

The final turn of Quantum Entanglement ...

Gamers, my sincere apologies for the huge delay in the publishing of this final turn.

I had it written up in rough draft form some time ago. Alas, given my Army duties, there has not been any free time at all in the past five or six months. Part of it as well is that I was worried about getting the diction and grammar 100% correct, but eventually realized that “better is the enemy of good enough,” and this document is good enough.

The intent of this final turn is to close out the Quantum Entanglement and Bold Beginnings storylines to include: Glog, Perra, Thivinen, Roland, and Ashe, but it is also to help integrate your Player Characters (PCs) in the vast mosaic of the world of Zhalindor. One of the cool things about Zhalindor is that “legacy PCs” are active in the world, and the current PCs have the chance to run into and interact with these denizens of legend. Your PCs now have attained that same measure of immortality, and this final turn will give you context.

Your PCs’ stories are full of intersections with the other immortals of Zhalindor and the march of Fate.

Robert, Kel, and Sam (and previous players from Bold Beginnings) have asked if this is the “end for Zhalindor.” My answer is a two-fold “no.” First, I plan on running sessions at least once per year in Zhalindor to keep personally active in the world, but more importantly, since the late 1970s, there have been dozens of campaigns taking place in Zhalindor. I had the honor of introducing you to the world, but it belongs to all of you now. You are Zhalindor.

The turn is divided into sections and will (eventually) appear in separate web pages. One of my initial thoughts was to do maps, diagrams, pictures of artifacts, etc. (much like we had every session in our Zhalindor campaign); alas time slipped away, and if I don’t get this turn out now then there is no telling when it would finally be done.

On to the turn ... there will be some common Party portions, and then, there will be sections done about individual Party members or pairs of Party members in the future.

We begin with a common Party section.

Return from the Imperium of Man...

The ride down to the planet surface was a bumpy one. Branham guided the craft expertly weaving and dodging to get the Party safely to the portal on this world. Branham notes a display showing a force field of unknown origins and utilizing a mysterious power source that appears to be surrounding something that has the rough cast of “a Circle of Stones.”

Branham tells the Party to “brace for impact.” The ship smashes into the ground and slaloms over a rolling field before crashing into an a copse of trees. “There goes any element of surprise,” Thivinen notes for the group.

“And, on that note, scanners show that we are not alone.” Branham points to angry red blobs converging on the center of the screen – the location of the downed ship.

Glog and Roland are sporting for a fight. They are not disappointed. All the forces that the Chaos Daemons could muster on short order are sent against our intrepid Party ... there are Orks, Eldar, and not a few Daemons. The moment that the ramp lowers with a loud clang, the horde rushes the Party.

The atmosphere is an angry red, and air of this world has a strong, ozone like scent to it – akin to the smell of the air in a thunderstorm.

Ashe, Branham, and Thivinen offer supporting fires to prevent Glog and Roland from being surrounded while our two doughty fighters carve a path from the ship to the edge of the force field some two hundred meters away.

It is a tough fight, but the Party is not about to be deterred by a few daemons when their chance to return home is so close. As Glog and Roland cut down the last two Ork war bosses, the entryway into the glowing force field is revealed. The Party rushes enmasse the last few dozen meters to enter the glowing hemisphere.

A faint buzzing can be heard all around the Party as it plunges into the force field enclosed area.

The “hole” the Party entered through closes as soon as Thivinen is through. A dozen or more hostile creatures glare balefully and impotently at the Party as it made its way deeper into the strange energies of the enclosure.

Branham notes the evidences of sentient created items in abundance. These items increase in density as the Party moves closer to the center of the force field. There are silvery pylons that look like frozen flows of liquid metal. These are covered with lightly glowing runes and sigils in spidery, flowing lines that seem to imply a language of some type. Thivinen and Ashe recognize it as being related to the language used during the Dawn Age when the mortal races were new in Zhalindor.

As the Party gets closer to the Circle of Stones at the center of the field, the more their Zhalindorian powers come back to them. At last, the group stands before the Circle. The force field center towers some 150 meters above the Party. The rest of the sky is reduced to a light pink through the distortion of the field.

The entire Circle is made of the silvery pylons. In addition to the flowing lines of script, there are pictographs showing creatures with rounded heads and sporting wings coming out of their shoulders. The pictographs show bipedal creatures bearing all manner of

tools and gadgets. A fine web of crystalline, multi-colored, translucent material crisscrosses the pylons. It looks like cold, spun glass. It is entirely dark, devoid of light or visible energy. Occasionally the scene is punctuated by a flash of light as the horde outside hurtles something against the field.

Branham says, "I have seen something like this before ... it is from the Ancients ... in MY universe ... they lived some 200,000 years before my people went to the stars ... they seeded humans throughout my galaxy ... they were related to ... well ... Grandfather Mortal ... they looked something sort of like Dragon-newts ... they built amazingly complex things. They just disappeared in a great war. It is weird for me to be standing in a complex that was built by the race that took ..."

His words just trail off; he is lost in thought.

Thivinen says, "Um, a-hum! Branham, I am sure that this is all fascinating for you, but how do we get home? The Circle of Stones back home constantly had power playing over its surface. This appears to be inert."

Ashe says, "I've read about crystalline machines and devices before that were powered by psychic energy. Branham, can you and I get this device started?"

Branham looks meaningfully at Ashe. "I believe do we have something that can power this device."

Ashe looks at Branham with both regret and resolve. "This is where Bert comes in isn't it?" Thivinen quotes the Poem, but Ashe shoots Thivinen a glance that indicates that Ashe is "less than happy" about Thivinen's attempt at "helping."

"One more thing," Branham notes, "when the portal is activated, I am more or less certain that the force field will be deactivated. We probably won't have much time."

To punctuate the last point, light flashes as large objects crash into the side of the force field.

"Let's do this!" Glog says.

"Right!" Roland readies his weapons.

With great tenderness, Ashe places Bert in Branham's hand, and Ashe asks, "will Bert and I meet again?"

"Yes, but not in this timeline," and with that the ancient Psychic sets about inserting Bert into the mechanism to activate the portal.

Thivinen and Ashe move next to Branham to aid in restarting the primordial machinery.

True to Branham's prediction, the force field dissipates the moment Bert is touched to the pylons. (Ashe later recalled Thivinen muttering, "as foretold by the prophecy," but Thivinen always denied this publicly.)

Glog and Roland move to hold back the horrors converging on the Party trying to give Branham, Ashe, and Thivinen a chance to get the device working.

Swords, axes, claws, and hammer clash as Roland and Glog hold back the daemon-spawn.

A familiar thrum fills the air as the portal opens.

"Come on," Thivinen and Branham yell to the fighters. Ashe and Thivinen dash through the glowing tear in the fabric of the universe. Branham holds his hand out and sends a wave of energy to push back the hordes as Roland and Glog bound toward the portal. Roland hesitates and then physically picks up the scurrying dwarf and runs through the gateway.

Branham shouts, "tell that blackheart Phineas, 'metal comes to life and trumps darkness.'"

The portal shuts behind the Party.

Branham is not with them.

An Interlude on the Astral Plane ...

The Party seems to fall inward and outward at the same time just as they did when coming to this universe. The group is deposited after a brief fall on a glowing plane of fog. The ozone smell and ruby red of the gateway world are gone. Everything is white, light, and muffled in the sparkling Astral fog stretching in all directions from the Party.

Roland looks around and notes that Glog is not there. The Party starts combing the area in the swirling fog and sparkling lights, but after a few moments Glog is spotted walking towards the group.

"Where were you?" Ashe asks.

Glog shakes his head, "I honestly don't know. I had the strangest experience ... dream ... something just now." Glog pauses and then continues, "I found myself in a tall, thin humanoid body in an underground labyrinth somewhere. I wandered around until I came upon an adventuring Party. When we emerged, it seemed like it was Zhalindor – the sun and the sky looked like our home, but it must've been somewhere far, far to the south. There was a jungle in the area. It was very hot and humid. This group of people was

speaking to me in a strange language, it was kind of like Tumerian, but it had a more of a lilting, sing song feel to it. It was clearly a party. No ordinary group would have such a diverse makeup.

“That is not even the strangest part. That night, this party, who appeared to be helping me up to that point, handed me over to a giant herd of rodents.”

“The rodents were giant sized?” Thivinen asked.

“*sigh*” No, there were lots and lots of small, regular sized, but really vicious rodents. I don’t really want to think about what happened next.” Glog visibly shudders.

“Some nice cleric or mage resurrected me and sent me back into the misty hallways, and I ended up here. I wonder what it means?”

Ashe ventures, “I guess that the bunny rabbits, squirrels, and mice will never forgive us for taking away their ability to speak.”

“That is not quite the way it actually happened,” Thivinen states with some forcefulness.

Roland is about to join in, but then he points behind Glog and says, “is that lady Perra?”

Indeed it is.

Lady Perra is flanked by a brace of what appear to be bipedal “salamanders.” Their bodies are tattooed in a riot of colors, swirls, and unrecognizable glyphs and sigils. Additionally, these creatures are carrying what the Party has come to recognize as high-technology. An earthy, swampy odor accompanies their arrival.

Ashe says, “Newtlings?!?”

Lady Perra carries a large cluster of what appear as oversized, boiled and peeled translucent blue eggs in the crook of her right arm as she gestures with her left hand to the creatures to either side of her and says, “they call themselves the Slaan. They claim to be the first race that rose to the stars in this universe, or more accurately this galaxy as they claim that there are many galaxies in this universe.

“Remember when we fought the Daemon Lord?”

The Party members nod their heads as they recall that fateful fight.

“These were the creatures that rescued me. They refer to me as the ‘egg mother’ and have treated me with great reverence. They told me that when the Party returned to Zhalindor, I should accompany you.”

Glog asks, “what is their interest in Zhalindor? Those things you are carrying look like eggs. The last time we took a cluster of eggs somewhere at someone else’s behest, we ended up taking – well, helping to take, the power of speech away from rodents. I can tell you that that has been a painful decision for me personally.”

Glog rubbed absentmindedly at his tummy and wrists.

Lady Perra gently pats the eggs. “Remember the Old Ones – the Old Ones in Zhalindor? The Slaan claim to have originally come from a paradise world that was filled with magic. They were initially protected and led by beings that we would call dragons. Eventually, many of these Slaan were sent from that paradise to this galaxy through some type of portal. When they reached this galaxy, they began to build a civilization, a civilization that spanned nearly an uncountable number of stars. Then came the Old Ones, and there was a great war. The Slaan were pushed back in battle after battle. Eventually when all seemed lost, their foes pulled back and seemed to vanish, and the Slaan science told them that these Old Ones had left this universe entirely, leaving behind the lesser creatures that we have fought. A Slaan myth grew up that the Old Ones had gone to destroy the paradise world where the Slaan race was birthed.

“In their myth, the ‘all mother’ comes from the paradise world to reclaim the egg that is their birth, the origin of their entire race. The Slaan have remained hidden with their first born eggs for hundreds of millennia. I have come to believe that the all mother is actually the egg mother, me.”

Glog deadpanned, “I am still opposed to taking any egg sacs anywhere.”

“Glog, I was instructed to take this gift to the most powerful Dragon in Zhalindor.”

“That would be the Grandfather Dragon,” Ashe added.

Thivinen chuckled, “we just saved two universes, what harm can an egg sac cause?”

Roland meaningfully rolled his eyes.

The Party votes on the matter. The vote carries with one notable dissenting vote, and the group heads out, eggs intact.

Lady Perra says farewell to the Slaan, and the Party heads the direction that the amulet shows them to be the way to the Nexus.

When the Party enters the doorway into the Nexus, Phineas and Tremir are waiting for them. Tremir inquires as to their health, and Phineas immediately says, “where is Branham?”

Ashe looks Phineas in the eye and says, “metal comes to life and trumps darkness.” Phineas just shakes his head and turns away.

The Nexus Manor House is just as the Party remembers it from what seems like a lifetime ago. Phineas and Tremir lead the Party to the doorway that takes the Party's back to its proper time and place in Zhalindor.

Triumphant Return ...

The Party emerges back at the Circle of Stones and are met by: Kaliban Keen-Eye, Styles, Shadow, Richard Sharpword, the priestess Rose (riding a unicorn), St. Acheron, and... Mittens?!?

Glog lets out an inarticulate shriek and begins running full tilt towards Mittens.

Fortunately, with so many high level spell casters around, Glog barely gets a pace and a half into his run before he is stopped. Equally fortunately, Mittens has a great sense of humor and laughs heartily at Glog's story about the rodents. Glog still seems unbemused, but the moment has passed.

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The Party still has much to do that in Zhalindor, and each of their tales will be told in the pages to come. Roland takes the Sword of Life. Thivinen takes the Sword of Fire. Roland and Thivinen return to Kernan to take on Veldman and Abram. Glog and Ashe team up to take on OB. Perra takes her eggs and walks towards the encampment in the Silver Forest, near by the Circle of Stones.

Some many seasons later, the Party members meet again all too briefly in Kernan for a great celebration with the Duke. He is joined by the Wandering Tien, Mittens, Shadow, and the King of Tumeria. The Party members are showered with riches and titles, but their tales of adventure did not end there.

The Battle with OB ...

The Day of Return from the Imperium

Glog and Ashe are met at the Circle of Stones by St. Acheron. Acheron invites the two to follow him to a large circle inscribed on a large, flat stone space that appears to be made specifically for circle construction.

St. Acheron on congratulates Glog and Ashe, "well done gentlemen! Few have undertaken missions outside the cocoon of safety that is Zhalindor, and to undertake a mission of such magnitude, of such gravity, well you have outdone yourselves."

He turns to Glog, “your tie in the Imperium is not quite done. You saved Zhalindor, but eventually you will crush the evil, Chaos and Void forces which run rampant in that realm.”

“Here we are,” Acheron gestures at the circle, “any questions before I send you to Tiola-Moldre to the High Inquisitor of Kemer-Lexi?”

“What about Bert?” Ashe asks.

“Ah, an understandable question. You will be reunited with Bert at the End of Time for the ‘final battle.’ For now, he will be aiding and growing with Branham. ”

“So they are both alright?”

“Cragspider has shown me a vision where you reunite with Bert. It must turn out in a favorable way – at least between now and then.”

St. Acheron waits for a few moments. No further questions are forthcoming. – Acheron gestures to the circle, helping position Glog and Ashe. Acheron carefully places a spiraled horn in the midst of the circle and lights it on fire as he chants an ancient set of words.

The circle fades from view, and Glog and Ashe find themselves in Justice Square in Tiola-Moldre, the City of Towers, the capital of Tumeria, and the first major settlement in the Second Age of Man. A cacophony of sound and a wave of smells from the crowded Tumerian city wash over the two. After the sterile settings of the ships in the Imperium of Man and the Nexus, the sudden rush of sound and scent, nearly stuns them, but both are overjoyed to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of familiar Zhalindor.

The Cathedral of Kemer-Lexi dominates the Square. As their eyes adjust, Glog and Ashe notice a contingent of Kemer-Lexi officials on the steps of the Cathedral including a large group of seniors from the Inquisition and Paladins. Several of the Cardinals came forward. Their smiles and warm words made their friendly intentions clear. Several of the Paladins are reverently carrying the magical materials that the Party had gathered to create the arrows of slaying.

Glog and Ashe are escorted into the Cathedral and down a Grand spiral staircase into the depths beneath the city. Eventually the group emerges into a cavernous undercroft. The room is magnificent, and Ashe notes, “this is not the work of mortal hands. During the First Age of man, many edifices were created by the efforts of earth elementals under the skillful direction of ancient the Tumerian Empire warlocks.”

Glog looks deadpan at Ashe – then scans the hall with a dwarvish eye for construction. The undercroft is truly immense; it is 300 meters long, 200 meters wide, and more than 75 meters high. Many tables are set in the hall. At regular intervals are sturdy, ornately

carved columns that spread upward into the supporting structures of the ceiling. A mist gathers near the ceiling – the large number of breathing, sweating descendents of Grandfather Mortal cause an indoor weather pattern. There are hundreds of torches casting a bright light across the underground expanse. There are vents along the walls and inset in the support columns.

“Truly clever construction,” Glog thinks.

Glog looks over the assembled masses, “there must be 1000 gathered here,” Glog gestures at the long tables stretching into the depths of the hall.

“3267 or eight, maybe nine, I would say,” Ashe quips.

Glog rolls his eyes. (Clearly, it is something that he has picked up from all his travels with Roland.)

One of the Cardinals smashes his staff loudly into the staircase and announces Ashe and Glog.

An honor guard of black clad Paladins and Inquisitors comes forward and surrounds the two as they make the ceremonial march to the head table. A wave of sound, cheers and praise, greet our heroes.

The Grand Inquisitor warmly welcomes his friends, Glog and Ashe. The Grand Inquisitor introduces the head table, and Glog and Ashe are surprised by two of the attendees, one is the Crown Prince of Tumeria, Jenny John the Just, and the other is the high advisor to the Overlord, Mung.

There are toasts, and Glog and Ashe revel in the chance to tell their stories to a rapt audience.

After much fanfare, feasting, and drinking, the evening’s festivities come to a close. The Grand Inquisitor, Jenny John, Mung, and a brace of Cardinals remain behind.

Glog asks, “why the big celebration?”

A Cardinal notes, “we will lead many of these men to their deaths in the elimination of OB. It is only right that we allow them some joy first.”

Ashe says, “we will soon have a number of arrows of slaying. How bad can it be?”

“OB is a pitfiend. He will not go quietly.”

Ashe takes the Cardinal aside and asks, “why is Mung here? And, why Jenny John?”

Mung cuts the cardinal off before he can respond, “my hearing is quite extraordinary. I am here to summon OB. I have a personal interest, and His Supremacy insists.”

Jenny John offers, “the Inquisition has promised my father a weapon that OB carries. I am here to collect and wield the weapon.”

The Grand Inquisitor says, “tomorrow will be a long day. Rest well gentlemen.” The quarters are just off of the undercroft and are more Spartan than our heroes might have expected, but they are comfortable enough and functional.

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Before dawn the next day, the two are greeted by Paladins and led further belowground into a huge, natural cavern. Unlike the undercroft, this is mostly a natural cavern. The walls are uneven, and stalactites can be seen at irregular intervals on the roof of the chamber. The air is musty and stale in the cavern, but the space is lit by thousands of glow stones suspended floating in the air.

The principals gather at the center of the cavern. At a signal from the Grand Inquisitor, the passages are sealed by magically melting the stone.

Clearly the Inquisition is taking few chances.

There is an unadorned circle at the very center of the cavern. Ashe and Glog are expecting a long ceremony, but the Grand Inquisitor gestures as a wagon mounted forge and smithy are wheeled forward.

Five gleaming arrows rest on pillows of silk at the foot of the forge.

For the final bit of the ceremony, the Grand Inquisitor asks five archers to step forward. He pricks a finger on each of the archers, and the right OB’s true name on the arrowheads in their own blood.

The Grand Inquisitor touches each of the arrowheads with a hammer of Kemer-Lexi, sealing the spell of slaying with a flash of righteous light in a thrum of power.

The Grand Inquisitor turns to the circle where Mung is standing and says simply, “it is time.”

As a unit, 1000 Paladins of Kemer-Lexi ready their weapons. The air is filled with the ring of metal scraping on leather. Many use simple spirit magic incantations to enhance their finely honed blades. The sharp smell of sweat and fear overcomes the natural musty odor of the cavern.

Mung swaggers into the circle and says, “OB, I have need of you.”

OB appears and stands before the assembled warriors. The archers draw and fire.

OB snarls and quick as thought, a gust of wind whips around OB and with a nod he summons five ice devils. The arrows are caught up in the wind in clatter harmlessly away from OB. Within heartbeats, each of the ice devils has summoned three to five greater devils. In less than five minutes, there are more than six dozen independent melees around the room. An acrid smell of burnt hair and sulphur fills the air, and some of the Paladins wretch from the stench.

The arrows of slaying are scattered.

Mung gestures and fades from view.

An Inquisitor intones, “be held hell spawn.” OB simply yawns and waves his hand as the Inquisitor is flung 30 meters into the air to land with the wet crunch behind the milling melee and out of sight of Glog and Ashe.

Glog notes, “this went to crap fast. Even for us.”

“I’m not surprised,” Ashe says.

“All right I’ll keep him busy, you retrieve some arrows. We’ll do this the old-fashioned way! For the honor of the Fourth Honor Company!” Glog bellows.

“Righto!” and, Ashe is leaping, dodging, and skipping faster than the unaided eye can follow.

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Glog trudges forward adjusting his grip. A ring of intense fire springs up around Glog, but his superior dwarven constitution lets him shrug off the damage and the pain. Still, Glog knows that he will last less than a handful of minutes. Ashe had better be quick.

OB summons a devilish great sword and swings it down two-handed at Glog. Glog dodges aside and says, “at last a challenge!” OB blocks Glog’s upswing and brings the eldritch blade around in a blurring horizontal strike. Glog blocks the blow, but the impact sends Glog reeling and sends him to his knees.

Ashe carries three recovered arrows and leaps to stab one into OB’s back. OB growls, but then smiles, and slowly turns to nimbly pluck the arrow from his back.

OB laughs, “you don’t know how to use these things do you?”

Ashe leaps away, and five Paladins of Kemer-Lexi spring forward to fight the pitfiend.

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Glog shakes and clears his head and runs forward swinging to land a perfectly executed blow into OB's back. Glog is gratified to see a shower of black ichor.

OB doesn't even pause as he levels three of the fine Paladins with a mighty horizontal swing at calf level.

Ruefully Glog notes that OB's grievous wound is closing and healing as Glog watches.

All around OB, pockets of Kemer-Lexi devotees fight back to back in order to prevent the devils from teleporting between them.

Ashe stares numbly at the two remaining arrows ...

Glog runs forward screaming a battle cry as the last intervening Paladins are slain by OB.

Ashe thrusts the arrows into his own leg and pulls them out to scribble OB's true name on the bloody arrowheads.

Glog ducks under OB's next blow, and Glog slides on his knees through the blood of heroes to execute a mighty swing into OB's knee.

This time OB roars with pain, sinks to the ground, and grabs Glog.

Ashe flies into the air to stab OB at the base of his skull.

The dread arrow flares and a huge explosion rocks the cavern.

The faithful are thrown to the ground. When the dazzle fades from Glog's and Ashe's eyes, the devils are gone, and only a pile of ash – and a great sword remain where OB was.

Jenny John splashes forward heedless of the congealing pool of blood to grip the great sword. "This will do nicely," he says.

The Grand Inquisitor is revived, and though grievously injured, he says the word signaling that the tunnels be unsealed.

All told 666 of the Kemer-Lexi faithful have perished.

Glog asks, "Inquisitor do you think it wise to let the Prince have a hell forged weapon? We have had bad luck with cursed weapons ourselves."

"Ah, the diabolic enchantment fled with the destruction of OB. What is left is an anti-magic sword, a mage slayer. There are few more useful blades than a mage slayer. The Cardinals' auguries have revealed the need for such a weapon during the next three

centuries. The prophecy states that the king will present it to a worthy champion to banish a wicked mage. In the meantime, it is well to have the king's good graces."

Ashe asks, "what is the deal with Mung?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"He seemed friendly with OB."

"There are many mysteries surrounding our Overlord's Inner Circle. Best not to inquire too far."

Glog asks, "where did Mung go?"

The Grand Inquisitor glances wide eyed at Glog and slowly shakes his head.

Ashe and Glog look at each other and nod.

The two rest and recover that day in the Cathedral barracks. The next day they take their leave.

They are met by Shadow in Justice Square with the flight of griffins. "These will make the trip back to Kernan much quicker and more fun! Climb aboard."

The flight takes off and heads rapidly to the west.

The Battle with Veldman ...

The Day of Return from the Imperium

Roland and Thivinen arrive at Balcon to find it in ruins... The Duke is badly injured, and the sisters of Chalana-Arroy hover around him offering succor and healing arts. When the Duke sees Roland and Thivinen, he rises on his elbows, and one of his attendees beckons our two heroes forward.

Roland and Thivinen kneel and lean in close to hear the words from the Dukes torn throat. He rasps, "they came a week before – hordes of undead led by Veldman and your former colleague, Abram, bearing a Chaos sword. Amongst the minions were dread Wampheri."

The warm day seems to grow noticeably colder at the mention of Wampheri, and the birds seem to quiet their calls.

The Duke continues, "the skeletons and ghouls surged forward to engage our forward troops while ghosts passed through our ranks and possessed key leaders in the rear.

Veldman unleashed Void magic that rolled as a foul miasma, slaying the living and raising undead in its wake. Abram's sword howled as he carved through our ranks, the souls of the fallen were sucked into Abram's Eldritch blade, their bodies crumbling to dust.

"We could not win.

"An elite force of us broke through Veldman's forces from behind, and my most stalwart warriors and I held the dread kine in check to allow as many of our troops to flee as possible. Alas, Veldman ghouls pursued and caught them and eventually even my own dear family all the way in Balcon. The fiends brought my family ... they brought them before me and ..."

The Duke falters here... His body is wracked with spasms and sobs. After a brief period, he regains a measure of his composure. He wipes stringy, bloody tears from his chin, and continues.

"The undead held me fast while vile Veldman and Abram gloated. Four Wampheri came forward and each inserted its egg into my family members. You could see the life fire die in my family, in their eyes, in their eyes and be replaced by an unholy fire. Veldman and his horrible minions laughed – they mocked and laughed at me and loped off into the east towards the Highlands. Before he left though, Veldman came before me and clawed my face and chest. He whispered 'you shall soon know the pain of losing everything dear to you. No, no death will NOT release you. You will live with this knowledge.'

"I lost consciousness and did not rouse till the sisters found me and ministered to me."

Roland and Thivinen followed the gory tale with nods and affirmations.

As the tale finishes, Roland asks, "where are the vile undead now?"

The Duke tilts back his head and points to the east. "Back in his tower in the mountains I suspect. That is the direction that his minions went from here."

Thivinen adds, "this is a most un-auspicious time. The two daemons stars are about to conjunct. I can feel the power raised by blood and the life spilt here. It hangs like a foul fog waiting to be harvested by the skills of evil mages."

Roland notes, "we have six targets then, Veldman, Abram, and the four Wampheri – should even one of them escape oblivion then we could be facing a generational plague."

The Duke adds in a hoarse cry, "... and my four family members – they are vile undead now, and you must destroy them – utterly."

Thivinen says, "let's be on our way then at once!"

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The day is still young, and the sun shines brightly as the two head along the road to the east.

Thivinen says, “it is best to fight undead under the cleansing rays of Yelm. Will we reach the Tower before night fall?”

“Yes, I know these parts, and we should be there by noon. Plenty of time to either prevail or die nobly trying.”

Thivinen does not share Roland’s mirth.

The path to the Highlands skirts the northern edge of the elf woods known as Gebnick’s Glad. A familiar figure waves at the pair as they reach the halfway point of their journey. It is their old Party-mate Gwendolyn.

Roland and Thivinen meet with Gwendolyn and a young elf named Moth at the northern edge of Gebnick Glade. The elves and their forest kin tell the two heroes that the undead stayed north of the wood line, and the woodland creatures confirmed that the horde was last seen trudging north into the Highlands surrounding Veldman’s Tower.

Gwendolen offers a gift from the elves. The Druids summon a mob of sanctified earth elementals, gnomes. Gwendolen explains, “undead are especially vulnerable to these enchanted creatures of the earth.”

Thivinen and Roland move deliberately north with their magical minions and arrive at the edge of Veldman’s domain at mid-afternoon. It is about a kilometer away from the Tower. Thivinen uses the life scanner from the Imperium to check the area.

“The area is crawling with life signs. They appear to be orcs, ogres, and goblinoids.”

“It’s never easy,” Roland notes. “Just the way I like it.”

* * *

Thivinen and Roland wade forward into the fray with grim smiles.

Roland slashes his way forward with broad sweeps of the Life Sword. Thivinen sends out sheets of fire, immolating hundreds of the green skins. The carnage of the evil creatures is gratifyingly huge, but the number of orcs and goblins is vast.

As the last light of Yelm’s Chariot fades to the west, the dread tower of Veldman is less than 100 meters from the duo and their elementals.

As twilight settles and the blood Red Moon of Chaos rises, every ground level window and door in the tower explodes with a wave of undead. The skeletons and ghouls are crushed like a swarm of ants under the prodigious blows of the elementals. Each ghost flares with sickly light as it strikes or is struck by the elementals. While the lesser undead are mere annoyances to the stalwart gnomes, each exchange with the ghost drains the earthen creatures.

Thivinen and Roland offer their capable support to the elementals, but the two are soon drawn into their own desperate struggles. Abram charges Roland, the Chaos Sword held aloft, glowing with a sickly green light. Roland and Abram exchange blows as fast as thought. Thivinen trades arcane strikes with Veldman. Thivinen spies the four Wampheri skulking up on him and loses a magical barrage of fire centered on him. Veldman staggers back ... this is one of Roland's and Thivinen's prearranged signals.

While planned, it is still a desperate measure

The flare surprises Abram, and Roland strikes taking Abram's head in one tremendous blow.

Three of the Wampheri melt in the magical Inferno, but one seems to just fade away.

Roland yells, "Thivinen, one was an illusion!"

Thivinen wheels but too late. The Mage sees the grim, needle sharp claws emerge in a shower of blood out of the chest. He looks in dismay at his ruined tunic (or at his shredded chest) Roland could not tell. Thivinen drops the Fire Sword and collapses to the earth.

Roland scans the area. Veldman is nowhere to be seen. Roland covers the distance to the Wampheri and the downed Thivinen in a series of superhuman bounds.

The Wampheri gurgles out a liquid laugh, "I will feast on your flesh and raise you in spite of your impotent godling."

Roland yells of battle cry and invokes a Runic, Humakti incantation at point blank range.

The Wampheri is stunned, and Roland skewers the fiend using the full power of the Life Sword. Roland channels the power of Life to fill the undead lord.

The Life Sword utterly destroys the unnatural creature. A fetid smell of brimstone surrounds the spot where the Wampheri was felled.

Before the dust from the Wampheri settles to the ground, Roland turns and plunges the Sword into Thivinen's chest invoking the power of resurrection. Thivinen sputters as Roland withdraws the blade.

“You enjoyed stabbing me didn’t you?”

“Well, I might have, but lucky for you it was you that fell. I cannot be resurrected.”

“It may be too late already! Look!” Thivinen points to the top of the tower where Veldman raises his arms and begins a sing-song, disturbing chant. Two stars, the daemon stars, begin glowing with the extreme light as they move towards conjunction.

Roland and Thivinen see the ghostly forms of the green skins and undead rising from the ground forming into ever growing ranks. A charnel stench rises with the ranks. The forms are becoming more and more substantial as Veldman’s chanting rises in pitch and volume.

Roland looks at the sky shakes his fist and says, “Come on! Really?!?”

“Wait! I hear something...” Thivinen points to the east.

A vast rushing sound comes from over the tops of the stones and trees to the east.

In the ruddy moonlight, a lone figure stands on a broad flying machine. The figure intones a tuneless series of notes on oddly shaped, large horn.

Veldman also seems to note the figure and increases the cadence of his chant.

Roland starts towards the tower door, “come on!” He yells at Thivinen.

As the heroes bound up the winding stairs, the tower shakes.

Thivinen and Roland reach the tower top as Veldman’s shriek rises to a crescendo and the stars move to touching.

“No time!” Roland roars and hurls the Life Sword end over end toward the sorcerer.

Thivinen fires a chain of magic missiles at Veldman.

Veldman raises his arm to reveal a charm against the magic missiles ... Unfortunately for Veldman the Life Sword thunks solidly into his chest as he screams and is utterly destroyed by the Sword of Life.

The spell that Veldman had cast does not end with his demise though.

As the stars conjoin in a blinding flash of light, the figure on the machine sings a series of syllables that appear as Runes in the air – a last ditch attempt to quell the evil sorcery.

The minions of Veldman solidify and then just as quickly twisted are transformed into rock formations.

(The area surrounding the tower is ever thereafter known as Veldman's needles.)

The figure leaps from the machine onto the tower top and sends the contraption burrowing into the ground, shaking the tower, and crushing a legion of rocky creature formations and covering the debris from the battle.

The figure speaks, "your Party has met me before. I am one of the Duke's barons, or perhaps more accurately, a baron of one of his first ancestors. I was betrayed by one of my own knights, Logmar, but your Party rescued me, and I went into the Great Waste to seek knowledge.

"Your Party rescued me from destruction, and I pledged to aid you in your time of need on my sacred honor. For the last three years I have been exploring the great mysteries in the waste of Lei Po. I pray that my service was of value to you."

Roland inclines his head. "Our thanks. Will you be returning with us to the camp of Kernan?"

"No, no. I'm on a quest, quest of some import. Please give my best to your Party mates though. I am off to Credia and then Palmalta. This world holds many mysteries, but my research has pointed a way, a way to a beginning, and my future."

Before Roland and Thivinen can interrogate their helpmate, the figure leaps into the air and flies to the south.

"Fare thee well, brother mage," Thivinen says and waves. He turns to Roland, "are we finally done with Veldman?"

Roland looks to the south, shrugs his shoulders, and says, "those four family members are not as tough as anything we have faced to this point, but they are still out there somewhere. We owe it to the Duke to put them out of their misery."

"Indeed!" And, the two started down the stairs to wrap up the evening's activities.

Before dawn came, the Wampheri spawn had been dispatched.

Roland and Thivinen made their way back to report to the Duke that his line had ended.

Perra and the Eggs of Life ...

The Day of Return from the Imperium

Lady Perra heads to the encampment near the Circle of Stones. There she meets Glarg, the Party leader prior to Glog. Glarg is also a Dragon-newt, and the first thing Perra notes is that Glarg has wings!

“Greetings lady Perra! It is an honor to meet you. The Grandfather Dragon has sent me to escort you to the great Dragon city.”

Lady Perra adjusts the eggs and says, “lead on esteemed, winged colleague.”

With that, Glarg leads Perra to a rock outcropping. As they approach, Perra sees that a glowing Dragon-Newt Rune appears on the stone. Glarg says, “fair Perra, please take my hand.” Glarg grasps Perra’s hand as he touches the Rune.

They find themselves in a Dragon-Newt transportation way. The waypoints flash by in a rainbow of light.

“I thought the only Plinths were in and out of the Great Waste?”

Glarg nods and says, “no, those are the ones that most know about, but the Dragon-Newts were the first race. We have our own Rune,” Glarg says with some pride.

After a time, the two Dragon-Newts emerge in a broad square. Perra looks around and sees many Dragon-Newts and humans scurrying to and fro across the broad plaza. The air is warm and humid, and the stone comprising the buildings in the town square appear to be made of the same material as Perra saw in the World Machine. There is the smell of spices in the air, and the hum of insects and the call of tropical creatures murmurs on the wind.

Perra notes, “the sun is directly overhead, but it was to the east when we left.”

“We are on the easternmost part of the continent of Zhalindor. Only some islands and the Edge of the World lies east of here. We traveled over 80,000 kilometers.”

Perra glances up to see a flight of dragons fly over. She instinctively puts a hand over the eggs.

Glarg reassures her, “they are all friendly. Those are Dragon-Newts in their final form. Some of them are ages old. Dragon-Newts are not associated with the Man or Death Runes. We are all technically immortal. If we stay to the True Path, even if we die, we are reborn in the Rookery. When I died, I was reborn with my wings.

“Let’s head into the Grandfather’s Temple. We are expected.”

Glarg gestures across the Plaza to the largest building opposite. The building is terraced with a large central staircase leading up from the Plaza to the third of seven tiers that form the Temple. As they walk closer, Perra notices that the humans all seemed to have

Runes marking them. The Runes vary, but the Dragon-Newt Rune is ubiquitous.. Perra notes a pervasive “rhythm” to everyone’s movement, as she feels herself drawn into some unspoken cadence.

Perra notes that she and Glarg are matching each other footstep for footstep. Glarg is focused on the Temple before them. His face is rapturous as the two walked up the stairs. When they get to the third level, they are met at the top of the stairs by a contingent of seven winged Dragon-Newts wearing vestments of spun gold, embroidered with the runes Dragon-Newt, Infinity, Mastery, Magic, and Fate.

The seven intone as a group, “what was foretold begins, what was, shall be, by the will of the sacred Dragon and the Creator.”

The two are escorted to the center of the Temple where a pillar of light flows across the broad, highly inscribed circle. The air is cooler, but still comfortable. Perra can feel a constant hum of energy through her feet. Glarg gestures towards the luminous column and Perra steps in.

She is basked without and within with the power of Life. The eggs begin to vibrate and shake. Perra finds herself in an utterly dark room, but the darkness does not last.

A single light appears, but it is not a what, but a who. The light flows from a massive Dragon with a hide of burnished gold. Intelligence and well-being flow through his gaze to surround Perra and Glarg.

The Grandfather’s voice booms in their thoughts. “Welcome my blessed children. Perra you have changed.”

Perra glances at herself and notes of pair of wings for the first time. She laughs with delight.

“Try them out daughter!”

Perra launches herself into the air and flaps up 30 meters, does a pirouette, and flies down to alight on the ground.

Grandfather and Glarg are both smiling.

“Thank you Grandfather!”

“You earned them Perra. You have fulfilled a promise made at the birth of the Mortal Age. Even before the Creator and his sister created humans, there were Newtlings. As soon as the Man Rune was integrated into the World Machine, mortal life became possible. As you have clearly guessed, the eggs you carry are the first brood of the Newtlings on Zhalindor. The Newtlings constitute a great race. In many universes, they were the progenitor race. They were the first of the intelligent races in the universe you

just came from. All of them, all of the Newtlings throughout the multi-verse trace their roots to Zhalindor... To the eggs... To you, Perra.

“Perra in the universe you visited with the Fourth Honor Company, these creatures were called the Slaan. They were mighty, but eventually there was a great war with the Old Ones. Two of our luminaries from Zhalindor helped them escape into the Nexus at the time of their deepest need. That is when their elders traveled to the Isle the Cyclops to tell me of their birthing story – of a beautiful world, outside of entropy, outside of time where their brood mother was hatched by a Dragon.

“It was not a Dragon though, but two dragons, Perra and Glarg.

“You will be sent through the Circle of Stones on Cyclops island to the great upland swamp at the instant the Mortal Age begins.”

* * *

And so it was that a pair of Dragon-Newts (and eventually a pair of golden dragons) came to found the first colony of Newtlings as the great race was known on Zhalindor.

Many are their legends and feats, but those stories are for another time.

Roland’s Tale ...

Sometime a long time later...

Roland bravely fought the forces of evil and Chaos, working his way up the Humakti hierarchy to become the High Sword Lord of Humakt for all of Tumeria.

He forged a cordial relationship between the forces of Kemer-Lexi, it’s Inquisitors, the members of Fillian, and Imperial Army stationed in Tumeria.

Roland discovered that, after his return from the Imperium of Man, he no longer seemed to age.

It took Roland a long time to figure this out. Members of the Humakti order would constantly comment on how youthful he appeared. Sometime after his 90th birthday, Roland took a leave of absence to explore his apparent immortality.

He had to find someone who knew the answer or could find it. Roland caught up with the baboon Kaboobie, the one known as “the world’s greatest detective.”

* * *

Roland finally found Kaboobie on a sticky, hot, mid-summer night. He found Kaboobie in a nameless, stinking alley off a grime encrusted street that could have been anywhere in a 1,000 cities.

But, this city wasn't just anywhere, it was Credia.

Credia, the biggest, baddest, most crowded human city in Zhalindor. What can you say about a place where there are four demon Lords buried at its center?

As Roland approached, he saw that Kaboobie was surrounded by a throng of adoring fans rapt listening to the baboon's stories. Kaboobie's Fez's tassel danced in the firelight as he pantomimed one of his great exploits. The applause was deafening as Roland met eyes with Kaboobie.

"Friends, raise your cups to the High Death Lord of Tumeria! Greetings friend!"

"Is there someplace private were we can talk Kaboobie?"

"Surely, surely friend Death Lord!"

As Kaboobie turned, Roland realizes that not only does Kaboobie have a fetching Fez, but he sports a prehensile tail. Roland ponders this as he was unaware that baboons had tails.

Kaboobie ducks into a nearby inn and pushes his way back into the storerooms. He pauses for a moment at a carving, takes its guttering candle and lights another, affixing it to what Roland realizes is a shrine.

The "shrine" has a small sculpture about a foot and a half long and a hand span wide. It features the carving of a very stern looking man dressed in full plate with a hand inscribed on the breastplate. His head is bare, revealing an impressively deep scowl. A kingly circlet adorns his brow. A Rune that radiates a sense of good and right is carved into the fore-piece of the crown. Roland follows the gaze of the kingly figurine to a figure of a woman at the far end of the sculpture. She is facing away from the king and bent over clearly mocking the king by mooning him.

Her robes sport the Runes of Illusion, Mastery, and Chance. Her carved smile is so mischievous that it causes Roland to grin.

"Is that your goddess Kaboobie #"

"No, no, they were friends."

"HMMMM ..."

"Come on! Let's hear about this new case!"

Roland explains the events of the past many decades, and Kaboobie takes notes and asks insightful questions.

“So you didn’t notice anything in particular, but you think that it happened as you came back from this ‘Imperium of Man,’ yes?”

“Yeah, that is about it.”

“Well, you’ve already seen what changes to the time stream can do. I remember the time Gabrielle invented ‘Serpent-Tongue,’ and it was all the rage with the nobles a thousand years later.”

“It sounds like a long story.”

A mouse chose that moment to angrily chatter at Roland.

Kaboobie looks so crossly at Roland that Roland cannot help but to break out in a broad grin. With that, Kaboobie howls and chatters with laughter.

Finally, the Greatest Detective says, “we have to see Cragspider. She knows about ‘stuff’ like this.”

“Cragspider that lives 40,000 km from here?”

“Yeah, well she’ll be down here in two weeks for the circus. That circus has a special significance for me”

“... Why am I sensing a trick coming on?”

“I don’t know, why, do you?” Kaboobie asked with a face full of innocence.

* * *

Roland spends the next two weeks catching up with the Humakti elders. Roland shares his stories including the destruction of OB, the death of Veldman, and his adventures in Tumeria.

In response to Roland’s tales of Vine and his pitfiend OB, the Death Lords and Death Priests mentioned that Vine still troubles the the Timerian Empire Empire.

“But, OB has been destroyed,” Roland said.

“Yes, we’ve heard no more about OB over the past 60+ years – since about the time your friends claim to have killed him, but Vine, or at the very least his followers, are still clearly visible and active here.

“Something big is underway, all the omens point to something happening near or in the Yin Sloth jungles.”

Roland pondered these things as he alternated between training, service to the Temple, and worship.

* * *

When the big day for the circus arrived, Roland was not the only one to attend the event. There were thousands and thousands milling about, waiting for chance to enter the fairgrounds. Roland wondered how he and Kaboobie were going to meet up, but his anxiety was short-lived.

Not more than 15 paces from the entrance, Kaboobie had set up a stand. It was manned by a troop of baboons. Some worked the crowd while some stirred an enormous copper kettle full of boiling liquid. These baboons lacked both Fezzes and tails.

“Get your perfect pasta here! You’ll never taste its like again!” Kaboobie boomed through megaphone.

Roland chuckled, but he could not resist trying a bowl. As he approached, Kaboobie passed Roland a steaming bowl using his “Baboonly skills” (and his tail). Roland wanted to undercut Kaboobie’s arrogance about the pasta, but it truly was the best pasta he had ever had.

The gates opened. Kaboobie doffed his Fez to his coworkers, and he and Roland joined the surging throng. As the two approached the ticket gate, a caped figure in a one-piece, bright red suit alighted from the air directly next to Kaboobie.

The flying stranger sported a bright yellow Magic Rune on his chest. He and Kaboobie embraced.

“Greetings Red Mage!”

“In the flesh!”

“How did you get here?”

“Same as you I imagine – through the Nexus.”

“We’re an age ahead of our time.”

“But it is the same circus,” the two said simultaneously and broke into guffaws and giggles.

Roland cleared his throat meaningfully and thrust out his hand. Kaboobie turned the Red Mage around and pointed with his tail, “this is the Death Lord of Tumeria.”

“Please to meet you...?”

“Roland.”

“Roland, a pleasure, we had Humakti in our Party, didn’t we?”

“Yeah,” Kaboobie noted, “then he died.”

This led to another round of uncontrolled laughter by the two, old comrades.

As Kaboobie arrives he is met by a posse of clowns and escorted with the Red Mage and Roland to box seats. The Red Mage smiles broadly and glances over to Kaboobie, who does not return the look, but does say in low tones, “just wait.”

The Red Mage guffaws as Kaboobie points to a simple placard affixed to the box that simply reads, “in honor of ‘sure shot’ Tremir.”

“Told you,” Kaboobie says as he plops down.

Roland ponders this as he sits down.

The two old friends shout, stamp their feet, and hoot as the circus acts are performed. Roland thought the acts were good, but not that good.

The final act is knife throwing. The thrower and his assistant march with much aplomb out to the center ring.

“Don’t use your assistant! Take someone from the crowd!” Kaboobie jeered.

“Pick a hero to throw the knife!” The Red Mage added.

Demonstrating his poise, the thrower ignored these less than helpful suggestions. The Red Mage and Kaboobie alternate blowing raspberries and booing as the act progresses.

Roland asked, “is there some significance to your actions in here?” as the trio left.

Kaboobie says, “a single pebble can cause an avalanche...”

“In 1000 years...” The Red Mage concluded.

“Well, good seeing you brother Kaboobie!”

“Farewell your Redness!”

With that the Red Mage launches into the air and is away.

“Hey, Kaboobie, I thought that Cragspider was going to be here.”

“She’s right there.”

A young girl no older than 10 or 12 walks toward them. She transforms into a twenty something woman as she approaches.

“I guess you can be 29 forever,” Kaboobie says as he bows.

“Careful, careful little monkey!”

“Mother of Gods, I am Roland.”

“I remember you. Zhalindor and my brother owe you a great debt. What may I do to serve you?”

“I don’t seem to be aging.”

“Most would not complain about this.”

“I am a Humakti.”

“Humakt clearly has other plans for you.”

“But, that makes no sense – my Lord is the God of Death.”

“He is the Lord of honor, duty, and honorable Death. He is not a mindless assassin.”

“Why would he make me immortal?”

“He has made many of his wards immortal, Alexander, Richard Sharpsword, Brennan, and many others.”

“I am not a God.”

“You are a heroes’ hero. You inspire the faithful. You push back the terrors of the night, the depredations of Chaos and the Void.”

“I do my best. Is there than a special mission for me?”

“Why don’t you ask him?”

A rent of dark appears in the air behind Cragspider as the Lord of Death himself appears.

“Roland, my faithful son.”

Roland sinks to his knees.

“Lord.”

“Rise my son.”

Roland makes his way to his feet.

“My son, you’ve been a unique follower. You bore the ‘hammer of Humakt.’ You took my ideals to the Imperium of Man in another world – nay, another universe.”

“Thank you Lord.”

“I have a special mission for you.”

From a small sack on his belt the Lord of death draws out two Runes, Stasis and Life.

Both Kaboobie and Roland suck in their breath.

“I need you to retrieve Grandfather Mortal and return him to the Circle of Stones. We will take steps to begin the End Times. There are things that even a God – especially this God cannot do.”

“Am I to resurrect him?”

“No, you will see.”

* * *

With that, Roland began a long journey to the Upland Swamp and the entrance to the Underworld. Cragspider accompanied Roland much of the way. Her knowledge of the secret ways of Zhalindor let Roland reach her tower far, far to the north in less than two weeks.

Bidding farewell to Cragspider, Roland skirted Skyfall lake, and headed towards the southern end of the Upland Swamp and the entrance to the Underworld, the entrance to Hell.

As Roland approached the entrance to Hell he met a company of Newtlings, Glarg, and Perra waving to him and wishing Roland well.

As Roland walked deeper into the earth, the temperature dropped. The whole cavern took on a backlit tone. Everything became muted the further he marched. There was a not a sign per se, but it was obvious to Roland as he crossed the threshold into the realm of the dead; the terrain around him faded to a neutral gray.

Standing before him was a tall, skeletally thin elf wearing the robes and sigils of an arch mage. Oddly, he also was wearing a large backpack.

“I am Lichtadon, mentor to Malachi, and helpmate of Humakt. I will lead you to the Grandfather Mortal.”

Roland followed Lichtadon through the halls of the dead. The twists and turns made Roland’s head spin. Several warriors challenge the warrior exemplar and the arch mage, but backed away when they sensed the power emanating from the pair.

After a timeless period they stopped on a large, frozen plane at a seemingly random place. Lichtadon gestured. Roland looked and saw a figure buried in the ice.

“You will have to be quick with both the Stasis and the Life Runes. Ready?”

“Ready arch mage.”

Lichtadon pulled a metal crown from his backpack and placed it firmly on his head. Likewise, he withdrew two metal bracers from the pack and slid them on.

“Are those to complete a ritual arch mage?”

“No, we need these in case, in the very likely case that the Grandfather is not happy to see his ‘grandchildren.’”

Lichtadon spoke words that ignited the air and wrote themselves in flaming Runes as he intoned. The ground trembled and the frozen figure emerged from the ice.

Roland noted that the figure looked like a cross between a Dragon newt and a Newtling. The figure had a grayish skin, wings, and was bipedal with arms. He had delicate looking hands with three fingers and opposing thumbs. There was a huge gash in the figure’s chest. Grandfather Mortal was not dead, but rather suspended at the moment before death.

Roland activated the two Runes less than a heartbeat apart. The figure began to collapse as a gout of blood coursed from the open wound on his chest and staggered as the full healing force of the Life Rune healed and revived him.

Roland recalled the words from Humakt. Clearly this was not something that Humakt could have done.

There was no time to ponder though as a stream of invectives ushered from Grandfather Mortal. Although Roland did not understand the language, the tone was clear. Both Grandfather Mortal's tone and his stance spoke the universal language of rage.

The Grandfather patted his sides – searching for something and then screeched in rage when his hands came up empty.

Grandfather narrowed his gaze and a wave of energy blasted from Grandfather towards Lichtadon.

Roland recognize it as psychic energy having seen Ashe use it many occasions, but Roland had never seen anything as powerful as this.

Roland fingered the Stasis Rune. The wave washed over and around Lichtadon. He nodded at Roland, and he held up a hand.

Grandfather cocked his head. He stopped. Lichtadon spoke a Word, and then said, “Grandfather, welcome back. Much has happened since you slept.”

“I was run through! That devil Humakt ...”

“Is not here,” Lichtadon hurriedly added, “all here are friends.”

Roland thought to himself, “yet another reason that Humakt would not be a good choice for this mission.”

Then, Roland started as realized that he could clearly *understand* the chirpings of the Grandfather.

“Is this another pocket dimension?” asked the Grandfather.

“Still a part of Zhalindor,” Lichtadon answered.

“What has happened? Did the boy make the changes I specified to prevent the implosion and the great collapse?”

“The Creator inserted the Runes you brought. Zhalindor became the cradle of intelligent life you intended. Intelligent precursor races for many planes of existence were born here and have brought many positive things.”

“Have you prepared my children?”

“Yes Grandfather. Some will meet us at the Circle of Stones.”

“What of my servitors?”

“Unfortunately, they wrought much damage and had to be ‘held.’ That is not all. Your additions to the World Machine somehow triggered the arrival of vast, evil entities. They intended on ending all life.”

The Old Ones,” Roland guessed aloud.

Lichtadon waved a hand and a circle of light showed a vision of the Gods’ War and the arrival of the Old Ones. Grandfather gasped. A blue streak flew from the sky and a moment later, the whole scene vanished.

“He broke it,” Grandfather said.

“Yes, Grandfather. He broke it to save it.”

“What are they?” Grandfather said in a voice two octaves higher than his previous squawks.

“That has been debated for three ages, (unrecognizable words), Grandfather.”

“And, ...?”

“No one is truly sure. The Creator believes them to be manifestations or consequences of the arrival of intelligent life. An unaccountably large number of intelligent species leads to a backlash of uncountable and incalculable malevolence.”

“So, they are ‘suspended’ outside of time, outside of the Multiverse, here at the Origin?”

“Yes Grandfather.”

“This is not what I expected. There must be more to this than merely fulfilling my wishes from when last I saw you. What do you require of me?”

“Some of your children are ready to return to your base universe and to the other universes, to create mighty works, to seed intelligent life.”

“What of Zhalindor?”

“All things end Grandfather.”

“If the beginning ends, the whole does not exist.”

“We have found your exogenous factor Grandfather.”

“Ah, I see. As I foretold. So be it then.”

Lichtadon said no more.

Grandfather shrugged, and the three turned and made their way out of the land of the dead.

* * *

At the entrance to the land of the living, Roland bid farewell to Lichtadon, Roland and Grandfather Mortal continued up the great gash to the surface of the mortal realm.

As the two emerged, a cheer arose from a legion of winged Dragon-newts who knelt and bowed heads as the Grandfather emerged. A huge golden Dragon move forward to hand Grandfather Mortal a harness, a robe, and other articles that Grandfather took and equipped. The Dragon gestured to a fleet of huge floating ships that approach from the east. The Dragon-newts arose and boarded the vessels. The last one to board was the Grandfather. He waved to Roland and turned to the west

“To destiny!” Grandfather chirped.

The largest Dragon flapped once, twice, three times and was away leading the fleet towards the 10,000 islands.

* * *

“He hates me.”

For the second time that day, Roland started. Roland should have been used to abrupt appearances by deities and immortals at this point, but some things are hard to get used to.

Regaining his composure, Roland said, “yes Lord, I see why you could not have revived him.”

“Well done my son. Any further questions?”

He had a thousand questions, but Roland merely shook his head.

Humakt held out his hands and Roland dutifully returned the Runes to him.

“These will be needed elsewhere in due time. The Creator and the Diamond Dwarf will be restoring the World Machine. Make ready for the End Times!”

Roland found himself back in Cathedral Square in Tiola-Moldre.

Roland girded his loins and set about preparing for the imminent End of Days. He fasted, prayed, and waited.

Nothing.

* * *

By the next year end, Godtime celebrations, Roland made his way to Spike and spoke to Cragspider.

“Mother of Gods, are the End Times here?”

She just chuckled, took Roland’s arm, and led him to the dance of mortals. The Trickster himself played the dance tune that year, and all agreed, it was the best dance in a lifetime.

* * *

The time of Gods is not the time of men, and there were days and nights, and seasons and years a plenty and nearly an age before the End Times were truly upon them.

Many were Roland’s legends and feats, but those stories are for another time.

Ashe’s Tale ...

Many years after the Return from the Imperium ...

Ashe had accomplished much in his long life. He had traveled to another plane, saved Zhalindor, rescued gods, and created the perfect spork.

What was left to do?

Bert was with Branham in another place, in another time.

Branham had assured Ashe that he would meet Bert again, and St. Acheron had confirmed this.

Ashe had heard rumors of a changeling retreat, a safe place far, far away. (In learning about this retreat is where Ashe had heard about the crystalline magic – if the truth be told.)

He would find this retreat and see what the future held for him and the changelings.

It sounded easier than it actually was.

Ashe first traveled to Timeria and followed many rumors – discreetly.

Changelings were still anathema in the Timerian Empire. All that he could verify was that the Tristan prophecies, book from the first mortal Age said the changelings would

gather at “the edge of the world” both to bring about the End Times and had the potential to cause and prevent the destruction of Zhalindor...

Intriguing.

Ashe headed to Palmalta, the continent to the south. He visited the Valley of Tombs, where the Seven Slith Lords are entombed in stasis to protect the world.

Ashe traveled further south, as far as a mortal could go, and saw the burning edge of the world.

Disappointingly, it ended in a sheet of fire. No changelings.

Well, that sheet of fire was pretty darn amazing!

Ashe sailed back to the north to the main continent of Zhalindor.

Over the next three decades, he worked his way through the Timerian Empire to the lands of the Wolfen, the Froud grasslands. Ashe passed through Gendro pass and headed into the Great Waste, that repository of forbidden knowledge.

It was at the temple of Lord Eldar, the keeper of the Void Rune, that Ashe got his first glimpse of the changeling path.

It was a mighty shade, a servitor of Eldar from the First Age – from the twilight of the Gods Time – that knew something.

Ashe engaged in a violent battle and prevailed against the Eldritch shades. In honor of Ashe’s victory, the shade spoke the Words that opened a portal, and Ashe stood a step away from the presence of Lord Eldar himself.

“What do you seek child of Eurmál?”

“I seek knowledge, ‘old legendary bigwig.”

“Do you mock me or praise me?”

“A little of both.”

“You please me mortal. I once snubbed the powers that were. It did not end well for me. I wish better for you.”

“Lord Eldar, I seek the knowledge of what happened to the changelings, and how I can find them.”

“Your first ancestor was Eurmial the only mortal created with the Runes of Man, Illusion, and And Discord.

“He turned to me almost immediately. Together with Lichtadon, we learned the secret of crystalline magic. When Lichtadon and I were disgraced, Eurmial fled and headed to the west. Eurmial disappeared from annals of time after the Spike was shattered and the World Machine was broken.

“The offspring of Eurmial met other sons of man when the changelings returned to Zhalindor at the dawning of the Second Age.

“The changelings forged crystal weapons and armed men while Malachi and Acheron taught men magic. Men fought the Slith Overlords on Zhalindor with the crystal weapons and magic, and Malachi sealed the seas to prevent the Slith main force from reinforcing the foothold on the northern continent.

“The changelings were there at the dawning of the Timerian Empire.

“For a time, there was a glorious age, but unfortunately, men misused my gifts and began to summon evil creatures and even viler things. My priests and scholars argued sense, but they were ignored by the population at large.”

Ashe snorted.

“Scoff if you will, but your kind turned evil as well and took over whole kingdoms. Many changelings were hunted, and many fled. They took half of the Rune of Stasis and they voyaged from the current city of Alyrean in the kingdom of Tanarasa. Seek the wreck of the Silver Maiden. The next step in your journey lies to the west.”

Ashe thanked Lord Eldar and headed to the west.

* * *

Ashe met up with Mittens on the western edge of the Great Waste.

“Friend Ashe, I am surprised to see you, but I am delighted to aid you. This will be a real adventure!”

Mittens danced a jig and clapped his paws together.

Ashe was having serious second thoughts about this course of action. Anything that made Mittens this happy was dubious, but what the heck – it was going to be a real adventure!

Indeed it was!

Fortunately Mittens had a magic carpet to fly the two of them across the Lands of the Overlord. Alas, even at max speed, traveling 18 hours a day, it took them almost 5 years to make it across.

The tales of the “Morokanth and the Changeling” grew to be many volumes long, but we digress.

* * *

At last, the two adventurers reached Alyrien.

Alyrien is a shady, port city. The streets are filled with creatures of all shapes and sizes.

Ashe bids farewell to Mittens, and makes his way to the temple Lhankor Mhy, the local sages guild. The graybeards were most helpful, and they were able to determine that the wreck lay just off the coast less than a day’s ride to the south.

Ashe hired a party and headed south.

As Ashe’s erstwhile companions approached the site of the wreck, Ashe noted that the waves seemed oddly “slow.”

One of the henchmen, Joe, ran forward, only to freeze in mid-stride once he was within 15 meters of the wreck.

“What is going on?” Ashe asked.

None of his henchmen knew, and none of them was willing to explore the wreck.

Disheartened the Party headed north.

Back in Alyrien, the graybeards suggested it might be the work of part of the Stasis Rune, and the Rune was supposed divided into two parts. One half went to the Silver maiden, and the other half was retained by the priests of Eldar in the Great Waste.

“... So Lord Eldar probably knew this. HmMMM ...

“I need to buy the largest sack of holding possible, and then, I need to visit as many stable masters in Alyrien as possible.”

The graybeards seem confused, but they complied and provided Ashe with a list of stables, and they found him a seller for an extremely large bag of holding.

Ashe went about his business and then hired a summoner to teleport him to the Redstone Keep all the way back in the Duchy of Kernan.

Even an ancient changeling can learn a new thing or two.

Ashe was out to the temple of Eldar within a season.

* * *

“Yes, Ashe?”

“You know – I need something else that you have knowledge about – I am led to believe that you as a God perhaps knew about it before I ventured all the way out west.”

“(Laugh) perhaps, what you seek is in the giant anthill just of the south of Permeganon.”

“You know Eldar, with this being such a dry climate, it takes a long, long time to clean up a mess.”

“I am confused by your words mortal.”

Ashe just smiled, and he began dumping the horse, cow, and pig manure from an extremely large bag of holding.

The entire temple was full of poop by the time Ashe was done. Then, just to complete the task, Ashe thrust a dagger through the bag of holding, and it disappeared with the pop and Ashe said, “three for three.”

* * *

The battle against the giant ants with anti-climactic. Ashe psionics proved an unstoppable force until he got to the Void demon protecting the Rune.

Even for Ashe that was a tough fight, and a near thing, but in the end Ashe recovered the Rune half and a few other useful magical items.

Ashley met up with a group of Dragon-newts and was back in Alyrien within the day using the Dragon-newt ways to travel the breadth of the massive continent.

* * *

With the Rune in hand, Ashe was able to counter the stasis field.

In a combination of telekinesis by Ashe and brute strength by the party he hired, the group is able to get the ship lying scuppered on the beach.

Inside Ashe found magically sealed box.

Ashe carefully lays the box down on the beach. He looks it over carefully. Eventually, Ashe has to physically manipulate the box. Ashe is able to puzzle out the secret of the mechanism, and the box pops open.

Inside Ashe finds a parchment and ... a crystal spork!

The parchment reads, "our divinations revealed that this item would be of significance to you. Hold it, and it will guide you to us"

Ashe's heart leaps with joy.

As Ashe holds the spork, his gaze is drawn to the west, and a single phrase comes to mind, "Isle of the Blessed."

* * *

The next day Ashe hired a vessel to sail into the Isle. The spork guides the ship through the treacherous shoals.

Ashe heads out in a small boat, and he sends the ship away.

About two kilometers into the Isle, Ashe comes across a curious sight. There is a large, 300 m diameter circle of glassy ground.

Ashe is drawn to the center. As Ashe steps onto the glassy ground, he sees a figure at the center of the area. A figure dressed in rich brocade of crimson awaits.

"Greetings Ashe, I am Carastinian. Long ago, Eurmál told me that I would need to guide his last son to the sanctuary at the 'edge of the world.'"

Carastinian transports he and Ashe to the Circle of Stones on a nearby island.

Carastinian gestures and a portal opens to a beautiful island.

"Ashe, before you go, Cragspider asked me to get something back from you. Do you know what it is?"

Ashe sheepishly pulls the Stasis Rune from his belpouch and hands it to Carastinian.

"Good lad, and good luck!"

Ashe steps through the portal.

* * *

The island truly is a paradise.

It is filled with gnomes, humans, goblins, orcs, elves and dwarves ... Really though there are only changelings. Changelings love to take on all manner of other forms.

An old changeling in natural form separates from the milling crowd and steps deliberately towards Ashe.

“Hello son, I am Euralm. Welcome to the end of the world.”

* * *

“So, we’re going to infiltrate the cell summoning the Old Ones, help them complete the ritual, but mess it up terribly, irreversibly at the end so that it destroys the Old Ones?”

“Yes. Exactly.”

“Any idea how to do it?”

“Not a clue.”

“Great let’s get started!”

* * *

It took Ashe an Age to explore the world and even other planes to find the right rituals and items to carry out his daunting task.

These are tales for other days.

Glog’s Tale ...

Long after the Return from the Imperium ...

After destroying OB, the celebration with the Duke, and various other functions and celebrations with his old Party mates, Glog eventually returned to his lands near Redstone Keep.

Glog came from a long-lived people, but after 500 years, Glog realized that he was showing no signs of aging even for a dwarf.

His barony was doing well, extremely well.

Glog decided to finish clearing out the Ebon Empire ruins.

As a challenge, Glog did it solo.

The magic items he recovered were extraordinary.

Glog travelled to Nerria with the objective of slaying all of the possessed Halflings.

Alas, Glog could not tell one from the other. Apparently the taint had been passed along to the entire population of offspring.

Glog considered just killing them all, but he thought what would Roland and Perra think?

Glog decided to head to the Yagha Tsorv mountains back to the entrance the World Machine.

Glog headed down, down, down to the bones of the world.

* * *

“Hello Glog. What are you seeking?” the Diamond Dwarf asked.

“I want to understand our great work. I want to understand the World Machine.”

“Very well.”

* * *

Glog worked as an apprentice mechanic on the World Machine for an Age.

Glog did not remain constantly working side-by-side with the Diamond Dwarf. Glog was called upon at regular intervals to aid the forces of good and light. His adventures filled many tomes.

His favorite adventures were those where he quested with his old Party companions. Glog and Ashe travelled across the planes to help Ashe recover his mystic items and formulae. Glog and Roland went to the Godstime to give rodents the power of speech, and many other adventures are spoken of around camp fires throughout Zhalindor and beyond.

Eventually though, the End Times came ...

* * *

When the End Times begin, Glog is working side-by-side with the Diamond Dwarf to install the Runes. When the Creator brought the Runes of Magic, Mastery, and Infinity, it was Glog placed Magic and Mastery in their places, but the Creator stopped Glog before he placed the Infinity Rune.

“Glog, there is another event that must take place just here in Zhalindor, and you have another final task in the Imperium of Man.”

Glog scratched his beard, and tried to make sense of what the Creator was talking about.

As Glog was pondering, Cragspider entered the chamber. She was in her most revolting crone form for the meeting.

The Creator and Cragspider braced warmly.

Cragspider beckoned for Glog to follow her, and he followed. (What else would you do?)

Glog expected to head to the Circle of Stones, but instead the Mother of Gods took Glog to an underground tunnel. Inside the tunnel was a trolley made of metal. The walls of the tunnel itself were lined with metal. There was a heavy scent of lubricants and dust. This was a very, very ancient tunnel through the heart of Zhalindor.

Cragspider made some passes with her hands on the outside of a capsule, and a doorway opened in the side of the trolley.

The interior was richly apportioned and very comfortable. She beckoned for Glog to go inside.

Once Glog was settled in, Cragspider did something at a “control panel,” and the trolley shot off into the darkness at incredible speeds.

* * *

After two weeks, the train came to a halt. A glowing blue passage with a cross-section of a trapezoid led away from the arrival platform. Cragspider led Glog down the tunnel. They came to a huge, semi-spherical depression in the ground. There was a large blue shaded sphere of somewhat less garish color.

“What is this?” Glog asked

“It is the blue moon, the first moon.”

Cragspider showed Glog the way “inside” the moon, and the moon flew into the night sky.

At the very edge of the sky, at the highest point of the dome of night, beyond the stars lay a glassy blue-black, curved wall.

The massive wall stretched in all directions as far as Glog could see. When it was dark, it was black as night, but when Glog flashed light on the wall from his light stone, it showed a brilliant sky blue.

“It is the sky Glog. Less than a dozen mortal have ever been here, and only three for the next bit.”

Cragspider takes Glog to a small hatch, and ushers him in into a craft, a craft like the ones in the Imperium Of Man. This one is cleaner, more compact, and with less visible machinery.

Cragspider moves towards what Glog thinks of as the front of the vessel.

She gestures with both hands, Glog notices that she suddenly appears as a middle-age woman in the silver suit that covers everything except her head and hands.

Stout boots now cover her feet.

Something akin to windows or port holes open along the vessel and reveal a backdrop of stars.

“Are you still Cragspider?” Glog asks in a quavering voice.

“Yes and no.”

“Are we in the Imperium of Man?”

“Not yet.”

Cragspider lets out a most un-goddess like giggle.

“Sit back and enjoy the ride Glog. Grandfather Mortal showed us this trick.”

The space in front of the craft “opens” into a black, glassy sphere, rimmed in rainbow light.

The craft pushes into the bubble, and Glog feels himself falling in and out simultaneously.

* * *

An eternity, but a moment later, the craft is entering the atmosphere of a dirty yellow planet.

The craft speeds towards the huge structure spines and walls the size of Credia or maybe even all of Xanduru. There are other craft flitting about, but they do not seem to notice Glog and Cragspider.

“To answer your question, we are cloaked Glog. To answer the next, this is the center of the Imperium, Terra, the birthplace of man in this universe. Yes, now we are in the Imperium of Man. Here, take this, you will need it.”

Glog is not sure if Cragspider is telepathic, or if his questions are just obvious, but he had said none of them out loud.

A panel opens in the wall of the craft and a Glog sized sword-and-a-half pops out.

Glog touches the metal, and takes the sword. It fits perfectly in his hand. It is perfectly balanced. The sword is worth many, many Krin. It is composed of anti-magic and anti-magic metals woven together.

Cragspider guides the craft through halls and gates; she lands the vessel in a large room, covered in dust. In several cases, the craft seems to “phase” through solid walls.

“We are here Glog. Your destiny lies out there, close by.”

A “hatch” irises open in the side of the vessel.

“Out with you Glog.”

As Glog exits the craft he glances behind and notes he can only see the hatch.

“It’s through that door at the end in the nearest wall. Hurry back.”

With that the hatch slides shut and the craft is invisible.

Glog walks carefully to what appear to be a door shaped portion of the wall.

As Glog reaches out his hand, it passed through. Glog cautiously steps through and emerges from what appears to be a ceramic vase on the other side.

Glog turns around and puts his hand back through the vase, it is some type of illusion.

“Well, easy to find,” Glog thought.

As he advances several godslayer golems dressed in gold charge forward.

Glog recognizes their energy weapons. Glog dances, dodges, and blocks as he carves up their legs until they fall.

Try as they might, none of them is able to land a blow on Glog.

Six more golems attack. Six more fall.

Glog comes at last into a large room.

* * *

On a huge dais sits an immobile, emaciated figure with the circlet of gold on its brow. Around the room are thousands of meter by meter cutouts on an otherwise featureless wall.

Suddenly, a group of elves fades into view.

“Glat zi vi zar glad?”

As the elves speak, the figure on the throne transforms. As it moves, it transforms from the wizened man into a huge 7 meter tall, two headed, bipedal bird, with iridescent feathers.

It gestures and the elves are consumed in black flames, but the flames flow harmlessly around Glog – around his sword he realizes.

“Glog, good to see you. I owe you a debt of gratitude. You brought the weapons that destroyed the Golden One.

“It has been perfect. I took his place after destroying that tool – Horus. Ha-ha!

“No one ever considered why the Emperor suddenly started giving his followers magic, why he suddenly was okay with being worshiped. The worship of trillions has made me powerful, more powerful than my ignorant brothers. Once I destroy you, it’s time to destroy my brothers. There will be but one, one omnipotent chaos lord in this galaxy!

“You pull me out of my dreaming to action! Thank you Glog!”

“Don’t thank me yet. Today you die Daemon!”

The daemon Lord gestures and another wave of energy washes over Glog and melts the marble below as Glog leaps to skewer the vile creature.

It squawks and strikes Glog, hard, and, while its magic does not affect Glog, its blow still hurts. Glog’s sword sinks deeply into the daemon, and Glog hangs onto the sword as if his life depends on it as indeed it does.

Glog wrenches the sword loose, and rolls as the beast strikes where Glog was.

The two exchange flurries of blows.

Glog is no novice at this point though, he is one of the most skilled warriors in all of Zhalindor.

Glog takes some damage, but the daemon gets the worst of it.

At last Glog thrusts the sword into the creature's chest. As it gasps its last, it gestures at a blank stretch of wall across from the dais; a section of wall dissolves revealing a glowing, sickening looking tunnel beyond.

Three more daemon Lords surge forward – Glog recognizes at least one of them. One is androgynously beautiful, another appears to be a decaying massive cone, and the final is Khorne.

If they had worked together, Glog would not have held a chance, but they back-bit and cut each other off as much as they attacked Glog. (In fact, they probably spent more time attacking each other.)

Glog defeated them in detail.

When the last, the gross one, is cut down, Glog finds a glowing purple staff lying where the first, bird Daemon fell.

Glog approaches the staff, and he hears a voice behind him. Glog slowly turns around.

A human figure clad in gold armor walks out of the passage.

“Thank you, Glog. You have accomplished something that has not been done in a quarter billion years. May I?”

He gestures at the glowing staff.

Glog nods and hands the staff to the figure. He breaks the staff across his knee.

A wave of something more primal than matter and energy passes through the room and accelerates out to the whole of this universe.

The motes of terror, the holes in the fabric of reality, and all of the other anomalies caused by the Warp are sealed.

Psionics disappears from the realms of man.

The golden figure faces Glog.

“Glog, the Imperium of Man, and I personally, owe you a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. But, is there anything that I can do for you?”

“Now that you mention it, I would really like to have an extremely powerful energy sword.

Kind of like the swords that those golden, godslayer golems had.”

“And, you shall have it.”

The figure disappears for a moment to rummage in a side room, and he comes out carrying a lovely weapon. He hands it to Glog.

Glog appears to be much pleased.

“Will this run out of energy like some of our past items from this universe?”

“That depends on how long you use it. My quick calculation says that this will last for approximately 20,000 years. Is that enough time?”

“It will have to do.”

With that, Glog trudges back to Cragspider and her craft.

* * *

Glog returned to Zhalindor, and his story will conclude in “the Crater at the End of Time.”

Thivinen’s Tale ...

Centuries after the Return ...

Thivinen continues to fight chaos and the forces of the void. As the High Lord of Fire for the Overlord’s Army, Thivinen leads his forces into the Great Waste to fight great masses of undead, Void worshipers, and other unsavory types.

Leading with magic in the Sword of Fire, Thivinen leads the Army for many, many years.

At various times, Thivinen is visited by the wandering Tien, St. Acheron, and a wizard named Styles. Thivinen does not shy away from personally exploring ruins, recovering knowledge, and engaging in a little swordplay when required.

One of his favorite adventures was exploring Permeganon.

By the time Glog meets Thivinen again, Thivinen is wearing an iron ring with two bumps – Thivinen has been recognized as an arch mage, second rank. Perhaps more surprisingly, the Sword of Fire has changed.

Thivinen informed them that he had recovered the Sword of Light and fused the two artifacts together.

After creating a Fire Corps within the Army, Thivinen takes a leave of absence to wander the planes for many years.

* * *

At the End of Days...

Thivinen stands before Humakt. Fillian stands at Humakt's right. Thivinen bears a mighty sword that is an amalgam of the Life, Light, and And Fire Swords. Behind Humakt, there is a cadre of luminaries including Alexander, Richard Sharpword, Roland, Ralph the Mumbler, and many others.

Humakt holds a glowing blue sword.

"You have done a great service to my adopted world, Thivinen. Take the final sword, the Sword of Power, and form the Rune of Death with my blessings.

"You have a final quest to perform in these End of Days. Then, you must return the Rune to me for it needs to be given back to the Creator for the final assembly of the World Machine."

Thivinen has done the like several times before. He takes the Sword of Power in his left hand and brings the amalgam sword in his right slowly towards each other.

In a flash, the four are one for the first time in an Age. The blade, the Rune, is dark as night. Its edges are indistinct, but the power flowing through it is palpable.

With the gesture, Thivinen is gone.

He emerges as quiet as shadow, invisible to even the most powerful of beings. This is fortunate, as one of the most powerful of beings is less than 50 meters from the point Thivinen emerges.

Alimandros is engrossed in a vile endeavor that consumes all of his concentration.

Alimandros kneels before a cyclopean circle made of carved dragon bone and stretching 300 m across.

The symbols danced and changed, sickening Thivinen. This is the strongest and most repulsive of Void and Chaos magic.

Thivinen glances around to see a deep fissure surrounding the circle.

“Ah, the entrance to hell. The ceremony has to take place somewhere between the two worlds.” Thivinen thinks to himself.

Thivinen activates five, preprogrammed spells prepared over 20 mortal life spans.

Multiple Thivinens wreathed in shadows, covered in impenetrable shields, launch themselves towards Alimandros.

Each acts independently, each carries the same deadly Rune blade, but only one truly wields the Rune of Death.

Alimandros jumps up and turns from his foul labor.

One by one, the god dispatches the creations until only the true Thivinen remains.

As Alimandros carves up the last illusion, Thivinen is directly behind the god.

Thivinen lunges forward to cut Alimandros in half. Alimandros smiles, gestures, and Thivinen feels himself held fast, the Sword of Death arrested in a downward stroke.

Alimandros turns around and grasps Thivinen’s shoulder warmly.

“Do not worry arch mage. I will not kill you. I will let you watch as I summon the Old Ones. Your mind will be filled with their glory, their power, and if you don’t go mad, then you will gladly serve your betters in these final days.”

Thivinen looks at Alimandros through narrowed eyes. Thivinen’s expression equal parts of fear, hate, and utter loathing.

Then, a change comes over Thivinen’s face. His eyes are smiling.

“What? Mad so soon? You really are fragile...” Alimandros never finishes his taunt.

Fillian’s hand touches Alimandros’ shoulder.

“Hello brother. Sis says ‘hi,’” and Thivinen’s blow strikes true, utterly destroying the dreaded deity.

“Thanks Phil!”

“You are a god now.”

“I was always the late bloomer. We are in the final days.”

“Time does not work as it once did for you. Come with me to the godsplane and experience the good you can do for an Age. The end will always be here.”

“First, I must return the Rune to its owner.”

“Right, we will go together then, but first...”

Thivinen smashes the Rune of Death into the Eldritch magical circle. The circle shrieks and is utterly annihilated.

Thivinen looks at Fillian, and asks “is this the last we must fear from the Old Ones then?”

“No, unfortunately not. Another of your former Party members will deal the final blow to the Old Ones.”

“Who?”

“The master changeling, Ashe. He has been preparing for this for many millennia. His plan is actually quite remarkable. I could watch that scene from the end days many, many times and still be amused by it.”

* * *

Thivinen and Fillian return to Humakt, and give him the Rune. The air rends and Humakt and his retainers step through to join the Creator, and speed Zhalindor into the end days.

* * *

Thivinen goes with Fillian and spends an Age working as a god.

Thivinen works through his many followers to create a collection of spells and items surrounding the hearth, the exercise of free will, and brewing.

This is no surprise to anyone who knew him as a mortal.

Many were his works and those of his followers, but these are tales for other days.

So ends the Final Turn of Quantum Engagement ...

Thank you all for much fun over the past almost 8 years, and for some of you, for almost 40 years.

It has been my pleasure to beer game master, and I hope that there are opportunities to play again together in the future.

In service,

Rich