larger gravity well, it starts to fall toward the larger gravity plain. A ship treated for landing will float gently down and land with little or no impact, depending on its load. The down side is that, if spell jamming ceases, the planet gravity takes over and unless the ship has been modified to deal with such forces, it will crush itself under it's own weight. The Tradesman, unlike the Sun Runner, had never been equipped to land on a planet. The crucial first aspect of such a modification is the inscribing of a "landing spell", much like a feather fall spell, into the very fabric of the ship. Runes are carved into timbers soaked in special potions. These timbers are used throughout the ship, in key structural locations. The process takes weeks and adds hundreds of thousands in gold to the cost of a ship. Structural

modifications, while more varied, were all equally costly in time and materials. Materials were limited and time was running out. There was a slim chance, though. All the lifeboats had survived the collision and lifeboats are always treated with a limited version of landing magic. It is all they can do actually. We disassembled them as carefully as possible to preserve their magic and used the timber throughout the repair work. In certain places we removed sound timbers to replace them with less robust, but treated structures. Such magic should rightly be completely intertwined with the design of the ship, but we bound it all together with nails, rope, prayer and spells and hoped that the magic would hold long enough. We named our fragile creation *Last Hope* (as a nameless ship is an accursed thing) and prepared to set sail. The owners insisted on salvaging what we could from the wrecks even as I explained that our chances for living were draining out of our lungs with every breath. They only relented when one of their own, the _____, started to cough up blood and bile. We set sail, slowly, so slowly, stuffed to the rails and dying with every stale, poisonous gasp.

By the time we reached the dusty green moon most of the crew were unconscious. The priest Ithyll was at the helm, as the magic of everyone else had been expended in the battle and on our *Last Hope*. What crew there were to man the sails could do little more than drive our vessel into the gravity well of the planet. We crossed the event horizon and started to fall, leaning to port and aft, shaking like a leaf, but still upright and intact. We managed to strike the tack to try to halt our forward motion. We fell faster than safety but slower than disaster. We wallowed fore and aft and side to side as in a choppy swell. Lifeboat magic reacts to being over-burdened much as a conventional vessel would. I began coughing and retching, as the atmosphere from the planet reacted to the poison in my lungs. The land flew up towards us. I was thrown to the deck, striking my head sharply. For an eternal moment we stopped, seeming to float on an endless green ocean. Then the magic failed. First twigs started to snap, then branches cracked, then trunks shattered as the bow slid faster and faster toward the ground. I decided to surrender to the darkness swimming at the edges of my vision. The music of snapping branches and cracking timbers lulled me off to sleep.

When I finally returned to consciousness, I found I had been placed on a pile of fragrant branches, heaped together with others not requiring immediate care. The dry, still air of the moon filled my lungs like perfume from a royal courtesan. I felt I could not possibly breathe in enough. Once I could focus on something other than the sweet breath of life, I untwined myself from my crewmates, placed a hand to my throbbing head and slowly sat up to survey our plight. Most of the crew were awake and being attended to, spread on and amongst debris from the *Last Hope*. The trees were low here, only 20-30 feet or so high. Tall enough to cushion our impact, but low enough for a relatively slow fall to the earth. This explained why no one seemed hurt beyond broken bones and bloodied faces. Our little *Hope* seemed in a similar condition. Most of the crash damage was limited to the forward and under sections of the hull, from the jagged ends of branches and trunks that scraped and pierced the timbers. The ship hung nose down, with the aft section still

cradled in the leafy boughs. She would have to be righted soon to prevent further stress damage but it seemed attainable. After all, we were, somehow, still alive. Enamored as I was with the mundane act of breathing, it was easy to be optimistic about our condition. Reality would set in soon enough.

Days later, reality was overwhelming and my head still throbbed. We had cleared an area around the *Hope* and used the trees to prop up the hull in a makeshift dry dock. Every piece of cargo or debris had been removed from the ship and organized around the edges or primitive boat yard. The trees proved to be tough and springy; hard to cut, easy to saw and impossible to work. The only animal life we found were rodents, lizards and birds, all, like the trees, small, tough and wiry. Our scouting parties had found no sign of service water, though several old hands claimed they could smell it nearby. In desperation, we chose a site most of them agreed on and set the deck hands to digging a well. In between scouting, hunting and cataloging, the owners and I discussed our options. Spells could be used to repair broken timbers, but were of limited effectiveness to bind separate pieces together. When used to bond same to same, the bond was permanent. With like to like it lasted a limited and indeterminate period of time. We would be forced to use this method for some areas of the ship, but it would require constant and stringent maintenance from one of the mages. Since local resources were inadequate for repairing the ship, the only raw materials available would be from the ship itself. This would leave us with space and structural problems, not including the main challenging of launching our vessel. A spell jamming vessel truly designed for planet fall with be able to launch itself into space, the landing magic allowing travel up or down a gravity well. Even if we could trust our jury-rigged abuse of the landing boat magic it would not be up to the task. Landing boats are truly only one-way vehicles and cannot recover space on their own. If we found sources of food and water, we would have all time we needed to make the necessary modification but we did not have access to the materials or expertise required. We would have to find another way to regain the freedom of wild space.

To that end we continued work on the *Hope*. She had been severely damaged when the original masters had run afoul of the Lich Queen. I would take a good deal of repair to give her a semblance of her original design. The owner asked why they should bother. I explained that are several major misconceptions about spell jamming. One is that the spell jamming magic drives an object through space. This is not true. The magic, centered on the helm, warps the fabric of wild space to allow a **vessel** to sail as though it were surrounded by whatever physical environment is appropriate to the design. Thus a schooner can sail or a long ship row. Vessels built exclusively for wild space, like many of the elven designs, use more arcane mechanization, but all are **ships**, built to be moved and be guided within a physical environment. If you strap a helm to a chunk of rock, you will have an impressive place to sit but that is all. Further, for any ship to have more than the most basic maneuverability, it must be built *as a spell jamming ship*. Soaked in the magics that will allow a helm to completely bond with it. Such a vessel will feel alive,

the air filled with the smells and subtle sounds of its home world. Any worthy vessel will do, but it will feel like a dead thing compared to one intended to travel wild space.

Worked continued on all fronts. Hunting tended to be a rather intensive activity, as the parties had to stray far afield to gather enough of the small animals to provide even meager rations to such a large body. Old Dorhnak proved quite the diviner, as the well diggers struck water after a day and a half of digging. The water proved sweet and cold. We surmise that all the water on the body is underground. The *Hope* was starting to look like a proper ship, at least on the outside. We had to remove much of her internal structure to use the timber for more vital systems. The only plan we could come up with for launching also required that we lighten the load as much as possible. Magic would have to be our salvation and the only magic we had to work with was to give the gift of flight to as many of the crew as possible and hope they could carry the ship out of the gravity well of the planet. There were two serious drawbacks to this plan. One is that the ship will not be able to hold the air or supplies needed for the whole voyage back to the Rock. This will necessitate more stops along the way, making the journey much longer. Secondly, some of us will have to stay behind. The launch must be done with minimal weight and extra bodies will mean extra stops along the way. Who stays and who goes is never an easy choice to make or take.

We are not alone. Our scouting party returned today with wounded. They report a small band of beings, half horse and half man. They attacked from ambush, with skill and viciousness. There will apparently be no reasoning with them. The owners are organizing a force to track them to their lair and kill them. There can be no thought of taking the ship before these people are dealt with. I have noticed that young WDK does not seem to be sleeping much. He was with the Lich Queen when she died, in truth he did deliver the killing blow. He may have taken more of that event away with him than we know.

Several days later...

Victory! If anything in our current situation could be called victorious. The war party has returned apparently triumphant and with a new ally. Keeping the larger part of the party invisible drew the creatures into an ambush. Though they were physically stronger, our weapons and training appeared superior. A few were allowed to “escape”, which allowed the party to follow them to their lair. This appears to be double fortuitous as they were just about to vent their frustration on a captive. In the middle of the melee, _____ heard the shouts of battle from within one of the primitive huts. Rushing to investigate, he found a tall man in a simple loin cloth, surrounded by bodies of the horse men. The scimitar that he held was red with bloods. As their eyes met, the other smiled and dropped his blade as his eyes rolled back in his head. It was as he fell that _____ noticed the knife handle protruding from his side. _____ carried the other outside, calling for aid. The others had killed the rest of the horse-men, to the last one. Those of

us who offered mercy were victims of viscous surprise attacks none were spared. Life offers hard choices sometimes. The bodies were dragged to a large pile of trees and brush and set on fire. Only those supplies that are of immediate value were carried back. The village will make a good camp for those left behind. Patrols and watches will stepped for the next few days to insure that all of the horse-men have been eliminated. Time to bury our dead and tend to the wounded.

The *Hope* is as ready as she will ever be. We plan to spend the next few days in rest and meditation as the mages invest themselves with the appropriate knowledge. We will have to spend several days in experimentation to determine the balance between men, ships and supplies. Our goal is to cast as many spells as possible. Lots will be drawn among the crewmen for these few positions. It may be possible to ferry others up to the ship after it achieves space. If not then those that lift will be the only crew. Our new ally still sleeps. The wound was very deep but missed any vital organs. He has lost much blood, but appears very strong and hardy. Wardlaw's medical skills seem equal to the task and we expect the new man to recover. The story of how he came to this desolate, little rock should provide much entertainment.

If the situation were not so dire, the last several days would have been wildly amusing. While we are all experience seamen, we do not have expertise in flying through the air in the manner of birds or missiles. Several of those originally chosen were not able to handle the strangeness of it all and have had to be replaced. More than several days were taken up orienting us with the new sensations and perspectives provided by this magic. While practicing, we spotted what looked like a city far in the distance. Earl the Younger flew off to investigate. When he had hiked backed two days later, he told us he calculated he had made it about half way when the magic failed. We were picking branches and twig from his skin well into the night.

Our first attempt at lifting the *Hope* did not go well. We will have to lighten the ship even more than we thought. We gained valuable information as to placement and balance of the crew. Our dry dock will need reinforcement before our next attempt, though. Our landing was none to gentle.

Several days later ...

We are ready. The last few flights have gone well. We have calculated that we should be able to achieve space and still have time to ferry other crewman and supplies aboard within the duration of the spell. We have re-constructed several lifeboats and will use the same strategy with them to ferry supplies and air from bodies along the way. We will be able to take fully three quarters of the crew with us. I will go as mage, not pilot. Young Siemonn will sit in the helm. He is young but the state of our vessel will allow no more than basic speed and maneuvering for any mage. _____ and _____ will represent the owners at port to negotiate with merchants and the Brotherhood. It will take at least half

the day to place the ship in space and several more to ferry the extra materials and personnel up after that. We now know that it is possible and that lends a certain optimism to our actions. Our newest member is alive and recovering. His story is unexpectedly disappointing. It appears he remember very little of his life before this moon. He simple awoke one morning as the captive of the horse-men, or the _____ as they call themselves. He does not even remember his name, as his captives only referred to him my some derogative of their native tongue. We have taken to calling him _____ as one reclaimed. He is growing stronger daily and has proven himself a valuable asset to those remaining behind. His knowledge of this place has already increased the standard of living here. He has explained that the city we noticed during our training flights were abandoned ruins from a very old situation. His captives did not spend much time there, convinced as they were that it was a haunted place.

3 days later ...

We watch as the moon recedes behind us. The launch went smoothly and we are under way with full rigging and meager provisions. I have plotted a course that should allow us contact with appropriate atmospheric bodies before our air becomes truly dangerous. Our first stop is where the Sun Runner died. We are hoping to take on some of the salvage that we were forced to leave behind. The owners may need it for trade depending on our reception at the Rock.

We were lucky at the battle site and recovered a good deal of what might have been lost. Three helms, one major. A large suit of armor that the owners say is animated. We found the strange tank *creature* still alive, though it was hard to tell as the normal demeanor of the thing was beyond baring. The oddest thing was that it seemed to smell of citrus, when normally the hold it occupied smelt like a combination of the worst kind of farts. We have secured everything we can carry and set sail for the Rock, at a snail's pace. The mood is no more tense than one might expect for a crew that has experienced what this one has, but there is work enough to keep everyone's mind and hand busy. Another misconception about spell jamming is that sailing in wild space is an effortless event. Any spell jamming vessel is subject to the same forces and degradation it would suffer when sailing under ideal conditions for whatever environment it's design requires. Thus it must be sound, functional and maintained in a disciplined manner. May Anghor help our shipmates down on the moon.

Wardlaw

You would think that watching that little dilapidated ship disappear into the sky would be more disturbing than it was. I truly understood that they might not be coming back, through either intent or mishap. I understood that our situation was dire. It just didn't matter. The battle with the horse-men had been exhilarating. I could hear the city in the distance calling me. I still had my books and the mysteries of this world were as

mesmerizing as the ones of wild space. Our small crew planned to move into the horse-men settlement. There were enough shelters for the crew members to share and for each of our band to have one of our own. I have been making some very significant headway on my research into the nature of the dimensional ether and could use the solitude. Perhaps the city in the distance holds some information.

One week later ...

Our new quarters were starting to shape up. The crew was settling into the routine, but we were starting to feel restless. I caught both WDK and Jarl gazing off into the distance toward the ruined city. We were going to have to head there soon.

I had odd dreams last night. Stranger still, I don't remember them. I always remember my dreams, it was part of the training we went through when graduating to the middle mysteries. All I remember from last night are images, feelings and shapes, all as fleeting and subtle as the breeze. One cannot have walked where I have and not believe that the breeze is as real as and dangerous as any breath of the dragon. Still it is a mystery for another day. Today is our first foray to the ruined city. Jarl, WDK, Greyson and I are taking a few of the crewmen and supplies enough for several days. _____ is still too weak to accompany us this time, but has advised of provided us a crude map, with an outline of the wall surrounding the city. This world is astonishingly void of landmarks. The city is really the only thing that stands out, from the endless sea of stubby, green trees. Once above them it rather impossible to become lost, if one is headed toward or away from the city. Trying to find a small party under a single tree or sheltered in a single clearing is another matter. We will try to fill in some of the gaps in his map will be our primary goal. We do not necessarily plan to enter the city on this trip.

....

The trek went well. The regularity of the landscape, in addition to the small sphere of the planet, causes distances to be distorted. Distances are either shorted or longer than we think they are. Small game is still hard to find. Water is impossible. _____'s explanation that all free water is underground becomes more plausible with each mile we walk. Luckily the crewmen we brought along are carrying more than enough for our planned march. Tomorrow we should be within sight of the city.

My pen shakes. I have not yet had an opportunity to center myself or regain the energies that have been as much a part of self as bread and water. I tell myself it is just fatigue and not the after effects of the horror that we fought tonight. Such a beast. It slunk out of the night, with no sound at all. No footsteps or breathing. Not even the leaves and branches breaking under its feet made a sound. It was huge and dragon-shaped, if the you took the skin of one and set it loose in the forest. It moved with a horrible loose-fitted gate, as if nothing held it together but the evil of its stench. Like everything else on the world it

seemed out of synch with our expectations. It seemed to move slowly, but was on us before we could react. Once crewman fell under a crushing blow from its jaw, another to the bony plates of its cable thick tail. Our first move was to scatter, as we readied weapons and spells. WDK moved from my left, while Jarl and Greyson flitted to the right. I tasted lightning in my mouth as the words of power danced across my tongue. As always, the last word was a scream as the power ripped from my stomach and out my fingertips. The brilliant, white bolts ripped across the night and held the terrible apparition in blinding net of sizzling energy. Its terrible, dead eyes held my own and I could hear its screams of rage across the silence. It was then that WDK struck with his great two-handed sword. The cutting edge glanced across the bones of its leg, but the force of the blow smashed through the leg joint, leaving it to balance on three legs. Jarl was trying to draw its attention and I saw no sign of Greyson. As it turned to strike at WDK, I noted the two crewmen using their axes on one of the larger trees. I shouted to WDK as I fathomed their plan. WDK took two hits for its terrible claws on his sword and arm, the force of which sent him to his knees. Long bloody trenches appeared on his forearm as he waved me away. My own shout of anger turned to a cough, as the dusty taste of chalked covered my throat as the next words of power swirled out of me. At first there was no effect as the thing covered me in its baleful stare and fetid breath. Then it slowly began to shake, to quiver, until each exposed bone was dancing to a different tune. It fell back on its haunches, a shaking, trembling mountain of bone, terrible in its silence. It fell directly into the path of the tree as the crewmen finished with their axes. The tree came crashing down and, for a moment, pinned the creature under its wiry trunk and leafy bough. The crewmen moved in with their axes, as a brilliant streak of light struck the great head, directly under its left eye. I recognized Greyson's feral cry of success. It gave a silent roar, as it reached out from under the tree. Catching one of the crewmen, it began to pull him in to its horrible maw. The other axe man, moved in, swinging the heavy headed weapon in an arc that intersected on the bony claw, holding his shipmate. Bony shards sprayed the clearing as the trapped crewmen winced in pain. WDK moved in as the creature reared up, throwing the tree across the clearing into Jarl. Rising to full height it threw the trapped crewman into a tree next to me. Over my own ragged breathing, I heard the wet breaking from inside his body. WDK aimed a mighty blow that mid section of the creature. The heavy blade impacted the creature's exposed spine, crushing a huge vertebrae. In retaliation a great, skinless wing brushed him aside, tearing chunks of flesh from his chest and thigh. A single short scream brought forth brilliant blue-white bolts of energy from my fingertips. They struck the creature on its bulging skull, penetrating inside and exploding from its empty sockets. A single bolt streaked from Greyson's sling, blowing bone flakes from a back foot. It swung its great tail, attempting to strike us all with the arc. Jarl fell limply behind a tree, Greyson leaped for another and I fell to the ground, pulling my enchanted robe over my head. I felt a terrible wind and heard a loud crash. Pieces of bone rained down around me. The creature had shattered its own tail against the tree Jarl had fallen behind. Inside the arc of the swing, Jarl swung, sending the terrible weight of his blade toward the creature's neck. The weapon connected just as multiple streaks of energy from both Greyson and I raced

to the bony apparition. Everything impacted at once. The air imploded as the evil magic holding the bones together disapated. They fell together with a sharp clatter, as a cold wind wove around our feet. Those of us still on our feet stood there panting and shaking. The quiet closed in around us. We gathered ourselves together and began to inspect and treat the wounded. One of the crewmen was dead. The other was horribly wounded, bleeding from the inside. Without magic, his chances were very low. WDK was holding up well, in spite of deep cuts on his arm and leg. We bound what we could and stepped off the path a ways to set up camp. There was no way we could make it back to camp tonight, though it would be good to have Brother Hugh's gentle skills at work on several of us. Greyson took the first watch, the rest of us laid down on beds of dry leaves.

...

Greyson is gone. There was no trace of her this morning and no sign of struggle or violence. We do not have time to mount a proper search. We must bring our wounded back to camp, then we can organize a search party. WDK has fashioned a stretcher, so it is time to be off.

...

It took us two days to discover that our temporary home had suffered as much violence as had our party. We arrived late in the afternoon and could smell smoke from the cook fires. Our thoughts were of warmth and comfort. Our expectations were struck cruelly down at our first sight of our small home. Cloth covered bodies were grouped on the far side of the camp. Other bodies were laying on mats and stretchers, being cared for by others, some wounded and some not. The brown smock of Brother Hugh moved from one body to another. He headed over to us as we walked in. His face was a mixture of sleeplessness and horror. We put the crewmen down and watched as Brother Hugh, clasped the man's hand, fell to his knees. His lips moved in silent prayer as his hands slowly began to glow. Very gradually, the glow intensified and spread until it covered the Hugh and the crewmen in a silvery sheath. It only lasted moments, but just watching it made my head ache less and my mood lighten. I moved toward the cooking pots, checking bandages on the way. There were several wounded and as many dead. After starting some healing teas, I moved back to where Hugh and WDK were talking.

No one apparently knew exactly what had happened. The dead men were those that had been stationed at guard last night. No one had heard anything unusual, until screams shattered the night from one of the huts. The camp exploded into confusion, as torches were knocked out and fires trampled. Soon enough new torches were lit and fires stirred to life. Extra watches were assigned for the night but nothing more happened. It was another dark mystery presented by this no longer tranquil world. The search for Greyson would have to wait until we could stabilize the situation here.

WDK

I hate recuperating. Hugh and Wardlaw say that I should rest yet another day to allow the cuts on my arm to close more naturally. Hugh's quiet touch had sealed them and taken away the burning, but his magic was limited and can be undone by too much activity. So here I sit. Wardlaw insisted that writing down my thoughts would help pass the time, but it is a dry and lifeless activity. It leads to more thinking than I am comfortable with right now. It bothers me greatly not to standing guard duty. I have not been sleeping well lately and the acute, boredom of standing a post allowed me loose my thoughts without dreaming. For it is always the same dream. Her eyes, insane with hate and bile, seemed to bore into my soul. Here hellish cackle bounced into and around my head. I can still here it I reset too long. The lipless crack of its mouth kept on screaming even after my sword had removed her head from the rest of her body. It screamed and howled as it hit the brittle deck. It cackled and spat as it rolled toward me. I think I was screaming too as I kicked it not wild space, just as the world around me exploded. After I came to, there was so much to do to I could forget to rest. In fact, I really haven't slept at all since the battle. Every time I close my eyes I see that face. I think the scream is always in my head but I only hear it when I've nothing else to do. I think I will go check on the wounded.

WARDLAW

We held up in camp for the next several days, healing and resting. There were no incidences to report, no more attacks. The weather was the same, the sky always blue, the temperature always warm. _____ has woken up and is looking stronger every day. He has mentioned that there are no native predators here larger than a ferret. The Lamia, as he called the peole who had been holding him captive, occasionally lost hunting parties for unexplained reasons, but not often. These incidences were almost always related to the ruined city. They had stopped going anywhere near there long ago. They had never had a problem at this particular encampment. We are loading up supplies for a major expedition to the city. Whatever is going on is centered on those ruins, and if the effect is spreading outward there may not be anywhere on this world that is safe. We have decided to attack the source before it whittles us down to nothing. The crew have decided to accompany us, rising mostly from the fear of fighting off further attacks. They are as hardy as any other crew of boatmen, but are hardly professional adventurers. They will serve, though and allow us to concentrate on the mysteries presented to us here.

The next day ...

We are about to start out. Litters and sledges carry our supplies. Jarl and WDK are leading scouting teams ahead and around us. It is at times like these that I miss Morphayéal and Pfiefer. I may take a short flight later in the day to gain more information. I admit that I am smiling as I remember the sight of those simple sailors trying to grasp the skills of flying.

The next day ...

Nothing new. The trek has gone well. The scouting party reports no signs of activity. We are still several days from the site of our battle with the bone beast. We are moving slowly and making sure of our camping location. I am refreshed and in touch with creation. I will stand a watch tonight.

Several days later ...

Tomorrow night we will camp within sight of the city walls. We have stopped early today so the several of us can take a flying pass around and over the city. I am excited about what we might see.

That night ...

The city is magnificent!! Many of the ancient structures still stand. The central pyramid is a marvel of engineering, still precise and massive after all these centuries. We saw what appeared to be wells, though one was the size of a small lake. Many platforms or foundations and what looked like a playing field of some kind. There was no sign of any movement or life. There is a large entry gate to what we call north, but we are planning on accessing the city through the rubble of the outer wall to the south. It should put us in over the playing field. It seems that this will give us the best overall view of the city. I need to sleep now. I will have need of all my facilities tomorrow.

A week (?) later ...

What can I say? How do I describe what has happened since last I wrote? Perhaps if I summarize our current situation. We are held up in a small building made of sand bricks, that we are calling the red building because of the faint red stripe that the base of the foundation. It is the only place we have found that will hold back the skeletal minions that surround us. We have been trapped in the ruined city for approximately a week now. More than half of the crew members, that we brought in with us, are dead or simply gone. The rest of us are wounded, tired and haggard. Some of us have seen other dimensions. Jarl has been ... changed. His new eyes see with a different light. WDK has changed yet again, at least physically. Ithyll has traveled the most, but seems the least affected. We found Greyson, but she is apparently no longer with us. She is on the side of the being that we face tomorrow. Thanks to the "library" we now know what we have to do. We already have some of the keys. We know where to find the others. We know what to with them when we have them. That may still not be enough. We find ourselves caught between a "demon" lord and the ancient gods of this place. They are battling for this world and we have been made into the linchpin for both sides. The demon lord, has offered to aid us in escaping if we just walk away now. Walk away and take with us the strange and beautiful pearl that had capped the doorway to the dimension he had been imprisoned in for thousands of years. The ancient gods simply demand that we carry out their orders. They make no promises nor do they grant any choices. I suppose that "do

what we say or die” could be considered a choice, even when not specifically uttered. I must sleep and refresh my link to the mysteries. Tomorrow we make our choice.

... later

It is hard to say how long it has been but it is over.

30 days later ...

It has been a month since we started limping back to the Rock, our crooked path delayed our arrival even more than we thought. Our arrival was the talk of the city for quite some time. The condition of our ship, our battle with the dreaded Lich Queen and the strange nature of some of our cargo were more than enough to make us the uncomfortable focus of the population’s attentions. The brotherhood was of mixed emotions at our homecoming. They were in truth overjoyed at the news that the Black Ship and her queen had been defeated and were more than happy to pay the bounty. They began to balk a bit about replacing our ship. “Repair” and “Replace” were two different things, they said. When we offered to tow the remains back and have them “repair” it from the keel up, they began to soften their position. They offered us a fine _____, space worthy enough for the journey back once one of our helms was integrated into her nature. Refitting could wait until we had rescued our marooned fellows. Much of the crew that we brought back refused to sail with us again. Our reputation is turning for the worse and we had to offer inflated wages to fill the crew to minimal status. The quality of some of these “sailors” seems questionable, at best. Still we are on our way and should be there within a week.

Two weeks later ...

I have seen many things since Master Penne first initiated me into the mysteries that comprise our world. Sailing with the current owners of the boat I sail, I have seen things that not even Master Penne could understand. We came into view of the moon yesterday after nearly two months. We did not know what to expect but were hopeful for the best. Most of the crew was new and understood only what we had told them during the journey. Our new ship was not rigged for planet fall, but we had brought with us a small tug to allow for transport between the ship and planet. We left the ship in the care of the first mate, a man I had worked with before and the only new member that I felt we could trust. From space it appeared that little had changed. As the tug fell gently down to the surface I could only hope that everything had gone well while we were gone. On our way down, we kept the sails up in order to scan the surface. After several hours we had found no sign that anyone at all was living anywhere on the surface. I was not disheartened yet. Even though it was a small moon, it was a large place to search.

By our third day, we saw the city. It seemed different from my memory of it. Flatter somehow. We plotted our course carefully so that we would be fully over it before we

landed. They were truly ancient ruins. Most of the buildings were more rubble than structures. The large pyramid in middle was the only

Jarl

Sure, walk over and say Hi to the nice elfin lady. She has the look of the Tarlangiian Cluster on her and would probably welcome the company of someone from back home.” He knew that he would enjoy such company, something he had never really expected of himself, seeing how eager he had been to leave. So he walked, sat down, and rattled off some snappy patter to a thankful and agreeable audience. His memory seemed to dissolve at this point into fuzzy, non-linear images of green eyes, smoky liqueur, and several different pairs of boots. He woke up in his bunk, without his clothes, his purse or anything else to call his own except the slamming pain just behind his eyes. He considered himself lucky he had transferred most of his belongings to the Aireezoynahh yesterday when he signed on as crew. . Lucky until 5 days later when the Vikings took the ship and killed everyone else on board. The incident did provide him the happy circumstance of being reunited with the lovely elfin maid with the green eyes, gray skin and most of his walk around money. Unfortunately they were reacquainting tied securely in the hold of the Viking ship. They were having quite a lively interlude when the entire ship jumped and rolled in a way no space faring vessel ever should. The crashes, explosions, running feet and curses simply provided dramatic prelude to the fiery deck falling down on top of them with a cracking roar. The main debris missed them happily, giving the Jarl the chance to experience the aroma of his flesh cooking over a slow flame as he attempted to burn away the ropes on his wrists. It was painful but educational. Flipping to his feet, no time to tend to his burns, Jarl surveyed the situation. Flame all around, the vastness of Wildspace visible in the gaping hole that was the ceiling, sounds from above that were obviously those of a battle and him standing in the middle of the pirate treasure room. What to do, what to do. On his way to the chest where the captain kept the haul he felt was truly valuable he gave a kick to the barrel his lovely companion was trying to worm her way free from. He could almost believe the smile she gave him was genuine as she dove for a disheveled knapsack the crew had thrown in the corner. With a squeal of joy she grabbed it firmly in one hand as she began to look around. Their eyes met in mutual professional glee, bringing a smile to both their faces others would have found completely inappropriate to the situation. They scrambled around, grabbing everything their practiced eyes cataloged as worthy, until a particularly long shudder and crack combination was followed by the deck tilting wildly. With unspoken cooperation they tossed their gear through the still burning hole and vaulted to the upper deck. Jarl enjoyed a little chaos as much as the next person but this was a little much. The rigging was ablaze, the mast had fallen across the railing and onto another ship and there were bodies littered everywhere. One of the largest men Jarl had ever seen was trying to move the mast away from the other ship which was catching on fire herself. Making one of those instant decision he usually ended up regretting, Jarl sprinted to grab the other side of the timber and help shove it aside. Just as he arrived though, one of the Viking mates (a particularly ugly little piece of work name Hobsin) swung down on a

burning section of the upper mainsail and slammed into the back of Jarl's newly elected companion. Jarl could empathize with the surprised look on his face as his heavy armored form crashed through the damaged railing. He empathized so much that he continued the moment of the swinging mast timber and allowed it to crash into the gloating Viking, who also wore a particularly puzzled expression as he went over the side.

The smoke was thick and heavy, the sounds of battle were giving way to more and more crashes as the deck shuddered with more finality under his feet. Rolling away from the burning cross beam, moments before it continued its way through the deck, allowed Jarl to once again meet up with his lovely traveling companion. Smiling shyly she handed him the sack he had packed below and with lowering eyelashes pointed out the eminent departure of the other vessel. Each step they took left behind empty air as the deck disintegrated beneath them. Jarl took a moment to consider the wall of flame they were running towards, but then decided that it was a trivial concern compared with the having no idea where he was about to land. One. Two. Jump-tuck-roll and slide. He rated himself for form and difficulty and decided it would have taken a silver. A worthy effort with just enough room for improvement. And of course he was alive. But where the Timarouhorn was he?

Emails

Gaming on the 22nd is on !!! ... at Gary's house

Thursday, June 25, 2015
11:38 PM

Subject	Gaming on the 22nd is on !!! ... at Gary's house
From	Jay Smith
To	jjensen; 4835589; finco; gephartj; schmidtg
Sent	Thursday, March 14, 1996 7:08 PM
Attachments	<<housestory.doc>> <<icestory.doc>>

Trying to learn from past events Gary is in a stay-home-but-can-play situation so I have made the unilateral decision to move the game to his house. If this is a problem for anyone let me know and we will have to move to alternate dates.

I will have experience for everyone for, i guess since we left the beyonder asteroid, so we can deal with that. Attached are the story forms of how you came to the ice world and what happened after. The first I think I mailed before the last session but I managed to correct the spelling mistakes in this version. The second picks up where that left off (I think) and actually carries on into leaving the asteroid on the Star Runner. Nothing is set in stone, it still needs to played out, this just made good copy.

Hope you enjoy it and see everyone at Gary's on the 22nd.

jay

RE: Gaming on the 22nd is on !!! ... at Gary's house

Thursday, June 25, 2015
11:41 PM

Subject	RE: Gaming on the 22nd is on !!! ... at Gary's house
From	Jay Smith
To	jjensen
Sent	Friday, March 15, 1996 8:36 PM
Attachments	<<ICESTORY.DOC>> <<icestory2.doc>>

It looked like I had somehow hacked up the copy I sent out to everyone so let me try this again.

LET THE GAME BEGIN !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (or continue, or resume or)

Thursday, June 25, 2015
11:45 PM

Subject	LET THE GAME BEGIN !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (or continue, or resume or)
From	"Jay Smith (Meridian Partners)"
To	""Gary""; ""Jerry""; ""Joe""; ""John""; ""Lynda""
Sent	Wednesday, June 26, 1996 1:05 PM

X-Mailer: Microsoft Exchange Server Internet Mail Connector Version 4.0.838.14

Encoding: 15 TEXT

Friday June 5th, at the lovely Crown Hill (not Ballard) residence of Lynda and myself at 1:00'ish.

To remind everyone you have all finished up your training, obtained documents giving you the status of sanctioned thugs, repaired your ship, hired a crew and are preparing to leave the port on the ROCK for parts that have yet to be determined.

If anyone would like to do anything before you leave please let me know before the 5th and we will resolve it.

cool

Jay

RE: hey what's happening ???

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:13 AM

Subject	RE: hey what's happening ???
From	Jerry Jensen
To	Jay Smith
Sent	Thursday, August 08, 1996 3:23 PM

The vacation was fine, the girls enjoyed Tennessee. I have the Bert scenario ready whenever you are. Depending on what you do, it may not take long....when are you available?

I have certainly enjoyed your stint as DM. I suppose good things come to an end sometime.

Jerry

From: Jay Smith

To: jerry

Subject: hey what's happening ???

Date: Thursday, August 08, 1996 11:39AM

MIME-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII

hi there,

hope everyone at the Jensen household is well and enjoying the summer.
Everyone made it back from vacation OK I assume.

Have you had the chance to consider playing the Bert scenario sometime.
After this weekend work goes off the deadline crunch and I will have some time available.

also just a note, i would like to sluff off the DM responsibilities to someone. It doesn't have to be for next time, but certainly after that.
Just rather play for a while.

let me know.

take care,

jay

RE: anybody thought of a time yet

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:13 AM

Subject	RE: anybody thought of a time yet
From	Jerry Jensen
To	Jay Smith; gamers -- gary; jerry; joe; john; lynda
Sent	Tuesday, August 13, 1996 11:18 AM

My schedule looks like it supports the 30th.

After considering the last adventure, Wardlaw realized that there may be survivors of the Sculpin on Gnibble. Juju zombies are the results of sorcery, not merely create undead. Perhaps they need a live subject. At any rate, if the Nex's ship log shows survivors, then a side trip to Gnibble (insanely dangerous) may be in order after some repair on Endor.

Jerry

Re: Adventure Text part 1

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:14 AM

Subject	Re: Adventure Text part 1
---------	----------------------------------

From	Jerry Jensen
To	Paul Heller
Sent	Monday, August 19, 1996 11:18 AM

> > Before I left, I said I'd send some Word (6.0) docs of my AD&D
> > groups latest
> > adventure. This portion of our group's adventure sort of starts in
> > the middle of things.

>.. by chance do you have any of the earlier logs? Sounded like the
>adventures have been interesting. Any idea why the throne (which I
>assume was the pilots chair) had to be blown apart (ok, cracked)? And
>where the "other dragon" went to (or died?).

Oh yes, the adventures have been interesting; but alas, they weren't scribed. Instead they remain oral tradition. As to the throne, indeed it was a pilots chair, capable of moving the entire planet so long as the spelljammer was an astral dragon. Sadly, the devastation was completely unnecessary. Had we left the freezing portal alone, it would have closed without incident in about a week. In fact, the portal would have been unaffected by an individual attack. It was the combined attack that delivered sufficient damage that caused instability and tearing that caused the mighty blast. If only adventurers could leave well enough alone, the world would be a better place.

As to the other dragon, we think it died during our attack. Or at least, we think it was a dragon. It is something of a mystery, as we had to make a very hasty retreat.

Catch you later.

Jerry

ooops ...

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:15 AM

Subject	ooops ...
From	Jay Smith
To	jerry
Sent	Wednesday, August 21, 1996 4:04 PM

MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII

that's sort of the first thing i thought when old bert started to hit puberty. for some reason i really had not considered that bigby had bound a real, nasty dragon (let alone

a red one) up and made a toy out of him. bigby either had a great sense of humor or a real mean streak.

i have worked out a plan. it is grounded in the idea that no way am i going to let this thing wreak havok amongst the draconians and the swanmays. it also goes along with the general feeling that ever since he ended up with these two swords, this has sort of been the moment morph has been waiting for.

it will have to start out with getting away. i did not react properly and wasted some time so that i would like to have an opportunity for some more prep work. Flight and wraithform will hopefully provide the means. mirror images can be called up if needed. Once away i would like to use my hawk vision to keep tabs on bert, i should be ablt to do so from quite a distance. my hope is that he will go off to find a lair or something huge and non-sentient to eat and then take a little nap (maybe it is tiring coming out of a spell like that). if he does than i will follow him from as far away as possible (a mile or two) for as long as I can. if he gets away that's ok. i'm sure i can find him later. it would be a nice thing to be able to warn the folk i have be staying with to have a bolt hole ready.

i was wondering if it would be possible to do any of this online before monday to ensure that we have enough time to finish up, seeing as how these things always tend to take longer than they 'ought' and i would like to start the other adventure as on time as possible.

whaddayathink?

jay

Morphayell and the Dragon

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:16 AM

Subject	Morphayell and the Dragon
From	Jay Smith
To	""jerry""
Sent	Wednesday, March 05, 1997 2:43 PM

Date: Wed, 5 Mar 1997 12:40:47 -0800
X-Mailer: Microsoft Exchange Server Internet Mail Connector Version 4.0.993.5
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

hey hey !!!!

I was thinking about this the other day and I think that the first thing that I (Morph) should do is pass out. He took a huge amount of burn damage and shock alone should probably make him pretty woozy, especially after the adrenaline wears off. If there is some kind of applicable saving throw or system shock to see how long he can stay up or how long he goes down for, I am cool with that.

It just seems that since we are off on our own here we can stand to throw in a little more (and I apologize for saying this) reality.

Jay

RE: Friday's Session

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:17 AM

Subject	RE: Friday's Session
From	Jay Smith
To	"Jerry Jensen"
Sent	Wednesday, March 12, 1997 11:05 AM

Date: Wed, 12 Mar 1997 09:03:55 -0800

X-Mailer: Microsoft Exchange Server Internet Mail Connector Version 4.0.993.5

MIME-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

Hey guy. It seemed to go well enough. A lot of ground seemed to be covered but not much really happened. Since we get together so rarely I think we all have to be there for me to be completely into it. As it was you did not really miss much other than scene changes. The short version would be that you spent the night in the small well-furnished room, woke up and found that Jar could only see in x-ray vision (no color, no substance, just infinite outlines) It took him a while to figure it out, then you left the room and did a quick re-search of the "Observatory" building. When you left you found that the the sky had disappeared, replaced by a dull red glow that either went on forever or stopped at the boundaries of the town. The ground had become somewhat UN-firm and slightly greed. There was no sign of a single living being or plant. Everything had become shades of red and black. You spent some time checking out the large pool where you found a bunch of rubies and were attacked by mud-men. You tried to leave through the gate and it attacked you. You killed it but in the process completely blocked that egress. You spent time searching the building among the many columns and found a tiny sarcophagus, but could not find a way to open it.

That is where things ended as far as I can remember it at the moment.
The others may remember or can fill in some details.

Jay

RE: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...

Friday, June 26, 2015
12:27 AM

Subject	RE: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...
From	Jay Smith
To	"Jerry Jensen"
Sent	Friday, February 06, 1998 11:06 AM

X-Mailer: Internet Mail Service (5.0.1458.49)
Content-Type: text/plain;
charset="iso-8859-1"

So if I can't knock the cage over (I assume swinging/leaping at/on as close to the top as possible doesn't help), I am left with the door. I can't remember how it was locked. How far away are the boiling ichor pools? How far away is the dragon for that matter?

(by the way, NICE word, "ichor". Well used)

From: Jerry Jensen

Sent: Friday, February 06, 1998 10:47 AM

To: Jay Smith

Subject: RE: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...

I know that your CO is at least 15, so you are shaking from shock as you attend your wounds, but not unconscious. You discover you cannot knock the cage over. It appears to be too heavy for your current weight to affect. You also discover that your special mental link with Pfeiffer is not currently active, nor do your swords have that magical keenness or aura about them. Pfeiffer does fly back and land to discover your plight, but you cannot communicate other than through verbal and visual methods. The dragon remains in its collapsed, ruined state. The ichor has ceased to literally boil from its wounds. You see the smoldering ichor channels burned through the scales as they gave way before the flood. The pools on the ground still boil and seethe...as if the planet abhors the unnatural combination.

Jerry

From: Jay Smith[\[SMTP:jsmith@metapath.com\]](mailto:jsmith@metapath.com)

Sent: Friday, February 06, 1998 8:02 AM

To: "Jerry Jensen"

Subject: RE: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...

X-Mailer: Internet Mail Service (5.0.1458.49)
Content-Type: text/plain;
charset="iso-8859-1"

Hey greetings from the file of long lost emails. I finally rolled for this. I rolled a 10 but it just occurred to me that I didn't look up his CO so it is probably not worth much without it. How's the house building going?

> -----Original Message-----
> From: Jerry Jensen [SMTP:JJENSEN@korry.com]
> Sent: Wednesday, October 01, 1997 7:42 AM
> To: Jay Smith
> Subject: RE: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...
>
>
> Jay,
> Greetings. I did get this message. I haven't fallen off the end of
> the earth. I've just been too busy to think much lately.
> Let's see...
> A CO check is fair. Let me know the results.
>
> Jerry
> -----
> From: Jay Smith
> To: "jerry"
> Subject: I have been thinking about this for a while now ...
> Date: Wednesday, September 10, 1997 4:48PM
>
> 4.0.995.52
> MIME-Version: 1.0
> Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
> Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
>
>
> I have been thinking about this for a while now and I wanted to send
> it off to you while I was actively thinking about it.
>
> What Morphayael would like to do in response to my current
> circumstances.
>
> First I think it would be appropriate if I were to attempt not to pass
> out. I've taken quite a bit of damage and am not hanging on by that
> much. A CO or system shock roll sounds only fair to me.
>
> After that, if I stay conscious or if nothing changes before I wake up
> I would like to do the following.
> (note: LL refers to the Elvin god in the old books. I just can't
> remember his/her name right now)
>
> Can I knock the cage over ?
>
> If so then can I stick my feet between the bars? The object here is
> to hoist the cage onto my shoulders and walk/drag it along. Perhaps
> Pfeiffer can bring me an appropriate pole or stick to wedge between
> the bars to assist. Perhaps Pfeiffer can actually help carry some of
> the weight by grabbing and flying, but it is probably too heavy for
> that.
>
> If I cannot walk with the cage I will attempt to roll it like a
> hamster wheel.
>
> The object here is to move the cage up to the dragon then onto the
> dragon then into the dragon perhaps via a nostril (my image has it
> plenty big enough). The end goal is to make my way as close to the
> brain as possible and bury both swords as deeply as possible into it.
> All during this process I would like to speak to LL. I would like to

> thank him for my life and the beauty of the world I have lived in as
 > well as the blessing of my companions and especially for Pfeiffer, my
 > truest and closest of friends. I can relate stories of our adventures
 > and little moments, admit to regrets, etc. I would like to thank him
 > for leading me to this moment of destiny where the meaning of my life
 > comes to completion. I would like to thank him for the opportunity to
 > rid the world of this evil, for the undeserved honor of performing
 > this deed. As the time draws near to the point where I cannot go any
 > further I would like to sing the story of his own great triumph. At
 > the end, as I plunge both Lady Red and Lady Ice into the dragon flesh,
 > I would commit my life to his keeping and offer this kill to him,
 > asking only that he watch over Pfeiffer. One way or another I will
 > probably pass out at this point.
 >
 > Basically Morphayéal has decided that slaying this dragon is the
 > reason I had been born and has lived. my weapons, magic, hobbies and
 > life decisions have lead irrevocably to this moment. This is the
 > defining moment of his life and he expects to either die or be reborn,
 > and joyfully accepts either outcome. His only concern is to make sure
 > that the dragon is, in fact, dead. The long trek to the brain feels
 > appropriately heroic, but if he has to, anywhere along the line will
 > do as long as he can cause enough damage. After that he will either be
 > dead or I won't, having performed a heroic deed of epic proportions in
 > an incredibly dramatic manner. This is really as far along as he has
 > thought things out.
 >
 > From a player stand point I have my own preferences, but am
 > comfortable with any outcome. It feels right. Even in fantasy, shit
 > happens and it has actually gone much better than I had any right to
 > expect. If he dies, he's dead and I was one of most fun characters I
 > have ever run. If he makes it, intervention or no we will just have
 > to deal with it then.
 >
 >
 >

FW: wdk, ithyll, wardlaw, jarl and how they found themselves in t heir current situation and what they will do now

Friday, June 26, 2015
 12:45 AM

Subject	FW: wdk, ithyll, wardlaw, jarl and how they found themselves in t heir current situation and what they will do now
From	Jay Smith
To	'John Gephart (Volt Computer)'
Cc	'joe'; 'gary'; 'jerry'
Sent	Monday, December 13, 1999 4:34 PM

Attachments	<<logbook.doc>>
-------------	-----------------

DUDE !!!!!!!!!!!!!

I totally did not have the right address for you. I have been trying to reach you for weeks. I left messages!! are you well? are you both ok??!!

anyway, read the story. let me know

Joe and Jerry replied back in the positive but we are obviously talking next year. gary replied via joe.

welcome back

Jay

-----Added Message-----

Jay,

I haven't read the log yet, but it looks interesting. By the way, the ship was the Sky Runner. The Sky Runner was such an unbelievably awesome ship, an extraordinary find that was under appreciated. A pity to see it wrecked so badly.... Anyway, I am working tons of overtime right now and for the rest of this year. However, I don't work on Sundays. I could create an open afternoon and evening with a couple of week notice (not this Sunday, but maybe the next). Saturdays are filled. Otherwise, weekday evenings aren't open until around a start time of 7:00. Tuesdays are always booked up. Other weekday eves are often booked. If a Sunday doesn't work, I can give some evening dates.

Jerry

-----Original Message-----

From: Jay Smith

Sent: Tuesday, November 09, 1999 6:06 AM

To: Jay Smith

Subject: wdk, ithyll, wardlaw, jarl and how they found themselves in their current situation and what they will do now

what are the odds of coming together for a social evening of discussion and imagination? I have mapped out a story that takes us to and beyond where we were many years ago, but there are some holes that need filling and a decision that needs to be made to determine which ending the story takes.

There will be some role-playing and some dice rolling, but no fighting or details. Once we have decision points and outcomes we can fill in the details with artistic license. The goal is to wrap up the current line so the we can start fresh should we decide to play again.

<<logbook.doc>>

One Year Later ... Game data

Friday, June 26, 2015

12:54 AM

Subject	Game data
From	Finco
To	Jensen, Jerry; John Gephart
Sent	Tuesday, December 05, 2000 10:53 PM

Just a quick update on what happened. Really didn't do all that much. No encounters.

We sold the Orbis (sp?). 50,000Gold
Sold the Honey Wood from the ship we found.19,000G Talked about selling the black book and the log book.
Found a platinum head band. It came from a mind flair (Abjuration & Necromancy) but the magic was dormant.
We also have 21 arrows that flame and will stick in stone.
Have 300,000 thousand in gems that didn't turn back into blood.
We also gave our cargo back to the people it belonged to.
They wouldn't repair the Sky Runner again, but set us up with a Hammerhead or Dolphin ship.

We each gained 48,000 experience points.

Jerry,

Wardlaw picked up the ability to do a feather fall once per day and your hair now has the Einstein look. You can also hear the wind talking to you. We also had you spend as much time as you could in the library.

You have been down loaded with lots of data on:
Alternate Planes (The Astral Dragons Egg deals with alternate planes) Info on the blood gems.
Looked for info on spells but they were completely religious based.
Astral Dragons

John

Your character can now see in:
Ultra violet
Superior Inferred
Aura's
and probable some more that I cannot remember.
He can change between them but gets a headache if he does in often.

hi everyone,

I hope everyone had a good time on Friday, I know I did even though the ship to ship battle took longer than it might have.

As a synopsis:

The ship was repaired, outfitted and refitted at great cost. Two magical staves have been recharged as group treasure and are usable by anyone, I believe. A crew was hired and cargo found, an unusually heavy crate with no markings bound for the Spectre at the very edge of this crystalline sphere. After some personal business, from which WDK reappeared with a new look and a new bow, the good ship SkyRunner was launched. After several days in tactical movement, acquainting the crew with the ship, each other and yourselves, the command was given and the SkyRunner spelljammed its way toward the end of this universe.

Six days into the journey, the ship suddenly reduced speed to tactical. In the far background was the angry red gas giant Gribbon. In the foreground, a little over a 1000' away from you, was the form of a Tradesman vessel, slowly tumbling end over end. Investigation showed a wrecked ship, with signs of a fierce struggle. The ship log identified the vessel as the Sculpin. While Wardlaw, WDK, and Ithyll surveyed the ship, the others on board the SkyRunner were assaulted by another galleon, ominously painted red and black, running an inordinate amount of sails and firing an inordinate amount of guns.

Initial salvos were very damaging. The SkyRunner began maneuvering away but discovered that while their maneuverability was well matched the other ship was far faster. The crew on the Sculpin fired what weapons they could, and succeeded in damaging the enemy vessel, before Wardlaw and WDK teleported over to the red ship. There they found a ship full of the undead, zombie remains of other sailors that had fallen in before this dread vessel. They also found the captain and spelljammer of the vessel, a female lich dressed in the rotting garments of ancient nobility. Their ship in danger they attacked swiftly.

A throbbing bones spell from Wardlaw was immediately followed by the deadly blades of WDK, singing their song of death. For his efforts WDK was repeatedly slammed into the railing by the ram-like force emanating from a ring on the lich's finger. Wardlaw found himself ground zero for 14 undead cross bow archers. Ithyll, from on board the otherwise deserted Sculpin, landed a telling blow with the single remaining catapult, crippling the enemy ship by taking out the main mast. Finally, on her last legs and in a blinding snow storm the lich made her final curse on the living when she rammed her ship into the broadside of the SkyRunner.

No one knows why or how the SkyRunner held together as most of the midsection of the ship disappeared in a shower of splinters and pieces. When the snow finally stopped it left behind a very damp, much damaged vessel with a gravity plane filled with debris. WDK awoke to find the helm of the enemy ship empty except for a necklace consisting solely of a cheap looking gem on a leather thong. Smashing it released the sickly brown aura of the lich, consigning her to oblivion, much to the relief of everyone (maybe even the lich).

The SkyRunner was immediately made as well as she could be in space with minimal supplies. Much of the repair materials were lost in the final crash. Salvage teams recovered the Beholder Suit of armor, as well as two jamming helms from the cursed ship. The log book of that ship was also found, naming her the Nex. The rest of the book was too water logged to be read at this time. In addition the ring and wand that the lich had used against WDK and Wardlaw were recovered as was her spell book.

The ship's atmosphere had been severely comprised during the encounter as well as her structural integrity. It was determined that one of the moons of Gnable was close enough for a short journey and that it contained the necessary elements for

completing repairs on the vessel. With Ithyll at the helm of the Sculpin the two ships are limping their way to the forest moon of Endor for repair and replenishment.

that's it so far. Let me know when the next opening for game time might be. If we could play a little more often it might lessen the urge to run so late. Talk to you later,

jay