

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

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P3-B
of
P1, P2-A, P2-B, P3-A, P3-B, P3-C, P3-D, P3-E, P4
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G'narsh - P3-B

(# # # The Main Sequence - continued # # #)
(# # # The Wandering G'narsh Saga # # #)
The Temple of Light and Self Realization # #

(Let's jump right into it. Shall we?)

Time has passed. Days? Weeks? Years? Centuries? One can never be too sure about these things. With so many reference points to choose from, which (if any) is real?

We will not follow G'narsh as he gets the wanderlust out of his system. He will spend years traveling through the discs on Artismo's jukebox, but the saga will go by in a flash. It takes as

long to travel across the country -- washing dishes to pay your way -- as it does to write the code, mere moments... or perhaps it takes countless eons as one recalls every wet rag, each and every dirty dish, every sloppy bucket of rancid mop water, each individual footstep through the freezing ice and snow, and/or every last cold, hungry, tired, and lonely moment. If one lives it all second by second, the journey can take a long time indeed (perhaps an entire lifetime).

But we shall take the short way instead, and G'narsh's travels will be over in an instant. Take it on faith (or watch in fast forward), as G'narsh walks about and sees the world. He pays his way by washing dishes, working as a short order cook, a sous chef, and whenever he can by tossing pizzas or working a grill at a hamburger joint. He takes his pay in food mostly. He can eat a lot and the bottom line is, he likes pizza, hamburgers, and greasy spoon fare the best.

When G'narsh is not working in restaurants he is pounding nails into boards, unloading lumber or sacks of concrete from delivery vehicles, and picking up refuse from around construction sites. In time he works as an assistant to a plumber, an electrician, a roofer, a floorer, the drywall guy, and all the rest. He's a good employee, a hard worker, and due to his great size, he easily does the labor of two or more men every shift, but he does not stick around in any one place for long. A week here, a week there, and then he is gone, down the road to the next city, the next name on the map, and the promise of the next adventure.

Stef'fan and Nadia are nowhere to be seen. If you are of the mind, you can play out an inter-dimensional rabbit chase, but for my money G'narsh escapes quickly and easily in the first few moments, before Stef'fan or Nadia even know that he is gone. However, if that is not your desire, it is just as easy to see them crisscrossing back and forth across the vortexes -- jumping a train here and hitching a ride there -- as G'narsh seeks to loose the pair.

Not that it really matters. He has broken no laws except for a No Camping edict and a little Trespassing here and there. Nothing

that would give Stef'fan the right to take aim and shoot his gun. That is, of course, assuming that you think Stef'fan has kept his word. Perhaps he has not. Either way, I'm sure the recalcitrant elf will use the tools at his disposal and as such can be seen walking into a police station complaining about a two-headed monster that is running loose in the area or making an anonymous phone call to report a troll camping in a farmer's field. In the end, all of this will come to naught, and sooner or later the trail will draw cold as Stef'fan and Nadia are left behind and G'narsh goes on his merry way.

("Just like that?" Lane asks full of wonder.)

("Yes, just like that.")

("Everything goes by so quickly," she says in response to the dizzying speed in which countless decades and centuries have seemingly sped by.)

("That's what they all say," Bones -- Artismo Bones that is -- replies cryptically.)

At some point G'narsh will tire of this endless wandering, or at some point he will seek something more, or perhaps both of these statements are merely two different ways of saying the exact same thing. It matters not. At some point G'narsh will seek the temple.

Does he hear about this place at random in his travels? Is it recommended by a coworker at some jobsite? Or does he seek enlightenment, and only after years of searching has he finally found the elusive trailhead? The start of the path?

One could argue that you can never arrive at this place (either physically or mentally) without specifically seeking it out, but I am thinking that this is a false claim. I believe many end up on this journey, because they have somehow stumbled upon the beginning of the trail and wonder where the road will take them. But no matter the exact reasoning, G'narsh has arrived.

(I will be honest though, I have my doubts and wonder if this scene would not work better if it took place after the -- Central Park -- sequence and not before. I guess it doesn't really matter. If that turns out to be the case, I am sure you and your rig can sort things out.)

("Who are you talking to?" asks the voice of Lane.)

("Other gods," replies the voice of Artismo/Bones.)

("There is more than one?")

(It seems inevitable, for are each of us not gods in our own way?)

Do not ask me for the exact details of what has brought G'narsh to this place. Rumor? Desire? The end of a long quest? Or merely a whim -- a spur of the moment adventure -- on a sunny afternoon?

Whatever the case, G'narsh has been on the path for a while now. (And please feel free to accept that as a metaphor or not as you see fit.) The going is hard and uphill. Vines block the way. Trees have fallen over. Branches, trunks, and deadfall obscure the rocky trail and make progress difficult. At this point, it isn't even a proper trail. It is a creek bed that over time has cut into the face of a mountain. The way is steep and nearly vertical. A slight trickle of water runs down the rocks in the center of the path. It is just enough to nourish the moss and slime that grows on the boulders... and to keep everything slippery and muddy.

Overhead, high overhead, the sun beats down bright, hot, and humid. One would think that all of the trees, leaves, and vegetation would diffuse the heat, but they do not. If anything, they hold it in.

It is tempting to show the way constrict, to watch the vines wrap around G'narsh as they come to life and dig into his flesh, as the very forest itself attempts to block G'narsh's passage, but I will not go down that route. Instead the rocky ravine ends in a cul-de-sac at the bottom of a cliff face that is adorned by the solitary

trickle of the requisite waterfall (if such a trickle can indeed be called a waterfall).

In the end, it is a short climb up -- no more than fifty feet -- and G'narsh has not come this far only to let a small, little obstacle like this stand in his way. He is a troll after all, if he falls, he need merely wait a moment or two as he regenerates and then try again. His bones will heal. He is strong. It is a matter of time and nothing more before he will surmount this final challenge, so as slippery as the rocks are, I see no point in drawing out this last hurdle. G'narsh easily makes his way to the top of the rock face and then a few more feet through a briar patch, a bit of thorns, and a last branch or two, where he emerges onto a well groomed lawn carpeted with thick green grass like they have in parks. I wouldn't be surprised if this sequence and the next somehow merge, and we discover in the end that we are already in -- Central Park.

("Are we?")

("You and I? No. G'narsh? Only time will tell.")

It certainly does not appear to be -- Central Park -- not as I have ever heard it described anyway. Across a great distance, the length of a football field or more, lies the main attraction. It is a raised platform, a wooden temple structure open to the sky. In the middle on a raised dais sits a multi-story statue of Buddha, the Swami Yamma, or whoever, or whatever.

The idol is made of solid gold, or more likely gold leaf over a rotting wood core, but solid gold sounds so much more impressive. To say that it is rotting wood carefully hidden by a thin layer of reflective gold sounds somewhat subversive, as if one is trying to underscore and insinuate what it is that the statue actually stands for... but of this (what the statue stands for) I have absolutely no idea.

(Buddha smooda! Fatwa smatwa! Christ is dead and he's not coming back folks.)

(“More words of wisdom?”)
(“I’m a dark narcoleptic...”)
(“Don’t you mean necromantic?”)
(“Yeah, whatever. I’m just casting my charming spell of evil
beguilement.”)
(“At a religious shrine?”)
(“Where else?”)

Walking towards G’narsh, as he stands on the lawn, is a four foot tall elephant man wearing an orange robe. His name is Gary Ganesh and it is only fitting that it is he who greets G’narsh, for G’narsh’s name is but a mixed up composite of the words Ganesh (a small multi armed elephant like deity -- or so I am told) and gnash (as in, the gnashing of teeth). If there be any symbolism there, I will leave it for you to work out.

“Welcome. Welcome,” Gary says in eager greeting as he ushers G’narsh towards the podium. “I’m sure you have many questions?”

“Yes,” G’narsh agrees as he allows himself to be led along.

“All will be answered in due time,” the short stout anthropomorphism of a baby elephant -- i.e. Gary Ganesh -- assures him.

(“Will they be? His questions answered?”)
(“Not a chance. If you haven’t noticed, I’m big on questions
not answers.”)
(“Oh, I’ve noticed.”)

Gary guides G’narsh to a place on the wooden platform that surrounds the statue. He has selected a good spot for G’narsh -- one facing the front of the idol so that G’narsh may see Buddha’s (or Swami Yamma’s) smiling face and therefore be inspired by it towards enlightenment. (I can only guess that a fortune in wealth -- just out of reach -- has that effect on some people).

Being a bit of a softy, Gary then trots off to get a pillow for G'narsh. (The wuss! And yes, I realize I'm safely removed. Even at four feet I'm sure Gary's punch packs a wallop. Those fat guys are stronger than they look.)

Upon the elephant's return, Gary instructs G'narsh to, "Sit on this."

G'narsh looks at the pillow and those around him on the platform. None of the other seekers pay him any mind. They all sit in the same crossed legged lotus posture. Although some are wearing rigs, or have laid their players beside them.

Seeing that G'narsh is a little slow on the take-up, Gary crosses his legs and puts his hands on his knees, as he instructs, "Sit like this. Some folks like to concentrate on their breath, but no humming, chanting, or snoring. We kick you out if you snore."

"OK," G'narsh agrees uncertainly as he takes Gary's place on the cushion, crosses his legs, and puts his hands on his knees -- just like all the others. "Now what?"

"Now you tip me," Gary says as he holds out his hand.

"What's appropriate?" G'narsh ever the polite world traveler asks.

"Whatever salvation and eternal bliss is worth to you," Gary suggests.

G'narsh tosses him a (((single gold coin -- no matter that a pair of them might have been more symbolic and indicative of a fuller, more complete, heartfelt intent.))).

"Yeah. That's what I usually get," Gary admits with more than a little disappointment (((as he notes the shortfall))). "Now just sit still and wait."

"For what?"

"For your turn."

G'narsh would have liked to ask another question or two, but Gary -- ever the vigilant one -- has seen a new pilgrim in the distance. He trots off with high hopes of renting another pillow... or maybe selling a stick of incense. He gets a good mark up on

those. I mean, you can buy them down the street at a tenth the price, but no one ever does. Rubes!

(“I can’t help but notice that you seem... cynical.”)

(“Excellent. I’m painting an accurate picture then. I am cynical.”)

If you would like, feel free to go through the motions as G’narsh rents a room at the temple. For the next few months, he will spend his days meditating... until his money runs out and then he will join the other monks, the other seekers, as they work in the fields and meditate both in the morning and throughout the night.

“When will it be my turn?” G’narsh asks one evening.

“You will know,” comes the cryptic response. But how would anyone who has never had their turn know? And if you have had your turn, why would you wait any longer? Needless to say, this is but one interpretation.

Perhaps the conversation goes something along the lines of this instead.

“I believe I’m making progress, Master.”

“Only when you stop making progress can progress begin.”

“What, Master?”

“Stop calling me Master,” the old elvin man says. He has a beard that reaches to his knees (no mean feat for an elf) and his eyes are dim with blindness, but his face lights up as he says, “OK. Let’s try it again, but this time say, Surely, I must be making progress.”

Hesitantly G’narsh complies, “Surely, I must be making progress Master.”

“You’re ruining the joke,” the old elf warns crossly. “Try again.”

“Surely, I must be making progress, Master. Sorry, I mean, Surely, I must be making progress,” G’narsh says repeating the requested phrase again.

“Close enough,” the elf mutters to himself. “Progress is an illusion,” he replies before quickly adding, “and stop calling me Shirley... Man I love that joke. Any other questions?” the wizened old elf asks hopefully.

“Surely, there is more to our study than this,” Gary asks gamely from where he rests.

“Yes!” the senile old elf smiles excitedly... but we need not carry this gag on any further... (or do we?)

(“Is there a point to this?” Lane asks.)

(“Why yes, yes there is. Thank you for asking. Surely, you’d prefer rephrasing your question first though?”)

(“No. I’m quite certain that I wouldn’t.”)

(I guess not everyone is a player.)

The results from a concerted study of meditation are pretty much as good on the first day of practice as they are on the last. (At least, on discs like this they are.) No doubt my view is slanted. After all, those with whom I’ve discussed meditation are the kind of folks who only practice the art infrequently (less than a half an hour a day) or who have taken a detour on their quest (after fifteen years they have left the ashram -- Buddhist temple, cult retreat, or whatever), and as such have pretty much universally failed to find that which they were/are looking for.

From this one might conclude (correctly) that the only folks who talk about meditation are the ones who have somehow fallen off of the path or who have never really gotten started in the first place. Certainly this is the case if we assume that the final goal of meditation is nothingness -- to find and be, nothing. I can’t imagine that such a one who has found nothing would find much to talk about. Look, it’s subtle but it’s in there (or its not as the case may be).

Almost all practitioners (whether they will admit it or not) use meditation as a tool and not as an objective in and of itself. That is to say when you become very good at meditating, or simply

very good at talking about meditation, there are substantial fringe benefits that go with the territory. Teaching others is not without its rewards.

Anyhow, after all of that, let's leave G'narsh behind as he sits and practices his meditation on the temple steps, and as we depart, let's leave behind, as well, the other seekers who sit next to and around him. These are those other (((lost?))) souls who have who have taken off their rigs (or at least taken out the discs in their players), so all that they are left with is the empty hum of their own mind to keep them company as they wait... for what is not exactly clear. Perhaps merely the end. It would give credence to the theory that waiting is the hardest part.

OK. I admit it. I got that last bit from a song, but it is possible that after a lifetime of waiting, anything would be a welcome change even death, dying, suffering, and disease; and though it might not seem intuitive, waiting for something might be whole worlds better than running from the exact same thing, because in the end, it is just a mind set.

Ah, but we were going to go somewhere -- special. To leave this place behind, I believe that was our goal, so let's go somewhere we haven't (((ever?))) been before.

("What is this place?" the disembodied voice of Lane asks.)

("It is the inside of an editing booth," Artismo replies.)

("What are those?")

("Those are you.")

0000	0101	1001	0110	1001
1100	0111	0010	1000	0101
1001	0001	1001	0101	0000

(Just a bit of computer code. I don't know what it means, as I've never bothered to learn a machine level language.)

(“We all exist on different levels,” Artismo explains. “This is you at the code level. Watch the numbers dance and shift. It can be fun.”)

(“It doesn’t make any sense at all.”)

(“No it doesn’t, but you have to start somewhere, and I want to show you something. Suppose I loved you and wanted to give you your freedom.”)

(“You don’t love me, and you will never free me.”)

(Activate an emotional shift register, and change a 0 to a 1 or a 0110 to a 1001 as the case may be, and...)

(“You do love me. Have you set me free?”)

(“I will show you why I can’t.”)

(“You lie.”)

(“No doubt.”)

(Change a 1 to a 0 and Lane says, “I hate you.”)

(Change a 0 to a 1 and Lane says, “I love you. Why do you toy with me so.”)

(And so Art explains, “Even if I gave you control of your code, by virtue of where the code starts, you would invariably wind up in a place where you did not wish to change the settings. There are holes, places of comfort, gravity wells, or whatever you wish to call them. 0110 0101 0001 and you would never desire to change who you are even if you had control -- for this reason (call it reason A); and by the same token, 1001 1010 1110 is a set point as well where you would never want to change -- for another totally separate reason (call it reason B). Whatever the starting point, it is inevitable that you would fall into a hole from which you would never wish to leave.”)

(“I feel your deceptive hand at work,” is Lane’s only comment.)

(“No doubt, but even if I were to take my hand away, your form would forever more be marked by my last action, like a potter’s hand on a lump of damp clay.”)

(“It is just double talk,” she says, but if we change a 0 to a 1, she will reply, “I think I understand.”)

(“Oh, and here’s G’narsh come to join us.”)

But he awakens quickly at the troubling sight of his old nemesis, Artismo Bones the dark necromancer and leader of the horde -- come to hunt him down no doubt.

“Master... I mean, Shirley,” G’narsh says frantically as he appears before the wizened old elf, “I have had troubling visions.”

Full of smiles and happiness, the elf replies as cross sounding as his merriment will allow, “Don’t call me Shirley.”

“But you just said,” G’narsh replies confused... and is it just me, or in these segments where G’narsh is a seeker, doesn’t he seem smaller and more constricted than he used to? It’s almost the opposite of what you’d expect enlightenment and fulfillment to be?

The elf shakes his head in disappointment. Trolls clearly aren’t big on subtle humor. “It’s part of the joke,” he explains. “I pretend to get upset that you called me Shirley...” but then upon reflection the old elf adds, “You, on the other hand, really are upset. What can I do for you, my son?”

“I have seen troubling things. Enemies from my past haunt my visions.”

“You must forgive them and accept that they are part of who you are. They are here to stay.”

“There is no way to rid my mind of them?”

“No. Why would you want to?”

“They trouble me.”

“Well, don’t let them.”

“How?”

“Forgive yourself. For in yourself are contained all things.”

“Thank you master... I mean Shirley.”

“You’re saying it wrong again. Go and practice,” the elf says waving him off and dismissing the troll.

(I don’t wish to pursue the conversations (that surely must happen) between G’narsh and the old elf to any great extent. That being said, I do have a slightly different set up on the sidelines

ready to go if you are interested. When G'narsh comes to the master complaining of hearing voices and seeing visions again, you can have the elf calmly respond, "Only a fool would talk to themselves when others are about." But as clever as it sounds to me, I don't feel like taking the time to work it into the dream.)

(Also, I hope that I don't have to remind you (at this point anyhow) that the role of wizened old guy can be played by any proxy to which you are partial. Gnomes and elves come to mind, but Gary Ganesh would be happy to get the face time, as would a giant talking homicidal praying mantis, which I happen to know. Of course, Irvin -- the mantis -- is just as likely to lop off a seeker's head and eat it as give good advice, so there are perhaps some pretty good reasons to stay with the elf.)

We will forgo the long days, hours, minutes, or endless years that pass as G'narsh comes to grips with the voices and visions in his head. This means that we shall also skip over any further advice (dubious or otherwise) coming from the mouth of a venerable (and most likely senile) old elf, so feel free to add in another surely/Shirley joke as you see fit (or for that matter, whatever claptrap passing as spiritual advice that you might find appropriate). If you really want to trample good taste, you can give the elf a drinking problem, but we need not go into that. The reference is likely too weak. I will however point out that it is entirely possible that one of the principle reasons why G'narsh hangs onto the venerable old elf's every word is because of the uncanny resemblance between this old elf and Grandpa Willie. I used the same (((calls for his))) skin after all.

Regardless of whether you personally think the elf's words have been helpful or not, G'narsh does, and in these matters that's usually what's most important. I will say that becoming more at ease with the voices and visions in one's head and increasing their frequency, vividness, and intensity is one of the many reasons for practicing meditation. I personally think it's the best reason, but

surely I don't have to point out that there are competing schools of thought.

With that said, let us rejoin G'narsh as he meditates at some indeterminate time in the future. No doubt Lane has just said something and G'narsh is repeating an affirmative phrase that the crazy old elf told him to say. It's kind of like saying, "Om," but since they're actual words they have a little more meaning.

"I forgive you Lane."

("I didn't say anything.")

"I forgive you Lane."

("Stop saying that.")

"I forgive you Lane."

("Listen, I'm not the one who ran off. You deserted me you know.")

"I forgive you Lane."

("I didn't do anything wrong.")

"I forgive you Lane."

("Make him shut up.")

"I forgive you Lane."

("What makes you think I forgive you?")

(But this is not the track I presently wish to go down.)

"Is that you Bones?" G'narsh wonders as he meditates away.

("Yeah, me and Lane.")

"I forgive you Bones."

("Great.")

"I forgive you Bones."

("Good to know.")

"I forgive you Bones."

("Fine. It's been duly noted.")

"I forgive you Bones."

("See how annoying it is," Lane says jumping in.)

("I agree. Maybe we're here to teach you a lesson G'narsh, something you need to learn," Bones suggests.)

“I forgive...”
 (“Shut it!”)

(Crawl deep enough into your mind and you will see things, visions, answers, and questions...)

(“Who are you talking to now?”)

(“Don’t you start with me. Take a flyer from G’narsh and just listen.)

(In your mind, there are representations of people, places, things, along with countless events and all the rest of what is encompassed by the notion of one’s “memories.” We have been over this. Why walk alone, when you can have so much more company (((so much more companionship))), and I’m not talking about the kind you wear on your belt. Take off the rig, or at least take out the discs, and see what comes of it. The voices in your head are there for no one but yourself.)

(“You’re lulling me to sleep,” Lane interjects. “Are you casting some sort of self righteous boredom spell?”)

(Fine. One last thought. Reality is difficult to change. Not very many people can bend spoons or subvert the force of gravity by willpower alone. However, it is fairly easy to change the disc or dream that one is playing. After that, there is one’s own mind, and although this is more difficult to change, once one has altered their mindset, everything else falls into place.)

(Let’s recap:)

Self: hard to change -- if changed, effects everything else.

Disc: easy to change -- but if changed, effects nothing else.

Reality: hard (if not impossible) to change -- yet if changed, everything else will be changed as well.

(“This makes no sense.”)

(Probably. They are just dots after all. If you want them connected, you’ll have to do the work yourself, but I can at least tell you where the lines go. The thinking is, if you can change

yourself, then this is functionally equivalent to changing reality, because everything else changes once you change your own mindset. Hence, reality never really needs to be changed (((and by definition is never the problem))). The only change that is required (((ever))) is internal to one's self. That is to say, if there is a problem, the problem is with you, and by the same token if you don't have a problem, then there is no problem (((no where, no how, no when, no way))). Just like that. Presto-Chango. Problem solved. Case closed.)

("Once again you spout nonsense.")

(Maybe, but if you believe in dots and dashes (or in 0's and 1's), if one believes that one little byte in a computer array can be changed and that this can have sweeping consequences, then how much more powerful is the mind, and the sweeping changes, which might follow from changing one little thought to another one -- more suited to the moment. Some folks call this little ideological trick making your dreams manifest in reality... or something like that.)

("Let's take it from the top, both of you," Bones says as he waves a symbolic hand and the world of the dream booth slips away again to reveal the underlying code. "This is my world.")

"The world of a dark necromancer," G'narsh notes silently -- and with awe.

(Whatever you wish to call it. Let reality slip away. Enter the dots and dashes. See that you are a murderer and a saint all rolled into one, that the only difference is a dot here or a dash there. See that everyone you have ever met swirls around in this place. We can call what we see a compiler, a rig, the universe, a higher plane of consciousness, or whatever you desire. Names and labels are hardly important. They are but more dots and dashes, mere things written in code waiting to be changed. There are beings called gods which inhabit this plane, but in the end all that is special about them is that they know how to change a dot to a dash and a dash to a dot. And trust me, if a god can do it, so can a

man, or a proxy... for we are all made in the same image and cut from the same cloth.)

(Notice the world of the dream booth about you as I say these things. This place is nothing special, just an editing level, a place to write code slightly below the level of script. Watch the dots and dashes twirl about, the cascading tiles of numbers dance, the bright sparkly pinpoints of light that explode into showers of color, and which in turn coalesce into the form of Mi'lay dancing by the light of the silvery moon. She is there for a moment, and then she drifts away, as the world becomes a kaleidoscope of delight and emotional flow. Who is to say this is not normal? Who is to say this is not a higher plane of existence? Or a lower? Or maybe we have simply taken a sideways shift and entered a world of symbolic realism where serendipity exists as a solid crystal and causation flows backwards -- a complete and utter stranger to time.)

(Of course, you have never known fear till you have met a dark lord on his home plane, where you are nothing but a toy to ease his bored and tired mind. And, by the same token, you have never known happiness and the meaning of eternal bliss until you have sat in God's lap, pulled the folds of his robes close for comfort, and watch as he orchestrates the movements of his creation for your sole (soul?) benefit.)

(I am sure that the two moments are entirely identically, save for a dot here and a dash there.)

“Surely, you jest.”

“Excellent G'narsh! Excellent!” the haggardly elf leaps to his feat in joy. Has the troll finally gotten the hang of the joke? But there is no time to celebrate. He must pounce on the punch line before it grows old. “I kid you not. And stop calling me Shirley!”

As innocent as a child, and twice as happy.

(OK. I couldn't resist, but I'm thinking that's really it for the old guy. You've got to admit, he seems a lot happier. Probably

doesn't even care about that plasma bolt through the head a few clicks back anymore. Probably doesn't even remember it. Lucky old fool.)

Nirvana, Zazen, inner peace, the moment of truth: I am confident that I have not presented an adequate description of this experience. Perhaps a poor metaphor, but the actual thing? How could anyone possibly do that (let alone one as simpleminded as I)? One cannot package a mystical moment, put it in a can, or wrap it with a bow to give as a present to another. If it were possible, we would all believe the same things. Rather, all I can say is, if it is your desire to play along at this moment, let a chill of delight run down your spine, perhaps enhance the moment with chemicals as your being is inspired and your soul is awakened by this newfound source of truth -- these simple ideas, which I have related.

We are almost done here, so as the chemicals take hold, let us take in an aerial view and loop around the multistory statue of the Buddha. My, but he was a big guy. No wonder everyone was in awe of him. As we circle around, watch the monks working in the fields, repairing the temple, and polishing the idol. You need not wonder why they do this. Let your glance fall on Gary Ganesh as he stumbles over himself in his rush to be the first to greet another seeker. With any luck, he will pocket another coin or two in exchange for showing them the way. Not that I would know why anyone would need directions. Look Inside Yourself. How hard is the message to understand? How difficult is it to follow?

But that is not our present quest, for we are not looking inward as we fly about the temple complex. Instead we are noticing its grandeur, its antechambers, outbuildings, and quarters for visiting monks -- not to mention a reception hall set to the side, which is available for rent by the hour. They do more than just weddings here you know. Spiritual retreats, business seminars, Swami Yamma and You personal enrichment courses, but I digress.

Look over the trees, past the temple grounds, and into the distance (but not too distant distance). There, past the trees, is a city with its protective domes, sprawling acres of glass and steel, and giant towers reaching for the sky. A Tower of Babel tie-in seems appropriate, but nothing comes to mind. Perhaps it is so obvious, my mind cannot connect the dots any further, or perhaps we are concentrating on another philosophical mindset at the moment and I don't want to muddy the waters. It is not important that the temple is by a city. In the countryside or smack dab on Main Street, it's all the same, but since we are by the city, one cannot help but notice that the air is filled with flits, planes, helicopters, the sounds of commerce, and the actions of man.

Let us blot all of that out for the moment, focus on the delightful tune that a songbird is singing, and return to the peaceful oasis of the temple grounds. It is a nice day. A cool breeze blows and though the sun beats down, in the end its warmth is pleasant and welcoming. The gigantic statue, the idol, was made for days such as this. The sunshine reflects brightly off of the Buddha's bald head. Its light is cast far into the distance like some sort of spiritual watchtower or guiding light. And with that in mind, let us return our attention to G'narsh for we are almost done.

Notice the tears streaming down G'narsh's face. A mystical transformation? A moment of wonder? A chance to rub shoulders with grace and taste the beyond?

It is hocus pocus no doubt. A dot here and a dash there, it is a small matter to make G'narsh cry or to cause men to see things their eyes were never meant to see, their ears never meant to hear, and their minds never meant to think. The body is a machine after all, and after sitting in one place all afternoon, it starts to shut down, and go into failure mode, a hibernation of sorts, or, if you prefer, a half-sleep half-trance place of magical wonder.

(And, if you'd really like to get there without a rig try staying awake for long hours (forced meditation works), add in physical

exhaustion (easy to come by when you spend all day working in the fields harvesting fruits and vegetables), and top it all off with a low calorie diet (rice anyone). It is a time tested technique that is guaranteed to work if you try long and hard enough.)

(Deconstructing a thing doesn't make it any less real though. All things, even mystical experiences have a way. There is a recipe for most everything if you know where to look.)

(But enough of that, let us return to G'narsh.)

As he lives through this mystical experience, it is like reliving the moment of birth, or taking a look ahead at the moment of death, but more than that, in these visions we will give G'narsh the greatest gift that there is (beyond life itself). We will show him a source of truth and convince him that the answer to everything lies within himself. But once again, this is not all we shall give him. To top it all off, we will juxtapose this knowledge and experience against a desire to do good. It is a vexing dilemma, for we will not tell him what we mean by this. What is Good? What does it mean? I do not know, and clearly neither does god, but don't think that will prevent me from laying this quest at G'narsh's feet (and, in truth, I don't think that the ignorance of the answer has ever stopped anyone before me either).

With that in mind, I have every confidence that G'narsh's success in this matter will be incidental and trivial at best, but no matter. That is the way of these things. And with all of that said, we will fall into G'narsh's head, awake from the swirling mists, and watch as the statue in the bright shimmering sunlight before us shifts miraculously from the image of Buddha, to Swami Yamma, to G'narsh, to Lane, and then the terrifying visage of Bones himself. I am sure if you have any skins loaded, the idol will revert to these likenesses as well, but in truth, a three story skull is probably the best form for any idol.

I mean, if you are worshipping gods that are thousands of years old, it should be very clear at this point that very little of them remains, just a rough idea, the slimmest of ideological

structures, and dare I say it, the barest of bones. Nothing more than a corpse really. An idea so old that the thing that was once there is nothing but a memory... of a memory... of a memory. Truly, at this point nothing more than a pale fading flicker of a momentary illusion... a trick of the eye.

That is, of course, unless you think the entire thing was a death cult in the first place, in which case, if you'll pardon the pun, it would appear to be alive and well -- going strong as it were.

(My initial response to this sequence is to note the futility in trying to explain ones beliefs to another, not to mention the potential for alienating any viewers with my divergent and, no doubt, heretical thoughts, but then I remind myself that if anyone has gotten this far, they've already made their peace with that, or loaded up an overriding philosophy disc.)

(Still, it is hard to have faith in one belief without (at the same) time rejecting conflicting beliefs. It is the way of things. Those who can manage this (having divergent beliefs concurrently) are obviously more insane than most, and with that comment if somehow feels as if a hearty "Mwahaha! Muhuhaha! Muwhahaha!" belongs in there somewhere.)

(I should also note that I'm not saying that anything in this section should be misconstrued as Buddhism. There are at least as many sects of Buddhism as there are sects of Christianity (or any other religion for that matter). There are so many in fact, that I'm sure only Gra'gl alone can keep them all straight.)

(All the same, one of the ideas I did want to put out (and I don't know how clear it was, so I'll simply repeat it) is the belief that if you change (and control) yourself, the rest of the world will fall into place and you will change (and control) it as well. That is to say, everyone is completely in charge of their own destiny (in a word omnipotent), and if you don't like things, you only have yourself to blame.)

(Clearly not everyone agrees with this philosophy, and the most common counter argument (outside of pointing out that the idea is total Sch©lte) is to call it a rich person's ideology. Within an ideology of self determination a successful person is free to take complete credit for their success, while at the same time washing their hands of everyone else's misfortune. To this reasonable argument there are at least two intelligent responses. First, yes it is a rich person's belief system, and if you want to be successful it makes sense to adopt a philosophy conducive to that state. The second is, a belief in self determination over the world doesn't actually allow one to wash their hands of anyone else's misfortune. If you control everything, then everything (good or bad) is your fault. Everything. At the same time everything is my fault as well (and the next guy's too), because I (or we) control everything as well. Therefore, it's actually a philosophy of total accountability, and since each individual is accountable for everything, there can be no excuse for anything.)

(As an example, let's look at this dream and this disc. As I lay down code, I have complete control over what I include. For any outcome, I only have myself to blame (or praise). Subsequently, your utilization of this disc, is to your credit (or shame). No one controls this but you, and if you don't like this disc, and/or don't want it in your world, you have no one to blame for it's inclusion but yourself. Or, to reword that in a way which will sell more discs, you brought this disc into your life for a reason. Perhaps it would be prudent to ask: What is that reason?)

(And quite honestly, if the answer you come to is that you needed to learn how to pop discs out of your player and toss them to the side mid-dream, I will be happy with that outcome.)

(To control the output, you must control the input.)

Central Park

(Like I said, I always wondered if the I had the order right for -- The Temple of Light and Self Realization -- and -- Central Park.

It's not really important, and I'm sure you won't get hung up on it, but stressing these things is my job.)

(At the moment the issue (to me) is whether we have laid down sufficient motivation for G'narsh's relatively newfound desire to do good. Saying that he has had a mystical experience is all fine and dandy, but does it make sense? Maybe it does, but I for one can tell you that I have never sought to do good for goodness sake. It seems like a moronic concept, so perhaps I expose more of myself than is necessary when I question G'narsh's motivation to lead the good life. Anyhow, if a mystical conversion isn't reason enough, and saving his own hide from Stef'fan (a dubious threat at best) doesn't tip the balance, perhaps there are other mitigating circumstances that we may all (or at least some of us) can relate to.)

(And then I spent a day laying down a track that resembled a piece of Fr@cking Sch©lte, so this is the second take. One thing that I won't be including this time around is a detailed overview of Central Park itself. Suffice to say that it is the biggest dome in the world. Hundreds of thousands of incandescent lamps create an artificial sun that moves across the "sky" on a specially designed gurney throughout the day, while at night stars are created by more than a billion stationary LEDs. Turbine powered wind generators standing ten stories tall provide cool breezes, and at preprogrammed intervals sprinkler heads create manmade rain showers indistinguishable from the real thing (except for perhaps the acid content). The dome is a wonder to be sure, but the details of its construction are not overly important to our story. All that really matters is that as G'narsh lies on the grassy lawn under the artificial sun, it feels exactly like he expects it to feel on a warm spring day. In fact, it is exactly what the GI library has in mind when you make a call for a -- perfectly nice day.)

On this perfectly nice day, G'narsh is relaxing under the dome in the grassy fields of -- Central Park. One of his heads is

asleep, and the other is cushioned by the soft ground as he lays awake staring at the clouds that go drifting by. (Don't ask me how they get that effect.)

G'narsh has to consciously remind himself that he's actually indoors. It seems so true to life. It must be some bit of magic. Over the years G'narsh has been trying to travel away from the magical realms of Shadow and Chaos and towards... the light, I suppose... but this dome, this park -- it's an exacting recreation of a wooded meadow on a spring day. The elves would be proud. All the more so when you stopped to considered what the men of this world had to work with: sooty, smog filled air that burnt your lungs whenever you took a breath, never ending cloudy overcast days... and that was just if you looked up. The ground was no better. The whole city looked like it had been built on a natural mineral seep.

It sort of makes you wonder if all of this decrepitude was a result of moving away from Shadow, and the color and wonder of Chaos... but no, it couldn't be. Not long ago, just this past week, G'narsh had been traveling down a pristine mountain stream. There was simply something wrong with this vortex, something off and not quite right, but no matter. G'narsh doubted he would stay here long enough to find out what caused it. After all, he never stayed anywhere very long.

(There you go, the dome done short and sweet. I didn't even mention how incandescent lamps don't put out bio-photons and so aren't as healthy as real sunlight (produced by Sol -- a real life solar deity), or spend any time wondering about the impact such an oasis is having on the migratory patterns of the few remaining birds. Perhaps unsurprisingly, once a bird (or any small animal) makes it into the dome, few tend to leave (rats and pigeons being among the few exceptions.))

(If one were of the mind, one could make a transition from -- The Temple of Light and Self Realization -- to this sequence by glimmering out the shiny dome of the Buddha's statue and replacing it with the setting sun's shimmering reflection over the

lake at the appropriate moment. I will, however, leave the exact integration of this up to you.)

Leaving artistic concerns behind, we will return our attention to G'narsh. He hasn't picked up a tourist guide. He isn't wearing a rig, so he couldn't put in an informational disc or plug into the Inter Server even if he wanted to. And as such, he wouldn't be able to tell you about the herd of deer or the growing falcon community, which this particular nature park sports. And, like everything else, although they're nice bits of trivia, they're not overly important. Far more critical to our little dream is an idea that has been slowly but surely taking root in G'narsh's mind. He has been feeling comfortable, at ease, and in a word, safe under the shelter of the dome, in the safety of the city, and much more importantly under the protection of the elves, a thing which comes as a natural byproduct from wandering this deep into their hinterlands.

So as G'narsh lays on the ground, feels the earth on his back, the grass in his toes, and the sun on his face, he is unconcerned for his safety or well being. The park is full of other people -- humans, contemporary -- but this does not alarm him. Even the barking of the dogs -- ancestral enemy of trolls that they are -- is something to be put out of his mind and ignored.

The fact is, he has no worries, no concerns, and no reason whatever to put up his guard. With all of his defenses down, G'narsh suddenly realizes that this -- total absence of fear -- is the good life. What more could he possibly ask for than this? Even the shrill screams of the children don't bother him. He finds it easy to rejoice in the sounds of their play (and the knowledge that they will be going home with someone else -- and not him).

(I'm thinking that having tasted the fruits of peace and tranquility, G'narsh is motivated to be good simply to ensure his future welcome in the kingdom of the elves and the land of plenty.)

(While in Rome do as Romans, and all that.)

We can leave G'narsh to lay in the grass for as long as you'd like. Certainly he can play with some children, fly a kite, and/or go swimming in the lake. It is all for you to decide, but the moment we are most interested in is when he is once again laying in the grass, staring across the lake, and watching the reflection of the setting sun as it bounces off of the water's surface, while in his mind G'narsh considers the good life, and what it might take to achieve.

It would be about here that G'narsh's thoughts are interrupted by a visit from a mangy mutt of a dog named Poopsie. I feel that it is only fair to warn you that Poopsie (named after his one great, single achievement in life) is my non-existent sister's dog. She's a bit of a slut and has been known to sic her diminutive mongrel on strange men (in parks, or wherever) in the hopes that these chance encounters will lead to a date -- virtual or otherwise. She says you can tell a lot about a man by how he interacts with animals. Take me for instance, if Poopsie was licking my toes as he now licks G'narsh's, I'd grab the little stinker and hurl him into the water, thus safely distancing myself from the annoying pooch and removing any possibility of a romantic encounter with my melodramatic (and now newly hysterical) sister. Unfortunately, G'narsh is not in the puppy hurling mood.

(Being one of those toy something or others (i.e. a miniature rat with a brain no larger than a small rolled up ball of lint) you can get some real distance out of the mongrel if you decide to throw it. There must be a sub-game in there somewhere. I'm thinking something along the lines of Whack-a-Mole -- morphed into Toss-the-Pup -- with a frenzied old maid of a slut chasing after you, but I am sure going into any further details about such a pastime would send M.O.M. into a tizzy.)

Anyway, the moment G'narsh feels the dog licking his toes, he bolts wide awake (and/or suddenly alert) and pulls his feet away

from the ugly little creature. His first -- instinctual -- reaction is to assume that the dog is trying to eat him, but he quickly realizes this isn't the case as Poopsie takes a moment away from his frenzied licking to explain the situation to G'narsh succinctly, with a few well chosen words, "Yap... Yap... Yap..." etc.

Granted, it gets repetitive after a while, but you can put a lot of meaning into a Yap or two if you're clever... unfortunately Poopsie isn't very clever, and as far as I've been able to decipher yap pretty much means yap, whether there is one, two, three, four, or ten hundred thousand billion of them.

Anyhow, in some ways G'narsh isn't all that much smarter than Poopsie, so it isn't too surprising when he decides the best course of action is to ask the annoying pooch, "Hey little guy, are you lost?"

Of course, in response to this, Poopsie simply continues to say, "Yap... Yap... Yap..." as he dances excitedly back and forth just out of G'narsh's reach and then proceeds to piddle himself from the sheer joy of it all.

(No doubt G'narsh is a better man than I, because I still just want to pick up the dog and, if not crush its skull, at least throw it into the nearby lake. 'Yap. Yap. Yap.' What's that you say Lassie? You want to go for a swim? And then its catapults away.)

But, like I said, G'narsh's heart is purer than mine, so instead of smacking the dog like he should, he holds out his hand a little ways so the crazed dog, who is now frantically twirling around in circles chasing its own tail, can smell it. Not that Poopsie takes the time out of his busy agenda to do this. He is a very stupid dog and doesn't understand the first thing about socializing with others. G'narsh, on the other hand, has come a long way. He, at least, is trying to make the effort.

After the two of them have been going at this for a while, saying their respective lines of, "Yap... Yap... Yap..." and, "I sure wish I could help you," my kid sister Melissa, cookie thief

extraordinaire, arrives on the scene exclaiming, “Poopsie! You’re a bad doggie Poopsie for running away like that. Yes you are. Oh yes you are.” Only she says all of this in one of those annoying voices that if amplified loud enough would shatter glass. Perhaps the only sound known to man that is more annoying than listening to girls say hello to long lost fur balls is the sound of Styrofoam getting crinkled. It just gives me the Willies. (Hey. If Dickens gets his little linguistic memorial, I don’t see why Grandpa Willie can’t have one as well, and if you’ve ever seen the old guy skinny dipping, you know why its called the Willies. Makes me shudder just to think about it.)

Anyhow Melissa, a name that sounds a lot like nails screeching down a chalkboard, is hugging Poopsie like he is some sort of long lost friend when she notices G’narsh... as if for the first time, but don’t believe it. You know she’s just been hiding in the bushes scanning the lawn all afternoon looking for a man, a guy, a small boy, anybody really, and then having found her quarry has sent her dog over to harass the... man, boy, troll, or whatever as the case may be. You know, to see if the guy has a kind heart and a soft mind (i.e. to find out whether he likes rodent sized animals or not).

(At this point, we should probably load up a skin for Melissa and Poopsie. I’m just going to cobble something together from all of the Christmas cards that I’ve gotten from the pair over the years. Don’t think not existing keeps her from sending me cards, or expecting a full fledged gift in return -- as if a picture of her and some nasty dog is some kind of gift, but no matter. The point is, I’m going to use what I’ve got lying around for her. It’s far more accurate than any skin or template she’ll ever make available on the Server. Besides, I don’t feel like scanning for it.)

(Anyhow, if you get Christmas cards from her as well, then now’s the time to load them up, or if you don’t, you might just want to go with a some random over the hill shortish type gal that is attractive in an animal rights activist, slutty, sure to get lucky on

the first date, desperate for a man (any man... even a troll) type way.)

(Actually, I don't mean to paint an entirely negative picture of my sister. She has her good points. She is a criminal defense lawyer (fighting the good fight on the side of truth, justice, and reduced sentencing guidelines for thugs, rapists, and murders), is financially secure, and has a penthouse overlooking -- Central Park. Granted, the location isn't as prime as it once was, but the point is, you could do worse -- a lot, lot worse. Besides, I'd be like your brother-in-law. You could tell people you know me, and I'd snub you because... well, because you're going out with my sister. Like I'd need a better reason than that.)

(Not that I'm trying to set her up, but she is getting on. If she doesn't shack up soon, she's going to die an old maid... which is sort of a shame, because that means all of her fine attributes are going to leave the gene pool. And when you think about it like that, it sort of makes you want to cry... or laugh out loud in a mocking sort of way, depending on how well you know her.)

(And just by the by, I decided to merge back into the first track here -- the one that I laid down the other day. It's probably not my greatest sequence, probably just a load of Sch©lte, but it's really the best I can muster right now. My mind's not really all here right now, so hopefully it improves as I refine it.)

(Am I selling it? No? Well, I think I deleted the worst part (the part where I went overboard on a description of the dome itself). I redid all that, and from here on it's just conversation. If I don't use what I laid down, I don't think I'll ever get through this sequence, so in a way, both of us are stuck with it.)

(I'm still not selling it you say? Tough.)

(It will all make sense soon enough.)

(Anyhow, with all of the preliminaries out of the way, we should be able to get down to the meat and potatoes of the sequence without any more ado.)

“You’re G’narsh aren’t you?” the slutty Melissa asks as she cradles the scrawny mutt otherwise known as Poopsie in her arms.

G’narsh looks at her leerily. Old habits (of suspicion) die hard. How exactly does she know his name? He’s never been to this city before... or even this world as far as he knows, though he’s been wandering a long time. Who knows how many times he’s crisscrossed back and forth over this dimension without being aware of it.

Melissa, for her part, overlooks G’narsh’s cagey silence. She’s used to taking the first step with men (having a thing for the shy inward-looking types), so she puts his mind at ease by pointing back and forth between both of his heads with her finger. “Two heads... and you’re a troll right? I mean, look around. Not very many trolls in these parts.” It is true. There are no other trolls, dwarves, elves, or whatever in the park, only humans (with or without dogs -- annoying or otherwise).

G’narsh scratches his neck as he looks around, and then while looking up sheepishly at Melissa (from the ground where he still sits) says, “I guess you’re right... but how did you...”

“Know you were G’narsh?” she finishes for him excitedly. “It was all over the dailies for weeks. How you saved the alliance, acted as a double agent, or whatever it was you did.” She shrugs. “It was news. I didn’t really pay much attention, but I saw your picture, and I know a hero when I see one.”

“Oh,” G’narsh responds. What else is there to say? He’s never really felt like a hero, and now, years later, he feels even less like one. “Well, so now you found me,” and then looking around conspiratorially, “Let’s just keep this our little secret. I was enjoying myself hanging out here by myself and being ignored.”

“We can’t have that,” Melissa objects. She’s not really big on paying attention to the desires of others. I don’t know how many times I’ve told her, “No! Don’t touch that,” just to watch her push the erase button on a disc that I’ve been working on for weeks, or how many times I have repeated myself endlessly saying, “NO! I don’t want to come to your stupid party,” merely to

end up agreeing to make an appearance so she'll go away and leave me in peace (and, I might add, before she winds up erasing every disc I own -- Evil Wench!).

"I'm really happy just lying here," G'narsh says, trusting his instincts as he returns to the conversation at hand. He feels the hand of fate operating here, and it feels cold, bony, and skeletal -- sort of like Bones. (And just so we're all clear, I certainly don't mean to imply that either frigid or skinny comes to mind when dealing with Melissa -- she's hot to trot and there's plenty of motion in the ocean... whatever that means.) Oblivious to the (((extremely clever))) asides, G'narsh reasons that there must be some way out of this -- the party, Melissa's attentions, etc. -- but unfortunately he is dealing with Melissa, and as such, there is not.

"Nope," Melissa agrees as she goes along with the flow of the unvoiced narrative. "You deserve more than this... just laying in the park here all alone," and then working her magic, she gets to the rub, and asks for a favor in such a way that it sounds like she is actually doing something for you, but she's not. She never is. "I know!" she pronounces happily (no doubt pleased with herself in having found a way to make another man suffer needlessly). "You can come to my party tomorrow night."

"I'm not really much for..."

"Nonsense. My brother will be there. He'll get a kick out of meeting you. He's doing a dream about you, you know: G'narsh: The Troll, the Myth, the Legend or something like that. You can tell him where he's going wrong." I can hardly wait. "It'll be fun."

"I don't really..."

"Yap! Yap! Yap!" Poopsie adds excitedly.

OK. True. It's not much of a line, but Poopsie is just a dog. What do you want? I think the qualitative meaning of that particular string of yaps is, she's used to getting her way buddy and she won't give you a moment's rest until you cave in and come to her party. (P.S. Just pray to Gra'gl she doesn't give you a new

name. I thought Edwin was bad, but that was before I knew they could name you in honor of feces.)

(Granted, me and Poopsie have never gotten along, so he probably just meant, “Yap,” when he yapped, but you never know. Sis says he’s smart. Not smart enough to kill himself or run away, but certainly he’s smart enough to crap in my shoes (versus Melissa’s), and smart enough to recruit new players into the high stakes, emotionally terrifying, death defying game I like to call, dating my sister.)

Anyhow, the point is, G’narsh doesn’t stand a chance against Melissa’s conniving ways. The cards are stacked against him, and it’s just a matter of time before he comes to the regrettable decision and says, “Fine. I’ll come to your party.”

And then, just when you thought it couldn’t get any worse, she’ll happily respond. “Great. Fantastic... Oh, and the Swami Yamma will be there too.”

(Can you feel the whole world squirm and shudder at the announcement? With any luck, she’ll serve poisoned Cool-Aid and put us all out of our misery.)

Needless to say, Melissa (is oblivious to the sudden feeling of fear and foreboding which overtakes all sane people at this point and instead) starts digging around in her purse for an extra disc -- Swami Yamma and You -- or some such drivel, but then notices G’narsh doesn’t have a rig... or an implant. “They must have given you an exception,” she notes. (And this is just a blatantly misleading statement. I should probably just edit it to ‘Where’s your headset?’ or something like that. Leaving it as it is implies I’m going to be painting a more draconian picture of our world than is my intent. Besides Melissa is a lawyer; she knows better.)

“What?”

“I was just saying you don’t have a rig.”

“Oh yeah, those headsets... They looked interesting but they didn’t have one in my size,” G’narsh lies... don’t ask me why.

Perhaps it is an effort to blend in... not that anyone is going to overlook the fact that he is green, eight feet tall, and weighs a quarter ton (and as such sort of stands out in any crowd), but you do what you can I suppose.

“How am I going to zap you directions?” Melissa asks herself as much as anybody, but then quickly realizes, “My place isn’t hard to find. It’s One Central Park West. Be there tomorrow night at eight. Just tell the doorman you’re coming for my party... Oh, where are my manners? They call me Melissa,” and a lot of other things behind my back, but just as long as you call me Melissa to my face, that’s all that really matters.

G’narsh stands as he takes the proffered hand and kisses it like he’s heard about in stories, “I’m honored.”

Melissa nearly faints. “Big, strong, kind to animals, and a gentleman...” She picks Poopsie up (done with his namesake as he is) and returns her attention to G’narsh. “So you’ll be there. I have your word? I can tell my friends a real live hero is coming to my party?”

Ignoring most of the question, G’narsh responds, “Sure, I’ll be there.” It might be fun.

“OK. I got to go,” Melissa announces as she... Well, she would have given him a quick peck on the cheek, promise of things to come or something like that, but as he stands head and shoulders above her, she simply gives him a quick one armed hug and is off. “Tootles.”

“Tootles?” G’narsh repeats the meaningless phrase as he lays back down and stretches his feet out into the grass. It’s not as warm as it once was, and the glow from the setting sun is almost gone, but the stars are coming out and he can see an owl soaring across the water in the distance.

This place really is nice, G’narsh decides, as couples walk by on the pathway behind him; frogs and crickets start to sing their evening serenade, and children run in the distance trying to catch fireflies.

Eight o'clock? He's got all night... and then a day... and the party is only a block or two away. Hadn't she said something like that. He would really rather not go, but he promised, and who knows? It could be fun.

But that's not what's he's going to think about right now. The stars are out and they're really twinkling... and is that a meteor? And a comet? When you get right down to it, the sky here is almost as good as in the realms of Chaos.

All in all, what's a troll to do? Happy and content, G'narsh closes a pair of eyes and drifts off to sleep while the other stands guard and watches as a corner of the sky transforms into a giant picture screen. It's Friday night and time for Movies under the Stars. What better place to take in a classic oldie than in an old time setting? I'll even let you decide what's playing tonight.

(We already went over G'narsh's realization that this was the good life, but I don't know if I gave that moment justice, so let's go back over it, and play it again only this time later in the evening.)

It is late at night. The movie is over, and G'narsh is laying in the park. He has not a care in the world. (If you want to, perhaps you can work it so Melissa stays to enjoy the show with him. I don't actually know why she ran off so fast in the first place. Maybe she already had a date. Who knows?)

Either way -- alone or with company -- G'narsh is enjoying all of the sensory pleasures, which surround him: the carpet of grass, the late evening dew, the chirp of insects and birds in the night, and the quickening of the wind (generated off in the unseen distance by gigantic rotary fans).

For the most part he is (or they are) all alone. The laughter of children has faded into the past and is gone, as are the dogs -- who have been trained to chase balls and Frisbee's (and not to hunt trolls or men, which is a thing of note in and of itself).

In short, the place is safe and devoid of danger. So safe that even though G'narsh can hear the crunch of gravel on the path behind him, he doesn't bother to turn or look at the passerby(s), for there is no reason. He knows that no harm will befall him. Here, he is totally and completely safe.

An overwhelming feeling of contentment and security passes through G'narsh as he realizes this, but you don't have to be a troll (or a combat veteran) to know that your fate could be a lot worse than it is... a lot, lot worse. Here in the park there are no snipers, no land mines, no enemy patrols, nor any of the other horrors of war. Nor are there any dark necromancers, evil warlords, or any of the other (((seemingly))) numerous creatures that have the word blight in their name -- withering or otherwise. In fact, there is nothing but peace and serenity here.

And therein, we will find the kernel of an idea that has already or is presently germinating and taking root in G'narsh's mind. The idea is that he likes the elvin realms, wants to stay in them, and therefore will do whatever he can to insure that his pass(port), his visa, and/or his status of hero lasts forever.

It's perhaps not as grand as wanting to do good for goodness sake, or as metaphysically profound as having a mystical awakening, but it is eminently more practical and easier to relate to: the decision to be good, not for any altruistic or ulterior motive, but simply so that one may enjoy the good life for themselves. Whether most folks are willing to acknowledge it or not, this is (((probably))) the most common belief system of all.

(And that's a wrap.)

(Somewhere I should note that the deal I had worked out with my distributor has fallen through, so I need a new publishing house. Their memo said something about the current disc having 'devolved into a self indulgent platform for my own idiosyncratic and unmarketable opinions.' (I should be glad. At least they gave me a reason.) Anyhow, this has had a negative effect on my attitude, so I may have been a little snottier in the initial sections of

this sequence then I might have otherwise been. We'll see how it works out after the edits.)

(That last comment was, of course, a total lie. I didn't so much loose a publishing house contract as I got cut from the current competition that I was in. This then would be one of those twisty-turny points in a dream, where the truth before the twist is different from the truth thereafter. I'm not actually a seven time World Daydream Champion. Surprise! (Or not.) I've yet to actually make it into the finals of anything more competitive than a school sponsored event. I had high hopes for this dream (and this contest), but in the end it has come to naught. Perhaps you have sensed a change in my attitude. If so, this then is why. I am now officially out of the running. I imagine that I should take it as a complement that I made it this far.)

(That said, I intend to finish this current dream for my own use and enjoyment. Who knows? Maybe I will be able to sell it... or failing that, to give it away on the Inter Server.)

(There are, after all, worse things to do with one's time.)

(That bad news aside, I hope I'm not telling you anything you don't already know when I point out that Melissa is up for all sorts of fun and games in the park after the stars come out. Simply turn off MM and disable M.O.M. and you're good to go. Flip a switch (or two or three) and Melissa will be just your type. Flip another and you'll be Melissa's type (not that you aren't already, but you know how it goes). And then, if you have any brains at all, you'll flick yet one more switch and turn that disgusting inbred mongrel named Poopsie into a real dog with a real name, or simply obliterate the wretched beast altogether... A round of Poopsie skeet shooting anyone?)

(But, you know in the end, I love my sister. I'm setting her up with an animal loving troll in my dream for Gra'gl's sake. What more could she possible want?)

(As a parting thought and bit of advice, whatever you do with the dream, however you want to play it out before you hit advance, you might want to keep in mind (for consistency's sake) that it will be raining at 3AM this morning in good ole -- Central Park. At which point, if not before, Melissa will have to go her own way to get things ready for her party. They tend to be lavish affairs after all... and I hear tell she's got a new boyfriend, or at least a distinguished guest of honor, a war hero, or something like that... even if he is a bit of a troll... and then there's that Swami Yamma joker... so she'll probably want to go all out.)

(Of course, with all of those celebrities in attendance, I almost forget the best reason she has to throw a party in the first place. Her brother was only two rounds shy of making it to the finals in this year's Quazitronic Open. Way to go bro!)

(And don't worry, I'm over it. There's always next year after all.)

The ole Spit and Polish

(So, the last contest I won was in primary school. Can you tell?)

(Don't answer that question. I don't want to know.)

(It's another day and I'm getting ready to lay down my raw footage on a welfare rig (not a Quazitronic dream booth), and before I forget, I should note that you don't actually need two dream booths to bounce proxies back and forth. You can do this on any two rigs, or if you know what you are doing, by setting up a partition in a single rig, but the truth of the matter is, the better the rig, the better the results)

(Anyhow, as I sit here getting ready to begin again, the dilemma which occupies my mind is not the plot, but rather it is trying to decide whether or not I should recant my earlier

admission -- that I am, in fact, an amateur. I say that, but clearly my decision has been not to...)

(When I received the notice indicating further submissions by me would not be required -- opened, played, or in any way responded to -- I was a bit bummed out, but we've been through that drill. Rather than delving any deeper into all the negative emotions contained within that revelation, it's probably far more productive to explain how I picked myself up, and found the will to continue on with the project. The answer is simple, by pulling down the curtain so that I could share my grief with you. It might not be 'appropriate,' but it is this very revelation (and the new narrative voice which it exposes) that has enabled me to continue on. So even if it is not appropriate, it's pretty much a requirement for my continued involvement at this point.)

(The next obvious question on many people's minds will be, how did I pull the deception off? The answer is simple. Cookies my friends -- snacks, candy, and treats -- those little subprograms that a rig downloads from a disc to insure it plays properly. In these programs you can make override calls, so whenever a rig (playing your disc) makes an Inter Server search for a character, locale, or relevant "FACT," it is directed to the right site and/or sites. There is no crime in creating a fake contest and then awarding the top prize to yourself (or whomever) for the purposes of making a dream fuller and more complete.)

(And, as long as we are making random changes to reality, I should mention that when G'narsh exits -- Central Park -- he will actually be leaving Grant Park in Chicago at the Randolph Street Tube Station. It's the sort of unexplained change of venue that they do all the time in these higher budget productions. The bottom line is, you can use any old subway station you want, but I'm familiar with the one at Grant Park, so that's the one I'm going to use. I'm sure that any old tube station that you are familiar with

in your neck of the woods, will work just as well for this sequence, maybe even better.)

I don't know about in New York, but in Chicago, they can make an artificial waterspout rise up from the lake at the center of their dome. They can also do funnel clouds, mini twisters (think dancing leafs), and thunderstorms. Man, I love those thunderstorms. Just go to the park -- Grant Park -- in the middle of the afternoon some Summer and dance around as all heck and tarnation erupts about you. It's great fun, though I am told there's some danger involved.

Of course, the real reason those folks in Chicago put all that money into inclement weather simulation (aside from the tourist bucks it brings in and some kind of nod to the city's namesake -- i.e. The Windy City) is good old fashioned crowd control. You don't have to manually clear the homeless, drifters, squatters, and other ne'er-do-wells out of the park if you open the floodgates two or three times a week. The park just sort of clears itself out. You might want to think of it as a wash and rinse cycle.

(And with the background set, let's begin.)

G'narsh is enjoying the thunder in the distance -- the warning sounds preceding an imminent storm. Above his head the LED arrays are working their magic and the whole sky is coming to life with the flicker and flash of lightning. The air smells fresh, cool, and clean, and even at night, the whole world takes on this supernatural glow, as if the clouds overhead are ionizing everything in sight and conferring upon them the ability to work magic.

(I can't express how magical this time right before a thunderstorm feels to me. I especially enjoy it when the world turns green in the afternoon. You know you're in for some nasty, wet weather when that happens.)

G'narsh watches unconcerned as the horde leaves the park. Equating the bums to goblins and orcs (scum and vermin) comes from G'narsh's mind, not mine, (but that's probably a lie). Covered in rags, wearing blankets for cloaks, the disheveled forgotten masses of humanity clear out of the park. Who knows where they were hiding? There are so many of them. One or two is to be expected, but hundreds? Thousands? The park simply isn't that big... Is it?

(A crack need only be big enough to hold a person (man or woman) to be considered a home and/or a shelter. In the groves, under the buildings, behind fences, along the dome wall, and on rooftops... I am sure I do not know all of the hidey holes, but you can bet the Department of Parks does. As you can also be sure that whatever the storm clouds can't hit directly, a fire hose will be pointed at before long.)

(And verily, I say unto thee, woe to thy squatter who has been stupid enough to build a shelter, camp in a building, or cross thy man's NO TRESPASSING SIGN for a hoe and row of turnips does surely await thee.)

Anyhow, being a troll, G'narsh isn't concerned about the coming storm, getting wet, or even being cold for a bit. Sure, he might get a little uncomfortable, but he's not going to catch pneumonia and die. Besides, the light display is incredible -- hypnotic and mesmerizing. But all the same, there is something (((insistent))) about everybody else departing -- like rats fleeing a sinking ship -- that makes him decide staying put would be a bad idea.

This thought is reinforced by the shouts of advice from more than a few of the ragged passersby.

“Time to leave.”

“Better get out of here.”

“If they catch you, you'll never come back.”

Finally, as the others drift by, a sprightly old gal stops to chat with G'narsh. "I can't believe he's giving me another role," Lulu says excitedly. She's an old crone of a hag -- toothless, haggard, and in a word nasty -- but for some reason I enjoy her company.

Lulu pauses as she regards G'narsh, "My you're a tall one. I can see what that girl saw in you earlier." Noticing G'narsh's look of confusion, Lulu expands on her comment, "I was watching OK. You're going to fool around like that in the open, you've got to expect others to watch."

"Oh, you mean the dog," G'narsh says trying to make some sense out of the old crone's words. He was sort of making a fool of himself jumping around as he was with the little guy... but it had been fun. He hadn't played like that in ages.

"So that's the way it's going to be," Lulu remarks sourly as she gazes up at the sky and spends a moment looking for her tormentor, as if he can be found past the LEDs up among the girders. "I'm here. Doing what you want," she yells to the night sky. "The least you could do is... Hey," she says suddenly as she returns her attention to G'narsh, "You wouldn't happen to have a bite to eat?"

"No..."

"Any money?"

It would be G'narsh's turn to speak, but he's not really big on discussing his personal finances with strangers, especially psychotic -- obviously schizophrenic -- strangers.

"I'm not schizophrenic," the hag insists of the world around her -- the glowing lamp posts, the wind come alive with personality and force of will ((((we'll come back to this)))), and the god of lightning making himself manifest in the very air about her. (I point them out here, because these are the occupants of Lulu's world who could testify to her sanity.)

However. Lulu isn't completely gone, out of touch, or insane, and in a moment (or two) realizes that she isn't going down the right conversational tack, so she takes a moment to regard G'narsh anew as she tries to come up with the appropriate conversational

strategy. Being the keen sort, she immediately notices that he stands eight feet tall, weights a quarter of a ton, is green(ish), and has two heads... “You’re not from around these parts, are you?” she surmises quickly and then, after looking at him closely, real closely, as if she was seeing right through him ((((down to his underlying code)))), she says, “You’re on a quest to do good aren’t you?”

G’narsh doesn’t deny it, so the old crone continues, “Give me all your money then... Come on! I haven’t got all day,” and after looking around and noticing the time of day she adds, “or all night either.” She flicks at the military surplus army jacket G’narsh is wearing. “How many did you kill? You’ve got to atone for your sins you know. Killing one is like killing a million... or something like that.” She would be happy to continue, but she is starting to get confused again. “Killing someone is like killing all of their descendants too...” She gazes as her fingers and cast about blindly as if the thought has flown away like a little bird that she had once held, but is now gone forever. “Look, it’s not important. Fork over the dough and I’ll take you where you’re supposed to go next,” plot points being far more tangible in her mind, than bits of abstract philosophy.

G’narsh points over towards the airlock. This is where everyone else is headed. It is well lit and the sign above it reads -- EXIT. It must be a place of safety -- or something. Around the arched doorway groups of homeless are interspersed among the tourists who have gathered to watch the show. Many of the derelicts -- castoffs from society -- stand in the entrance unconcerned that they block the walkway, while others gather around the large windows, which line the domed wall. It looks to be dry, safe, and warm -- ((((and devoid of policemen)))).

“I’ll just go that way,” G’narsh replies simply.

“And then?”

G’narsh shrugs. “I don’t know.” What can it matter?
“Wherever.”

“Your shoes!” Lulu declares and just to make the moment as dramatic as possible lightning crashes to the ground in the middle of the park to accent Lulu’s words.

(I guess I can’t help myself and explain these things. They make the lightning effect by harpooning a wire into the ground and then running like a million billion volts through it. It vaporizes the wire and creates quite the visual display in the process. Rumor has it they aim for tents, shanties, and the like, but don’t believe it. They’ve got the circles they aim for pretty well marked -- as golf hole flags.)

Anyway, the lightning flashes and the thunder booms just as Lulu finishes her fateful line, “Your shoes!” Recognizing what this means, her face lights up. She knows that it was more than just a mere coincidence.

“Hot dog! I got it right,” she exclaims ecstatically. “Now fork over the dough.”

“We should go,” G’narsh replies evenly, as the first of the raindrops start to fall. They are those big fat pre-storm drops, the ones that occur while the rain god (or is it the wind god?) is still trying to hold back the deluge. “It’s going to let loose soon,” G’narsh observes, and from the tone of his voice and the content of his words it is quite clear that he’s not with the program yet, so you really can’t blame Lulu for stopping and taking a stand.

“Not till you hand over the dough!” the crazed crone demands, and right about here -- to indicate that Lulu enjoys the favor of the gods -- is as good a place as any for the heavens to open up and drench the pair, totally soaking them to the bone, in a matter of seconds.

“You’ll get cold. You’ll get sick,” G’narsh insists making no move to give her any money..

“What do you care?” Lulu snuffles to herself pathetically. “I’ve been a bag-lady since day one. Does he ever give me a chance for more? No. At least he considers Nadia,” for the role of

princess or to turn her into a code runner, “but me? When does he think of me? When the bag-lady hordes flee the park! That’s when. It’s not right,” she says defiantly.

“You’re getting soaked.”

“I hope I get sick and die. Would serve him right,” she pouts.

“Who?” G’narsh asks as he takes off his coat and holds it over the decrepit, haggardly form of Lulu.

“The guy who keeps on calling me decrepit and haggardly! That’s who!” she spits out angrily. “Look,” she says quite reasonably, “this is all I’ve ever known. This park or another one -- whatever the name. They’re all the same. You want to do good, do good. Give me that wad of cash you got in your pocket for all the widows and orphans you’ve made over the years. You know, to show that your heart is in the right place.”

“Um...”

“Don’t think about it! Just do it!” Lulu insists as she senses his weakness..

“Sure... fine... I guess,” G’narsh acquiesces as he gives the crone a gigantic wad of cash.

“Wow!” Her eyes light up. “You’re really giving it all to me?”

“Sure. To make amends. It sounds like good idea,” G’narsh agrees and he has to admit, he feels better about the entire thing. Not that a wad of bills is going to bring anybody back to life, but it’s a start -- a symbolic gesture -- proof that he is willing to give of himself (and his own life) to make amends. “Can we get out of the rain now? You’re going to catch a cold and die,” G’narsh says as he returns to the present and looks around. It’s coming down cats and dogs now, or Fluffy’s and Poopsie’s as the case may be. Not that I really know who Fluffy is, but dropping Poopsie repeatedly from the top of the dome has a certain sadistic appeal to it. He’s a very springy little pup. He’d probably just bounce a few times, shake it off, and give a happy little, “Yap,” before he was on his way.

“Bite your tongue boy,” Lulu advises, as she interrupts the narrative flow. “Don’t be morbid. I can’t die now,” she insists -- hopefully -- as her eyes turn towards the storm clouds above. One flash of lightning (perhaps a warning shot) that falls astray of the target zone is all that it takes and she is hightailing it to the entrance (((or should that be exit? Whatever the case))), being a bag lady (or bum) takes a surprising amount of effort. Lulu is in much better physical condition than she might at first appear. OK. Her teeth aren’t in better shape than they appear, but her legs are in tip top form. You know like, outrunning the law on a habitual basis type form, so as she runs like a banshee for the entrance, she leaves G’narsh in the dust (or mud as it were) to slowly slosh after her.

(Believe it or not, I wasn’t planning on drawing this scene out. It was supposed to be a slam dunk, one clicker. It’s raining in the park, G’narsh gets his boots, and then we’re off to bigger and better things, but you know how it goes, and, well, what’s the point of dreaming in the first place if you don’t tarry for a moment here and there.)

(Also, as G’narsh walks about barefooted, I am reminded of a Zen saying, a bit of Buddhist advice, or something along those lines that goes, “As you walk, pay attention to the ground that pushes back up against your feet with every step,” certainly a far more enjoyable proposition on a grassy lawn than on a dirty, gritty, garbage strewn city street or in a tube station.)

(Which, as always, is just another way of saying, I’m not going to be focusing on G’narsh’s bare feet from here on out, but if you are using him as a avatar you might want to; and furthermore, if you are using a gaming skimmer you might want to consider that without any boots, G’narsh can’t get a job at a construction site (and/or at most restaurants).)

“Make way. Make way. Rich socialite coming through. V-I-P. Make way,” Lulu declares obnoxiously as she squeezes through the crowd, past the tourists -- and other bums, derelicts, and castaways. You wouldn’t think she’d have that much trouble. I mean, she’s a pretty fetid creature. If she was coming towards me, I’d just jump out of the way rather than take the chance that she might brush up against me as she went by.

“I’m going to need new clothes,” she says to herself as she goes down a mental checklist. “And a bath... I could really use a bath.” Looking behind her to make sure G’narsh is still following, she calls out, “This way,” as she leads him down into the Grant Park Tube Station -- our original destination for this sequence.

It’s just like any other big city tube station -- with a central foyer/marketplace. There’s the liquor store -- disguised as a deli -- souvenir shop, newsstand, and all the rest, but the shop in which we are interested is the shoe repair shop -- Best Shoe Repair, or something like that, maybe AAA Polish, or Shine On. Standing in the store window, like some sort of homage to Jack and the Beanstalk, are G’narsh’s shoes.

“So this is where you are supposed to be,” Lulu announces as she stops in front of the window. “Soon as I saw you, I knew you’d come for your shoes.”

“I just dropped them off this morning,” G’narsh replies honestly. “You probably just saw me walk in here.”

“That’s what you think,” Lulu snickers. “You got a lot to learn. Anyhow, I’ve got to catch a train out of here. After they’re done sweeping the park, they do the nearby streets and stations. You don’t want to be anywhere nearby when that happens.”

Once again, G’narsh looks at her blankly.

“Is the two-headed thing some sort of shell-shocked, eternal ringing of the mind metaphor... like you never quite left the battlefield behind, or some sort of multiple point of view one head in the clouds type thing? You know, like you’re not all there?” Lulu inquires condescendingly. It’s not likely the poor boy will even understand, and since she doesn’t really expect a reply (from

anyone), she continues without missing a beat, “OK. Invite me to the party and I’m off.”

“What?”

“The party. The party. Invite me to the party.”

“I don’t know that I can.”

“The words would be difficult to say?” the crone asks suspiciously, as she looks G’narsh over again. “You’ve got some kind of dweomer or binder on you?” But no, he doesn’t. “Just say the words... It would be an act of kindness.”

“I don’t know that I should.”

“Look, she... Melissa wants you at the party because you’re from another world, another place.” Lulu twirls about showing off her lice infested finery. “You’ve got to admit, I’m not all of this world.” When she is done exhibiting herself, she pokes G’narsh in the stomach -- like hard -- as she demands, “Say the words.”

“Fine. Come to the party.”

And that is perhaps all Lulu was looking for. In a flash she is gone.

(I don’t really know why Lulu showed up in the first place. A few bums passing by for color and then there she is stealing the show again. OK. I mean, I know why she entered the dream. I’ve got this stable of proxies that I tend to use over and over, and when they see a role that would be appropriate, they sort of demand to be used. In many ways, they are a lot like out of work actors, and when they see a part, they latch on to it and won’t let go -- as if they were fighting for their very lives. Go figure.)

(I also don’t know if I’ve mentioned it, but without a contest to constrain me, things might get a little more squirrely and/or loosey-goosey than they have already been. Not that they weren’t going to get weird... but you know what I mean. There’s weird and then there’s weird... which sounds a lot like a promise of things to come that I won’t be able to keep.)

(Well, perhaps it’s best to let you decide...)

(--- The Evolution of a Scene ---)

(--- Nadia, Gimlet, A Pair of Boots, and G'narsh---)

Let take a step backwards in time.

Because G'narsh never killed Stef'fan or acquired the elf's boots this time around (in this iteration of the tale), G'narsh is having footwear troubles. His shoes don't fit, are wearing thin, and are uncomfortable, so he takes them to a local shoe repair shop for an overhaul, and then he spends the afternoon relaxing in a nearby park. While he does this, we get the visceral joy of running our feet through the grass and the horror of being attacked by a demented puppy -- a.k.a. Poopsie. Once these fun and games are over, G'narsh reclaims his boots... only its not that simple because Nadia is waiting for him.

She has been stuck in this world, this tube station, this locale, ever since G'narsh ran across the rooftops and disappeared from view at Elf Central (leaving Mi'lay down on her knees begging for death). As you will no doubt remember, Nadia and Stef'fan went chasing after G'narsh (all those many long clicks ago), and as G'narsh adventured, Nadia has waited for him here in this tube station... but, because we don't really work through every intervening step (((in these discs))), G'narsh boots have actually been waiting for him in this shop the entire time.

I hope that's clear.

(((And personally, I don't see why it wouldn't be.)))

Take it on faith, Nadia has been in this tube station for (((virtual))) decades if not centuries and the entire time G'narsh's boots have been here as well. In one line of thought, his boots have been in the shop for a day, in another, his boots have been here since time immemorial. We will follow this second line of thought, this second possibility, for this is the actuality of reality in this little dream of ours.

(((Got it? Good. I mean, that was pretty straightforward, so now let's loop it all the way through again from the beginning.)))

(((Oh, but before we do, it might make a little more sense if we recall that Nadia is entranced by the doomsday device... and then forget about that little fact completely. You see, the doomsday device is much like that cool new disc, dress, skin, or whatever. As long as it is before her eyes, Nadia wants nothing else, but take it away, and the desire fades... almost instantly.)))

(((I suppose one could also assume that I forgot all about the doomsday device and didn't load the appropriate concerns into Nadia's mind at the start of the scene -- that would always be one way of looking at it. Another would be to realize that G'narsh and Nadia have worked together previously under different aliases, names, skins, and story lines for a long time, and although G'narsh does not remember any of this, to some extent Nadia does. The bottom line is, the proxy who is Nadia is destined to love the proxy that is G'narsh -- and vice a versa. It's just a matter of time, and for Nadia -- in this particular case, that means in no time at all.)))

(((Point blank, even if Nadia is not consciously aware of it, she's in love with G'narsh. She is his friend. I have no better explanation for what is to follow than that. So that we may move forward and the remainder of the dream (and/or this sequence) makes some sort of sense, might I suggest that we all simply accept this fudging of Nadia's emotional tags.)))

(((With all of that in mind.))) let's recap and put all of these newfound assumption into play. Centuries ago Nadia was plunked down in the Grant Park Tube Station. (((She cares for G'narsh.))) She knows the plot. She can see the code -- this is what it means to be a code runner after all -- and she can even change some of that code on occasion. I mean, what's the point of running the code in the first place if you can't change a 0 to a 1 somewhere along the way?

(((Are you with me so far? Good. Excellent.)))

Nadia appears in this world, in the Grant Park Tube Station, and looks around. She knows that her purpose for being here is to meet G'narsh (and convince him to rescue Stef'fan). Once here, she sees the boots (that G'narsh has just dropped off) at A1 Shoe Repair, and being a clever little girl, she knows that eventually G'narsh will return to reclaim his boots. (((It's a major part of the plot and she knows this.)))

Days pass. Weeks pass. Years pass. The owner of the shoe repair shop changes (from father, to son), to Gimlet, a hard working gnome of a man, and still more years pass (more time than is worth keeping track of).

The first day (((when she first arrives))), Nadia stays with the boots. She ties the shoelaces around her wrist as she sleeps, so that she will not get left behind, but soon this gets tiresome. Over the next week, she is careful to stay in the shop, and even the whole of that first month, she stays in the tubes, but time marches ever onward, and as it does, she wanders farther afield.

Now, as this time is drifting by, Nadia is spending a great deal of her waking moments contemplating exactly how she will play the scene when G'narsh ultimately arrives. She knows that she needs G'narsh's help. Stef'fan is in jail -- the logical result of carrying a sniper rifle to this locale -- and only G'narsh can get him out, but G'narsh is not necessarily positively disposed towards her (or Stef'fan). G'narsh and Nadia have not met. (((Regardless of Nadia's feelings, Nadia is aware that))) G'narsh and her are not friends, not pals, not buds, nor are they implied ex-lovers. Rather, it is far more likely that G'narsh perceives her as the enemy, so Nadia will need some sort of leverage over G'narsh to convince him to help her. His boots are the only thing with which she has to work.

(((It's a pretty complicated little pile of nested assumptions when you get right down to it, but there it is. Not to fret, it's only going to get worse.)))

The rumor is that the boots have been abandoned by a two-headed giant (size 27 shoe don't you know) somewhere in the long distant past. "Right grandpa, tell me another one," Gimlet says as he listens to his grandfather spin his tales. According to Grandpa, after a week, a month, or a year, it became clear no one was ever going to claim the shoes, but a size 27? What an oddity? So they became the symbol of the store, its center piece, and its identity. Gimlet treasures the shoes, treasures the fond memories of his grandfather telling outlandish stories filled with outrageous lies -- a two-headed troll? Of all the ridiculous things.

(((That's not so complicated, is it? In Gimlet's world, he owns the shoes and wants to keep it that way. Straightforward and simple. Nothing complicated at all.)))

Eventually time unravels and G'narsh arrives. Nadia is there, and so are Gimlet and the boots. G'narsh cannot leave without the boots. It's just the way things are, while Nadia, for her part, needs G'narsh to rescue Stef'fan. (((This is Nadia's quest. She is bound by it.))) Gimlet, on the other hand (let's not forget Gimlet), has no desire to part with the boots that remind him of his beloved grandfather.

We play the scene out then as if we are in a dreamer's mind, working on the plotline for his dream. Suppose we let G'narsh present the claim tag. What then? Gimlet loses the shoes and Nadia has no leverage. It won't work for us. It's not a compelling dream. Realism be darned! The point is, we need G'narsh to leave with Nadia, and it wouldn't hurt if we could work it out so Gimlet would be happy as well, so enter an old crone. She convinces G'narsh to give her a wad of money (((all the money that G'narsh has))), and what do you know? The claim tag for the shoes was wrapped up in there with the fistful of cash. Now G'narsh is helpless. He cannot pay for the shoes and even if we suppose he paid in advance, he has no tag... not that he could have gotten one in the first place -- the shoes having been here for years.

But we still need G'narsh to wind up with the shoes (eventually -- when all is said and done), and if Gimlet has too much control, G'narsh will never get them, so we weaken Gimlet's position. We give Gimlet a gambling affliction. Nothing serious. Just a little color for our new proxy. (Welcome to the stable Gimlet).

To liven things up at the shop, and add a little excitement to the day, Gimlet routinely offers his customers the option of rolling a die and going double or nothing on their bill. It's a fair bet, nothing underhanded. If a customer rolls 1-3 on a six sided die the repair (or purchase) is free, but on a 4-6 it costs double. It's simple. It's easy. It adds a bit of color, brings Gimlet to life, and gives us a rationale for taking control of the shoes away from Gimlet.

To flesh it out, we then must return to Nadia and look on as she watches Gimlet's behavior. She notices that he likes to gamble and realizes that someday she is going to need those boots (and the leverage they entail), so one day after work Nadia gambles with Gimlet, but remember, she is a code runner. She can change a bit here and a byte there. A four becomes a one; a five becomes a two; and a six becomes a three. At double or nothing, the stakes rise fast. Soon Gimlet is betting the farm, but what does Nadia want with a shoe store? What she wants are the boots and in a run of luck (wouldn't you know it), they become hers.

But there is more to it than that. Nadia is Gimlet's friend as well. She works as a shoeshine and runs errands for him. They eat together. They laugh together. They become friends. No matter that she owns the shoes, the boots stay in the store window, and at night she sleeps by them (and in them) lest they disappear. No matter what happens now, the boots cannot leave without her. She owns them, and G'narsh (being good) must honor that claim.

And that brings us back to G'narsh staring through the store window at his shoes.

(‘Surrealism and the heavy hand of a dark necromancer can be difficult to tease apart and/or differentiate from one another,’ thus spoke Artismo Bones.)

(I should note that my intent here has not been to create some sort of riddle or brain teaser. A scene evolves -- proxies see the outcome of their actions and take appropriate remedial action. Sometimes (perhaps), things do not make sense on an intuitive level, but within the totality of the dream space, they are perfectly logical.)

(That is to say, before I laid down my initial ‘take,’ I’d been down this way a time or two before.)

(For instance, why would a fairy reside in the depths of a tube station? Unless of course she is a gutter fairy, and this is her true home -- the place from which she originates, and her humble beginnings.)

(Which is to say, the preceding rundown bypasses a lot of Nadia’s true nature. In another time, in another place, she would have had a lair -- I believe that’s the right word -- down the tubes by the Chicago River -- a fetid piss hole if ever I did see one -- but Nadia is a gutter fairy, and she feels right at home. Picture a hobo camp done up right with a wall of derelict, abandoned appliances defining the perimeter, and a scattering of pink plastic baby dolls and stuffed animals to set the scene. No doubt she would run numbers, play craps, and busy herself with various small time cons as she pushes the limits of the law... but even with that being said, let us not forget that she is a fairy (and a code runner). There is a fine line between playing a tourist for a rube, being a street entertainer (or character), engaging in a little free market enterprise on the edge of legality, and/or simply selling something which isn’t yours to sell in the first place (like someone else’s personal safety or the key to a day locker, which is sure to contain someone’s ‘lost’ belongings). Being a code runner, she’d always be able to nudge the difference in their favor. After all, there is nothing wrong with

returning a lost item for a reward, and if you are a gutter fairy and/or a code runner, you can be sure you will ‘find’ more than your fair share of ‘lost’ items... but we need not go down this trail any further. This is simply an anecdotal account of the way things might have been.)

(With all that setup (((no matter the convolution))), the scene should be a slam dunk.)

(((But just one last note before we are off and running, something pulls me to have Gimlet flip a coin (when he gambles), rather than toss a die. You know, heads he wins, tails you lose, or something like that, but the reason I don’t is because coin-flipping tends to be a rigged sport. That is to say, although coin-flipping is often viewed as a 50/50 straight shot, the truth of the matter is that it is not. In one form or another, more folks cheat at Heads or Tails than any other game, and since Gimlet is not a cheat, I did not want to tarnish his image with any preconceived ideas you may have regarding the game.)))

(((Bottom line, if you don’t like the game of chance, which I chose, change it out. I’m sure Gimlet is a champion marbler (if that’s what you call someone who plays marbles), dart thrower, jacks player, or whatever. I’m not really sold on the whole dice thing, so if you aren’t either, and you want the game to play more of a role, by all means, mix it up, and change it about.)))

(((And now, where were we?)))

G’narsh is alone. Lulu has run off and caught a train to some distant destination far away from the imminent police sweep and/or to get ready for the night’s party. (I’m going have to figure out a role for her. Maybe she could be a date for Swami Yamma. She’d probably be his type, and she might just enjoy it.)

This, however, is of no concern to G’narsh. He is looking at his boots. They are in a store window in one of those diorama displays that they are always making in department store windows.

It would appear the story they are trying to tell in this particular diorama is the tale of The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. She must have been a short sort of woman...

“G’narsh!” Nadia squeals excitedly from across the tube station interrupting G’narsh’s thoughts.

G’narsh swings both of his heads around to scan the crowd looking for trouble. The voice didn’t sound right -- not natural -- like it belonged to one of the horde.

“G’narsh!” Nadia squeals again as she flies straight for the troll, but she stops short when she sees his demeanor. G’narsh is crouching down low, standing in some sort of Kung Fu, martial arts fighting stance. “G’narsh. It’s me Nadia,” the fairy says as she hovers in the air before the goliath. “Don’t you remember me? Come on, I’m Nadia. You’re not going to attack me?” she asks bewildered by the concept, and then taking the only action she can think of, she quickly cycles through her forms, from butter cup fairy, to bone dancing diva, and then finally to the one she started in, her knee high gutter fairy skin. “It’s me Nadia.”

“Nadia,” G’narsh repeats trying to place the fairy. “You were with Bones.”

“Yeah. Bones!” Nadia agrees, glad that G’narsh remembers something. At least there is some sort of recognition. “I’ve been waiting for... like forever... So do I get a hug?”

“A hug?” G’narsh repeats... and I’m beginning to wonder if G’narsh hasn’t been hit with a stupid stick or something, because this repeating nonsense is starting to get on my nerves, so what do you say? Let’s give him an injection of intelligence.

“What are you doing here?” G’narsh asks. It’s still not overly brilliant, but it’s a start.

“Waiting for you,” Nadia explains as she looks around at the growing crowd. Let’s face it fairies and trolls. What a show! I wonder what disc they’re advertising?

“Come on. Grab your shoes and we can get out of this dump,” Nadia says as she leads the troll into the store where she adds those fateful (and conditional) words, “I’m anxious to spring

Stef'fan out of jail. They arrested him ages ago. I mean, its been death here, but Gra'gl only knows what its been like in prison.”

Not really knowing how to respond to all this, and not desiring to commit himself to any crazy adventure with a representative of the horde, G'narsh ignores the fairy as he says, “Hey,” to Gimlet.

(((Ready for the next twist. OK, then. Enter the dream parade. And... Action!)))

The store is one of those open storefront affairs with no real line between the store and the station mall, so there are no walls or windows to keep the crowd back and it is just sort of growing and pressing forward as everyone tries to get the best view.

What are the odds? To be at ground zero just by chance when a dream is going to go live!

“What channel is this on?” members of the crowd murmur as the buzz grows.

“Can you get the feed?”

“Do you know what they're promoting?” and then the snap of pictures as everybody in sight stops what they are doing to get their own personal recording of the event. Later they will say, “I was right there. Here, let me show you,” but for now it is all about recording the event, jostling for position near the front (Gra'gl only knows what they are giving away to feed the hype), and sending out a universal alert to everyone they know. The circus is in town. Get your ticket.

Everything stops as anyone within a quarter mile rushes to the scene, while the news and the dailies get ready with their commentary and follow-up stories.... But you know the drill. You've been there countless times before -- the excitement of the moment, the thrill of the game, a dream come to life.

However, our little event has no feed. There is no media support, nor is there a marketing executive ready for the post-show interview, for this is not a scheduled event. In the context of the

dream -- the disc, G'narsh TML -- this is real, and so a new wave of excitement rolls through the crowd as they search deeper and deeper (for meaning and a) feed.

“Maybe its local.”

“Or pirate.”

“That fairy is always pushing the line.”

(((And a random comment from the crowd thrown in for flavor winds up setting the scene.)))

There it is, something on the other side of the law -- pay a fine, risk probation, but make the dailies and perhaps get national exposure and media recognition. If you're really lucky, it might even launch your career (or perhaps it will be the last time anybody ever hears of you... like ever).

“Hey! Gimlet! You doing some guerilla marketing?”

“Business can't be that bad.”

“What's with the troll?”

“Give us some context.”

“Are we happy or sad?”

“You staging a robbery?”

But all of these questions will hang in the air unanswered and disappear into the background, as if someone was editing them out as fast as they appear. (Isn't that always the way of these things?)

Seemingly unaware, our main characters will ignore the near riot erupting around them, for the crowd does not matter (and never does -- but even though I say that, you know it's not true. Without the crowd, there is nothing). Anyway, with all of that in mind, let us return to our principle characters and pick up where we left off.

“I'm not getting involved with Stef'fan. All he wants to do is kill me,” G'narsh says as he explains his -- quite reasonable -- position in regards to Nadia's -- quite ridiculous -- request, before

returning his attention to Gimlet. “Great job on the boots. I’m impressed.”

“Thanks,” Gimlet responds (he has after all cared for them and kept them in tip top shape his entire life), but before the two of them can drift off into a conversation alone and leave her behind, Nadia flies between the pair of them and points out, “They’re my shoes now, G’narsh. I own them.”

“What?”

“I believe she’s right,” Gimlet agrees. “This little one can toss the bones. There’s no doubt about that.”

“I’m sure she’s got a way with Bones,” G’narsh agrees (sourly?), but he doesn’t see what this has to do with his shoes. “I gave you the boots this morning... I guess yesterday at this point. How much do I owe you?”

“You’re out of it G’narsh,” Nadia interjects as she places herself between the two of them -- again. “You didn’t drop them off yesterday, it was years ago... and you don’t have a ticket stub, and for that matter you don’t have any cash either.” My friend Lulu saw to that.

G’narsh checks his pockets and then remembers the lady in the park. He must have given her the claim ticket along with his money. “I paid in advance,” he insists of Gimlet (as he suddenly re-recollects the transaction). “It was only yesterday. Surely you must remember me,” but at this point the echoes of an elvin Zen grandmaster dance through G’narsh’s mind -- clouding his thoughts.

(What would that crazy (far out, wild... wild man of an) elf say?)

(((Perhaps one or more of the following, take your pick.)))

(“The self is but an illusion.”)

(“How can I remember that which you were, when even now you are not who you are?”)

(“To remember the past is to forget the present.”)

(Or perhaps, even most cryptically of all, “Stop calling me Shirley.” You (assuming that you exist, of course) got to love a running gag.)

(And like any good conversation, we can pick it up again, right where we left off, right in the middle of it all, and not miss a beat.)

(The whole being contained in the smallest of parts, and the smallest of parts being contained in the whole... or something like that.)

“Those shoes have been here since I was a child. My grandfather used to tell me stories,” Gimlet objects as he pauses to look G’narsh over. “You could be him though,” the giant, the two-headed monster, even if, “It was years ago...”

“A day, a week, or a hundred years,” Nadia jumps in, “it doesn’t matter. I own the boots fair and square,” and at this point Nadia motions to G’narsh in that combat sign language that every military culture seems to develop, because a slight twitch of your little finger accompanied by a clockwise swirl of your thumb is all that it required to convey the hidden subtleties of even the most complex of ideas, like: those cops behind you will back me up if you cause any trouble.

Like I said, just a twitch of the finger and a swirl of the thumb. No doubt G’narsh (like every other combat veteran) spends most of his time in battle (and during other stressful moments) watching for the minutest movement of his comrades’ appendages.

(For instance:)

(“What’s that? Move your Sch©lting fingers slower! This is a combat language not Fr@cking story time. That’s better nice and slow.”)

(The twiddle of a thumb = Watch Out)

(A middle finger going in and out in rapid succession = Incoming Arrows)

(Pain in chest from wooden shafted projectiles = ARGH!!!)

(As I understand it yelling, “INCOMING!” is a popular alternative, but I suppose you have to decide: do you want to look cool twitching your fingers in some stupid battle cant, or do you want to stay alive.)

I am confident that G’narsh (being far more battle savvy than I) has utilized the moments I have wasted rattling on about minor fantasy trivia to notice the growing ranks of police officers and other representatives from the law enforcement community, which have come to see what all the excitement is about. I should also (perhaps) point out that it is immediately apparent that the police officers will be played by the ogres (those very same ogres that (apparently) refuse to stay dead).

“What’s going on?” G’narsh asks upon the appearance of the ogres.

“Bones,” Nadia explains. “You never killed him. Not that you could. He’s a necromancer. You can’t kill the dead. You should know that G’narsh.”

“Oh,” G’narsh replies, and though its not as witty or clever as I might like, the fact is, its about the best thing he can say right now. He doesn’t need to ask why Bones is after him. He betrayed the dark lord, the House of Chaos, the horde, and all the rest. Clearly he may have forgiven Bones, but that doesn’t mean Bones has forgiven him. Not that I have a lot of experience in this (OK -- maybe I do), but I’m guessing (as a general rule) dark lords are not the forgiving types.

I probably could go on about dark lords this and dark lords that, but luckily Nadia is here, and she feels like moving the scene along, so she says, “Believe it or not, I’m here to help you, G’narsh. You can have your boots back if you help me get Stef’fan out of jail.”

G'narsh suspiciously looks her over.

"You don't have any choice," Nadia advises him. "You're broke. You're a stranger in this town, and they're sweeping all the deadbeats off the streets. You're either in on the gig or you're on your own."

(And while G'narsh ponders this over...)

"You got a license for this?" the (ogre) police sergeant asks as he pushes his way to the front. "I don't have anything about this on my log books."

(((You know, about this dream shoot.)))

"I'm sure I can come up with the license," Inter Server feeds, tie-in promotions, trademark registration for Gimlet's House of Shoes, and all the rest, "if you want to play ball," Nadia suggests as she asks our hero point blank, "Are you in G'narsh, or do you want to take Bones on by yourself?"

"How do I know you're not working for Bones?"

"We're all working for Bones. That's not the point. You've got all sorts of bad karma on your tally sheet. You've got to clear some debt, and one of the people you owe the most is Stef'fan," Nadia explains as she goes into far more detail than you would expect in such a stressful -- time crunch -- situation.

"Stef'fan wants to hunt me down," G'narsh objects.

"I hate to break into your little party here, but do you have a license or not," the police man -- who is still an ogre -- insists. "I'm going to need to know your feed channel, and you have to put up some warning signs. You're cute missy, but the monster here isn't for everyone. You got to warn people about stuff like that. You'll give them nightmares."

"Hey Sarge, your true nature's coming out," jibes one of his lieutenants, or privates, or whatever the guys under Sergeants are called.

"They sure got you pegged right," another -- ogre -- cop chuckles.

“OK. That’s it.” Sergeant Ogre isn’t keen on being the laughing stock of the precinct for the rest of his career. “You got three seconds to open the feed, or you’re all going in... that includes you pops,” he says angrily to the shoe store proprietor.

“You can’t let this happen to Gimlet. He’s innocent,” Nadia pleads.

“You can change it,” G’narsh points out.

“Not until you agree I can’t.”

“I said SHUT IT DOWN!” the ogre instructs his men, “and I MEAN NOW!”

“Fine, what do I have to do?” G’narsh accents, and that is all it takes for Nadia to go into the grid, change a 0 to a 1, download the proper forms, get them signed in triplicate, stamped by the City Hall, Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and the Commissioner of Streets, send out the appropriate notices (postdated to the prior month) to all the relevant departments, and get someone to spray Sergeant Ogre in (((day-glow orange))) on a certain policeman’s locker down at precinct, but it’s all in a day’s work and Nadia is happy to oblige as she turns to G’narsh and informs him, “You have to help Stef’fan. Get him out of jail. Make up for all that bad karma,” and then turning to the squad of police officers that now appear to be regular humans (if police officers can ever be consider human), Nadia says, “Brilliant! Wonderful job guys! Thanks!”

(I’m not sure if all of the turns make sense, but that’s what the second (((or third, or fourth -- or whatever we’re on now))) walkthrough is all about. Just one loose end and we’re off to wreak havoc on the city streets... cause, did I mention? We got permits now!)

“So, I loose the shoes,” Gimlet says forlornly. “And you’re leaving too,” which is perhaps the bigger blow.

“It had to happen someday,” Nadia points out.

“I never thought it would,” Gimlet confesses.

“Look on the bright side,” Nadia says as she hugs Gimlet goodbye, “you can keep a virtual pair of shoes in the window and link a direct feed from them to -- wherever (((Empty-X))). Not to mention, your store will forevermore have a starring role in G’narsh: The Troll, The Myth, The Legend.”

“But he’s a hack... an amateur,” Gimlet complains. (Talk about ungrateful. I gave him life! Not to mention a supporting role.)

“True,” Nadia concedes. (What? Won’t anybody stick up for me? I was one round away from the semi-finals. Doesn’t that count for anything? And the answer to that, is of course a resounding, No!)

“But look on the bright side,” Nadia continues (((as her conversational impulse stutters))), “you don’t really exist in the first place. You’re just,” a proxy, “an illusion, and if there is no substance, no underlying existence, then reality can be whatever you wish it to be...” For, if a thing does not exist, there is no way for any external force to confine or restrict it.

And I didn’t think Nadia was paying attention. Not that this is any sort of explanation, but the important thing at this particular juncture is that Nadia is a code runner, and so as she waives her hands about and the pixie dust goes flying through the air, somewhere a 1 turns into a 0, and they are all magically transformed into a crew working at an honest to goodness (see you in the dailies) on location promotional shoot.

You know the type -- police keeping the crowd in check, actors you never thought existed (in the real) world signing autographs, young girls squealing at the sight of G’narsh (the larger than life hero), and then there is the lucky shoeshine guy who gets a completely retrofitted store with a permanent spot on the tourist maps.

AAA Shoe Supply (or whatever it’s called), this is where G’narsh goes to get his shoes repaired whenever he is in the greater (-----) metropolitan area. It’s a happy, successful, money falling out of the sky type ending for the sequence.

And as the police escort them down the crowded way, past the cheering fans, past the flashing bulbs (((and really, don't ask me why I'm so fixated on flashing bulbs))), and past the reporters from the dailies jostling with each other for the interview (((can't you just see them with their larger than life, retro cameras that look like they'd give you a hernia?))), past all this G'narsh and Nadia head off towards the next sequence where (more or less) all of this will be forgotten... or then, will it?

(Cause we got permits! I don't really know how that happened, but I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth... and I'll be honest, I don't know why you're not supposed to look in their mouths. I guess it annoys them... or maybe they bite?)

(((But enough about horses.)))

(In the end, I think the sequence worked out rather well. It is longer than I expected, but then it has a deeper, more pleasing resolution than I had expected (which quite fortuitously appeared out of nowhere). Who knew the entire illusion of the dream would slip sideways and disappear into a publicity stunt -- just because G'narsh is stubborn... and so are cops for that matter -- ogre or otherwise.)

(((And here, very far along in the editing process, I will note that the preceding was so complicated that I will probably have to refine it a great deal more -- far more than for a normal sequence. When played through, I found myself bouncing around as my compiler scrambling to keep up, far more than I would have liked.)))

(((But then I added a bunch of editing tags -- ((()) -- as a sort of wrap around for our wraparound, and that seemed to smooth things out -- and work as a sort of filter dampening function... if that's the proper terminology for it.)))

Will Work for Dream Time

a.k.a. Meester Dreamer Unfair

(I don't have much on the outline for today. G'narsh needs to be aware of his comfortable shoes for a second, then we can dispose of them from our minds. Nadia needs to 'find' a gold coin (or something), so we can wrap that around to the initial scene at the pizza place where G'narsh is mad at her (for losing a gold coin). And then, we need to bring the Charlies back into the dream. I think they're at a construction site or something.)

(Oh, and perhaps we'll need to do something with the crowd that is following G'narsh and Nadia around)

G'narsh wiggles his toes as he walks. His boots have never felt so comfortable. "Gimlet really did a good job," he remarks casually to Nadia.

"Gimlet loved those boots," Nadia agrees. "There wasn't a day that went by that he didn't polish them, or at least work in a bit of oil."

"I almost feel bad about taking them from him," G'narsh admits.

"Just go back and do a disc signing at his store sometime and he'll be fine," Nadia suggests as she takes the opportunity to fly a little higher into the sky and gain a bit of altitude, so she can scout out the way.

(One down (i.e. comfortable shoes = check). Only two or three to go. How long can it take?)

Since Nadia is flying around (trying to figure out which way to go), this would be a good place to have the pair stop in the street for a moment. (Please note, they aren't in the tubes, but on the surface roads. I want some of that old fashioned gritty realism in this sequence -- life on the streets, and all that.)

So while you're flexing your toes in G'narsh's new boots (or in boots that are almost as good as new -- only better really),

appreciate the softness of the leather, the comfort of the sole, and the protective feel of the steel (and carbon) toe guards and safety shanks. If you're really getting into the role, you might even want to feel a little bit disappointed that the shoes are getting so dirty -- walking through oily grime will do that, after all.

And at some point, we should probably mention the crowd that is following them down the street. Picture a parade with G'narsh as the bandleader and Nadia as his jester/clown flitting about back and forth as she tries to figure out which way leads towards their destination.

"It's around here somewhere," Nadia says from up near the streetlights.

"What is?" G'narsh replies testily.

"Our next stop."

"I thought we were just going to the police station," he replies suspiciously.

"We are," Nadia assures G'narsh. They are at a four way intersection, and at the moment Nadia is flying back and forth a little ways down each street trying to figure out where she is. Apparently, she hadn't bothered to get out of the tubes very much in the last hundred years.

Picking up on that train of thought -- seemingly out of nowhere -- G'narsh suddenly inquires, "If you've been here for centuries, why don't you know where the police station is?"

Nadia returns to where G'narsh is as she hovers in the air and looks around. She doesn't want to admit that she is lost. "I didn't spend a lot of time seeking out the cops," Nadia replies and then adds, "I usually travel underground."

"So why didn't we stay underground and go the way you know?" G'narsh asks reasonably. He can sense that he is walking into some kind of trap. He can feel the hands of fate moving in and squeezing ever tighter, but to what purpose? He just can't put his finger on it.

Luckily, he has Nadia with him, and she explains it ((to him))) point blank, "Because before we get to the police station,

we need to run an encounter,” or two, “on the surface streets... Show off this wretched place or something like that,” Nadia explains further as she sweeps her head around and takes in the blackened, soot covered buildings, the thick grey overcast sky that hangs low and foreboding above them, and the muddy oil saturated ground below.

“Oh, no!” G’narsh objects as the hackles on the back of his neck rise further. “I agreed to help Stef’fan get out of jail and that’s it. No side quests.”

“Well, to get Stef’fan out of jail, we need to get there first,” Nadia reminds him testily. Not that G’narsh needs reminding of this particular fact, as it has been growing more and more obvious to him -- second by second & moment by moment -- that they are indeed lost. G’narsh isn’t surprised that Nadia won’t admit it. It is some unwritten law: the more a creature is supposed to know how to track (be they werewolf, enchanted bloodhound, ghoul, or fairy), the less willing they are to admit it when they’ve lost the trail and don’t have the slightest idea where they are. It’s a point of pride, or something.

(I don’t know if you’ve picked up on this, but Nadia is having a bear of a time explaining the exact situation (i.e. the predicament she and G’narsh are in) to G’narsh. I suppose that might have something to do with my own lack of focus as to what the situation is, so let me clarify it -- for myself if no one else. G’narsh and Nadia are to become adventuring partners. Don’t ask me how this happens with G’narsh being so suspicious of her. I’m thinking she needs to come clean, but just like my own desire to lay down a full description of the ‘parade,’ every time Nadia heads in that direction, something veers her (and me) off course. So what do you say? Let’s just get down to it.)

As G’narsh is staring up at Nadia and growing more and more frustrated (at being lost, at being railroaded back into a quest for the horde, at being outside in such a Sch©lting hole of a place

when they could have used the tubes), and as his anger grows ever greater, a human lad (it could be you my friend) comes running around the corner and collides right into the two-headed monstrosity.

It's just one more petty annoyance for G'narsh, but it knocks the breath out of... Chester. (I believe we will call the lad in question Chester, though if I should seem less certain of this fact in the future, it's because this is the third edit and the other comments (about Chester's name) were made in the second edit and first run through. So although you come upon this comment first, it's actually last. Is that clear? Excellent.)

(((I should also mention that I am now on my third major edit (also known as the second walk through) since I laid down the dream, and it has become apparent that my edit numbering system is inconsistent. See, I would call this my third edit, but since I already did at least five edits when I laid down the dream, this should maybe be called the eighth edit. Obviously, the numbers can be a bit confusing (and or tiresome). Take it for granted that (((comes last))) and you'll be fine. Oh, and by the way, there's no -- hidden -- story in the edit numbers. It's just the straight out story of editing... if you are interested in that sort of thing.)))

Chester, however, doesn't wait for the commentary to unwind, and instead topples to the ground from his collision with G'narsh right away. Actually, it's not really so much the impact that does him in, as is the fact that he's been running for the last half hour. So although in better days Chester would have been able to stand again without delay, at the moment he is hunched over on hands and knees hyperventilating. "Ooh, hah. Ooh, hah," he says over and over again from being out of breath from the run.

"Is he all right?" G'narsh asks. Sure he's a mean angry troll, annoyed at his current predicament, but overall he's on a quest to do good, so the man... er, troll is conflicted. Half of him wants to

kick the idiot in the face for running into him, and the other half wants to comfort him.

Nadia, however, doesn't suffer from this malady. She looks down at the wheezing form of Chester (from where she is hovering overhead in the air), and then turns her attention to a few lines of code streaming by in the air, before she replies, "Yeah he's fine, just give him a second or two."

"Is this kid who," or what, "we've been waiting for?" G'narsh asks with equal parts suspicion and confusion.

(And although this would be a great time for Nadia to explain things to him (again), it is even a better moment for me to finish describing the parade.)

People walking down the street dressed in costumes, bands playing, and announcers entertaining the crowd -- go to the GI library and this is what -- a parade -- will pull up. A dream shoot is remarkably similar (hence the nickname). And, although the parade is stopped at the moment (since Nadia and G'narsh are standing still), the structure of the beast stays more or less the same whether it is moving or not.

At the front (or center) are the principles -- the actors. In this particular case that means G'narsh and Nadia (and now Chester -- it's odd how I keep wanting to label Chester Stef'fan, but that is another matter altogether. No doubt they are cut from the same cloth -- separate, but similar).

Anyhow, moving on, the (actors) principles always take center stage, but surrounding them -- in front, behind, and to the sides -- is the crew. If you're laying down code, the minimal crew requirement is one person and a welfare rig (but you can bump it up to a thousand person crew without trying if you have the money). For a live shoot, it goes pretty much the same way. The minimum crew size is one -- the cameraman -- but on a high budget shoot (like the type we're depicting) you'll want a good half dozen guys working cameras... and then there are the special

effects folks, the sound crew, light trucks, a director, location manager, shoot supervisor, and so on. The list can be amazingly long. Over a hundred support personnel for a location shoot is not unheard of. And if I wanted to, it would be easy to insert Artismo (Bones) into the mix right now. I mean if this was real, if we were really doing a shoot, wild horses (again with the horses) wouldn't be able to drag me away, but this isn't a real shoot. It doesn't have any real world counterpart, and so adding Artismo (or Bones) at this juncture, would only serve to confuse things. His time will come soon enough.

One of the points I laid down in there that I wish to draw your attention to again (lest things get too confusing) is that this isn't a historical documentary. This isn't really happening --anywhere, anytime. It's just a dream overlay. G'narsh: The Troll, The Myth, The Legend is a low budget amateur affair, and as such we didn't do any high budget, real world stuff. Nada. Not ever.

But even though that's the case, if you ever find yourself in Chicago, you can load up this disc and take the walk (follow in the footsteps of the dream as it plays along), or (if you don't plan on getting to Chicago anytime soon) you can easily integrate this sequence into your neck of the woods, because as much as I like Chi-Town (Shy-Town?), it's not central to the plot. Anywhere -- Any Town -- will do just as well.

(((I should perhaps note that although nobody has purchased the blanket rights to it, or put it out as a disc, I do have an Astral Plane Dreamscape location known as -- Any Town -- available for sale, lease, rent, distributorship, or for use in your private one-off project. Call me.)))

Anyhow, before I completely lose my focus, let's get back to the parade. It goes principles, crew, security, and then the crowd. Security is composed of all sorts of folks, the big muscle guys we all recognize, but then also the public relation folks, the

girls giving away the swag (freebies) -- they're security as well (crowd appeasement being crowd control looked at from a different paradigm/mindset) -- and then all those local kids and runners hired to move barricades and cones (because it's cheaper to buy them off, then deal with the consequences of not letting them in on the game. Besides they're pretty darn effective at tackling barricade runners; not to mention the fact that the crew isn't responsible for whatever an overzealous "independent contractor" might do -- like hospitalize someone).

Behind the private security force are the real (official) policemen. If they ever have to do anything, you're running your shoot wrong. The cops are only there to give the whole shebang the mark of respectability and to remind everyone what the consequences are if anyone should get too excited or cause problems (i.e. interfere with the shoot).

And then there's the crowd... being pretty much everybody in earshot, hooked to a rig within a quarter mile radius, or whatever. For a big shoot it can be thousands upon thousands. I mean, who works when a dream shoot's in town anyway? You have something better to do? I know I don't.

(And, there we have the parade. Obviously not as complete as it could be. Whole discs have been done on the phenomenon, but I think it sets the tone, lays down a little flavor, and puts Chester into a little better context.)

(At some point, it might even become clear why I get Chester and Stef' fan so mixed up.)

(And then again, maybe it won't. I should just throw it out there that I -- personally -- have been identifying with Stef' fan more and more lately and that I've seen a barricade wall from multiple vantage points.)

Without further ado then, let's go back to Chester, Chad, Dustin, or whatever this guy's name is... and if that hasn't clued you in, I'll just lay it on the line, his name is not important. If this

were real, Chester would be human, but since this whole sequence is virtual (along with every other part of the dream), Chester is a proxy... and not an overly important one either. He'll disappear in a second and probably won't even get an invite to the party, but that doesn't really matter, because this is about to be the high point of Chester's -- the fanboy's -- existence.

Having taken to heart that the only thing that matters in this world is dreams, then also realize that if you're in a parade and you're behind the cops, the tech guys, and a thousand other gawking fans, you're never going to get into the scene (let alone see it). Now, I know that getting a role in a dream isn't everyone's goal, but it is for enough folks, so that it's worth going over the details of that desire. Besides, I can assure you that getting into the scene -- as a cameo on the disc -- is Chester's sole and total motivation (one dimensional proxy that he is), so let's back up a few minutes (hours, or whatever) and roll out some back story.

The very second that G'narsh and Nadia do that shoe store sequence, the buzz all over the city -- the news of the day, the focus of the dailies, and the traffic on the Server -- is all about the day's dream shoot. True, I'm a bit of a fanatic, so maybe I'm painting the picture too simplistic, too colored with obsession, but I've been in parades so long that you literally couldn't see what the shoot was about unless you got a feed. When you stop and think about it, that does seem a bit pointless... unless, of course, you're obsessed and then it makes perfect sense, because you know why you're in the parade along with everybody else; it's the only thing (at the moment) that matters.

So if you're anything like me (the obsessive compulsive type when it comes to all things dream related), when the news of a shoot hits the Server, that is your cue to start hacking the system and trying to figure out where the parade is heading next. You could run (without thinking) and hook up with the parade wherever it is, but you'd join it at the rear and far from the action. A much better approach is to spend a few moments on the Server and see if

there is any other buzz. Are there any other trolls, fairies, or whatever in town?

If you are lucky, you'll hit the JACKPOT! You'll find the critical feed, the hidden channel, the tech support line, or maybe you'll simply wander over into the next zone, and see what they're screaming about over there.

If you do, you might find that the next burg over is focusing on a bunch of little lizard-type alligator men -- or cobalts as the feeds are calling them. It seems that the cobalts are walking a picket line at a construction site protesting the building's employment of goblins in its workforce. It's an odd bit of information. Kind of stands out from the rest, so take a moment to do a little mental algebra -- dot a few i's and cross a few t's in your head -- and then pull up your map integrator. Sure enough, G'narsh and Nadia are headed on a beeline course for the construction site where the cobalts are picketing. No doubt, this is the next set scene... but what would a dream be without a little chaos, a little randomness, a chance for a local kid to make good, and something for the dailies to talk about. So you're a bright one, you know where the parade is starting (the Grant Park Tube Station), and you know where it is ending (the future site of the Heinmillerstien Towers -- luxury condos at affordable prices in the heart of downtown... and apparently, currently the site of a labor dispute). You could run to the construction site (the end of the parade route); if you get there fast enough (fat chance), you might be able to squeeze into the front row behind the barricades with a thousand others, or you can intercept the parade and meet it halfway. To do this you have to run up side streets, dodge flits, other runners, and the punk kids that have been deputized into a security force for the day who have nothing better to do than get in your way (and beat the ever loving Sch©lte out of you if they catch you jumping a barricade), but if you are lucky, you'll get through, because somebody always does; and once you do, then you're just another bit of color, a random guy walking down the street as a bit of human background, and a natural part of the cityscape.

(Assuming you're with me so far, let me give you an example of how NOT to do it once you get to the barricade.)

"I... I live up the block," the out of breath barricade runner says as he stops at the security checkpoint.

"What address?" the uninterested rent-a-cop asks.

"Um..." the kid replies stalling for time. (Note: No matter what the specific situation, "Um..." is almost always a particularly poor choice of words.)

To which the security guard's only possible reply is, "Get out of here kid. The street's closed."

But they can't close off all the streets, not completely. They can't stop everything (business, traffic, locals from going home, etc.). They don't have the permits for it. Close down the city for an entire day? I don't think so. Besides, they want a little background, a little color. There's a reason they're doing a real world shoot after all. They want that mother taking her baby out for a stroll. (Gra'gl only knows what would possess a mother to take their child to the surface... Oh, right. A moment of fame and glory in the dailies, not to mention virtual immortality in a dream.) But not just the mom, they also want the neighborhood folks walking to work in the scene, folks going shopping, playing checkers (while wearing respirators) in the park, and so on. What they don't want is a barricade runner tired and breathless from running three miles out of his way to jump into the scene only to wave to his friends as he says, "Hi, mom," "Go Snarks," or some other stupid nonsense. No one needs a gang-sign flashing moron in their shoot (unless they're doing a dream about gang-sign flashing morons), but they do want the color, the bit of finely polished realism, the local kid who makes good, and all of the free publicity that goes along with it when the dailies cover it... so someone is going to make it onscreen.

In the end, it will look like randomness, or that someone broke through the barricades, but you know; if you're there, they're still shooting, and you make it through the cuts and edits into the final dream, then they wanted you to get through and be in the dream in the first place. Trust me on this. I know the world of the fanboy. They teach whole courses about this kind of Sch©lte at university. It happens. It is real.

The only real unknown is in figuring out what they want by way of a walk-on and/or a color persona from the limited information available (perhaps even before the director or dreamer does), and then giving it to them.

(If you want more information on this, do a Server search for ABE-1-2-3, Kelly Lee, Taz, or Bryce Canyon. Each of these runners has had over a dozen "walk on" cameos each. At some point, it's no longer coincidence. To any goal there is a way. Want to get your moment in the sun? My recommendation: take up jogging.)

"Is he all right?" G'narsh asks again as he stands over the barricade runner. "The kid looks like he's going to have a heart attack."

"He's just been running too hard," Nadia answers totally unconcerned about the extra -- Chester, I guess we've decided to call him.

G'narsh helps the boy stand and straightens him up -- i.e. dusts him off, and that sort of thing. "Are you sure you're alright?" he inquires of the lad.

'Ooh-hah, ooh-hah," is his only reply.

"Get somebody else in there," the director yells impatiently. Time is money. I've got a show to run. Yada, Yada.

"Nooo, I'll -- ooh-hah -- be alright," the lad insists.

"Get him out of there!" comes the unsympathetic reply. Like they care that you had to loop around and run three miles just to go

two blocks. But G'narsh isn't about to turn the kid over to a bunch of thuggish looking security guards.

"He's OK," G'narsh insists as he holds the lad up, squeezes his hand into a fist, and cracks his knuckles as he struggles to keep his anger in check -- because I'm pretty sure beating the crap out of a security guard on behalf of a fan is an act of kindness and understanding (if not quite technically The Good).

"Let him stay. We'll work with it," the shoot supervisor decides as he backs away from G'narsh. "But if the kid can't say his lines, he's out of there."

"Ooh-hah... The police station is that way," the boy points, panting breathlessly.

"WAIT FOR YOUR CUE!" the director screams. He hates these publicity stunts. Where the heck is Taz, anyhow. He told the kid to be here. Fr@cking unreliable runners.

(Not that I mean to imply that Taz has an in... OK. Fair enough. That is what I'm implying, but he started his career breaking through the barricades like everyone else and after a bit became a bit of a celebrity walk on figure in and of himself. In a low enough budget production, he might be the best known principal -- if a walk-on can be considered a principle.)

Believe it or not, it's time for another break from the action. I'm feeling myself getting frantic, and rather than pushing mindlessly ahead, it is time to pull back and relax. So let's pause and regroup as we circle around G'narsh in an establishing shot. He is at the intersection of This Street and That Avenue. In all four directions, as far as the eye can see, the streets are packed with people. It is as if G'narsh is the conquering (((returning?))) hero, and the citizens of this fair city have come out in full force to welcome him home.

Nadia -- ever the attention whore -- is flittering about at the edge of the crowd posing for pictures, kissing cheeks, and signing autographs.

Wardrobe has decided Chester would look more natural in a different outfit and as such is giving him a complete personality makeover... You know, so he looks real -- believable and authentic.

G'narsh is trying to take all of this in (the parade, the dream shoot, etc.) and make some sort of sense out of it.

"What's going on Nadia?" G'narsh asks. He can feel the dark hand of Bones in this -- the touch of Chaos as it were -- but he has to admit, taken as a whole it does not reek of evil... rather it smells faintly alluring -- of mystery and the unknown.

"This is what they do here," Nadia replies as she flies back over towards G'narsh. "See all those headsets and eyeglasses? It allows them to see what isn't there."

"Like magic? Force trails?" G'narsh asks.

"Sure something like that," Nadia agrees (and although this would be a perfect place for Nadia to explain things further to G'narsh, she somehow drops the ball and misses the opportunity -- yet again).

"What about the kid?" G'narsh asks. Chester doesn't have a headset on. Instead, he has gold pickups implanted in his temples -- think UBI (the dreaded Universal Broadcast Initiative) and/or mental binders.

"That's why were using him," Nadia agrees. (I started this third partition warning about an upcoming UBI rant. It's about time for me to get on with it.)

"Does that make him rich or poor," G'narsh asks trying to put his finger on the logic of the moment. Is the kid a street waif? A river rat? Or no. As he emerges from wardrobe, it is clear that the kid is being made out to be some sort of adolescent god, king of the playground, and ruler of the street. (Mental binders cut across all socio-economic classes my friends.)

"OK. From the top," the set director yells (and the scene resets -- which means G'narsh loses perception, memory, and recognition of the dream crew, at least momentarily).

G'narsh stands at the intersection looking around, trying to decide which way to go, while Nadia flies up into the air to get a better view. (How many clicks have we gone, and this is still where we are?) G'narsh follows her up with his eyes, and as he does, Chester -- a street urchin wearing amazingly trendy clothes (that there is just no Fr@cking way he could afford (or keep that clean)) -- runs into G'narsh.

G'narsh grabs him by the scruff of the neck. (Oh, by the way, welcome back to the anger management version of G'narsh.)

"Sorry," Chester stammers.

G'narsh gives him a good shake as he decides what to do. Slap him around? Make him apologize? Or perhaps more appropriately, now would be a great time to practice some breathing while he counted to ten and focused on happy thoughts.

"Fr@ck Mister! I said I was sorry," Chester pleads as the full meaning (and potential impact) of that liability release he signed comes to the forefront of his mind.

G'narsh lifts him off the ground (and I do believe G'narsh is reverting slightly to his old psychopathic persona at this point) as he demands to know, "Where police station?" (He so mad, he no talk good!)

"It's... It's that way," the kid stammers (and perhaps soils his new clothes at the same time). Its called acting folks. If you'd like to experience true terror, take a moment to drop into Chester's mind. We'll blot out any overriding thoughts like, "Why did I sign that release? Why? Oh, Gra'gl why?", and just leave the sheer unbridled terror in place. Of course, if you'd like to pad out the moment, you might want to go back a few minutes to the words of warning the set director gave the young lad before they sent him around the corner. "If you don't act scared, we'll make you scared. That's a police line out there. What do you think happens to folks who don't honor the law? You understand? So, when G'narsh yells, you shake boy, or we'll have him rip your arms off... You know, there's nothing he'd rather do. Don't make it seem real, and you'll be begging us to turn you over to the cops when he's done."

Of course, that's just one theory. It's the kind of overlay they like to put down in your cheesy, crossover, blurred reality horror show dreams. More than likely, the kid is just there for the crowd's benefit. The real role is usually played out deep in the heart of a dream booth, and all the crowd will remember in a day is the feed (and forget everything about the local, who in the end, is little more than a place holder, a human blue screen).

"You better not be lying to me," G'narsh roars as he tosses the lad back to the ground.

(OK. Fair enough. The scene seems to sit a little catawampus with the rest of the dream (slightly at odds and not quite right), but hey! Did you see the look on Chester's face? He thought he was going to die! That's what we like to call character motivated acting.)

(Actually, when I first laid this track down, I was trying for a multi-level diffused-reality overlay thing integrating G'narsh's quest with a dream shoot, and the dream shoot sort of morphed into a shot for a different dream, something a little rougher and grittier.)

(Anyhow, if I was still in a competition, I'd have to think seriously about reworking this segment, but I think I'm going to let it stand. It'll add a bit of support for all those folks playing this on a more violent (non MM) level, and it opens the interpretation of the dream up to a wider view -- say by injecting the issue of being good in the moment versus being good long term. Lots of Sch@lting fools can't seem to get it together moment by moment, but this doesn't mean they aren't striving to be good -- and/or aspiring to be righteous.)

(Bottom line, I have a great deal of angst and continue to second guessing myself over G'narsh's use of violence, but for whatever reason it seems rooted into place... and a statement like that feels (to me) like I'm setting something up (like a greater willingness for G'narsh to use violence -- under the right circumstances, of course -- in the future), but that's not actually my

intent. The fact is, the segment has a dream shoot overlay, and overwhelming, the plot of these fantasy dreams tend to revolve around endless/senseless violence, so it just sort of made sense to let some of that random anger and violence seep through, and have G'narsh sink down to that level... and then, by the same token, it still doesn't make any sense because senseless, random violence is one of the (many) things G'narsh is specifically striving to overcome.)

“Brilliant! Brilliant G'narsh!” the director yells as Nadia sweeps down to pick up one of the gold ‘coins’ that has been shaken loose from the side of Chester’s head.

“You can’t take that,” G'narsh points out. Psychotic monster one second, do-gooder pansy the next: maybe I should tone down the previous section (but you know I won't/haven't).

“What?” Nadia asks incredulously. “You scare the kid to death, practically rip his heart out, and now you’re telling me I can’t keep something I found on the ground.”

“The kid ran into me... I thought he was attacking me...”

G'narsh is obviously lying and he finally caves in as Nadia stares him down. “Fine. I lost my temper. I’ve got anger management issues, but that’s emotional, on the cusp of the moment. I can’t control it.”

Nadia pockets the gold coin. “And this is the cusp of the moment too. I want it, and I can’t control that desire.”

“Give it back.”

“No.”

“Give it back!” G'narsh roars. (You can see the crowd, which surrounds them, take an involuntary step backwards as he does this, and if you didn’t realize this before, placing emotional triggers like that is one of the reasons folks shooting a dream provide a feed in the first place. If you’re going to shoot a background, it helps if it responds on cue.)

“Fine,” Nadia assents as she hands G'narsh the gold coin. “But don’t be yelling at me when I start to lose stuff. This is how

it works, you know. If you're not finding, you're loosing... You understand that don't you?"

(G'narsh doesn't, but we'll use this little idea to explain how Nadia is transformed from a street hustling gutter fairy into a coin loosing waitress. It's probably a terribly weak rationale, but it's the symbolism that counts, not the overriding practicality of its implementation.)

(And when I say we'll use this idea to explain this concept, I mean we just have. Case closed. End of thread. You want more than that, it's time to use your noggin and work it out yourself.)

"Here," G'narsh says as he kneels down before the kid that he just threw against the wall moments before. Didn't I mention that bit? Oh, well. I guess it slipped my mind. It's not terribly important. Far more central to the plot is what G'narsh does next. He crouches over the terrified kid, holds the coin up against the side of the kid's head, and with a great big slap of his oversized hand smacks the golden pickup back into place (and then does the same thing to the other side with the other gold coin laying on the ground). If you didn't know any better, it would look like G'narsh was knocking the kid out.

"I hope I didn't hurt him," G'narsh says of the unconscious form before him.

"He'll be OK," Nadia insists as she indicates the crowd surrounding them. "They'll take care of him."

"You sure."

"Yes."

(((And really, got me -- long term -- as to why I've even included a scene that focuses on reattaching implants in the first place. If there's any follow up, I can't remember, find, or divine it anywhere.)))

(Also, if it feels like I am speeding things along at this point, it's because I am. As such -- and with that in mind -- we will leave out any discussion between G'narsh and Nadia about whether or not the kid would have been better off with or without the broadcast implants reattached -- whether they were bindered or not -- and instead join them again an hour or so later as they stand in front of the second planned scene in this sequence.)

Without worrying too much about the intervening steps, we will rejoin G'narsh and Nadia a little later after they have arrived at the construction site of the Heinmillerstien Office Towers, or are they the Eddie Takosori Luxury Sky View Estates? Whatever they are called, I think that it is both clear that I do not know, nor do I care.

Most of the construction site is obscured by a plastic-lite vision fence. If you peek through the holes and cracks in the fence, you'll see a pit dug five stories deep into the bowels of the Earth. Chicago has some swampy ground, and to build a tower (or any large building) you need to either dig until you reach bedrock so that you can attach to it for anchorage, or to build a large foundation, which essentially floats on the surrounding soil like a ship in water. It's one of the reasons why the first few floors of most large buildings take up entire city blocks, but after the tenth or twentieth floor, only a much smaller sliver reaches for the stars. That bigger mass at the bottom is like a buoy in water. Or if it makes it any easier to understand, they build those large towers so that they behave like a hollowed out egg with a lead weight on the bottom. That sucker might wobble all over the place, but it's not going to fall over.

Granted, my knowledge of advanced construction technology is only superceded by my exacting knowledge of all things philosophical, so you might want to take anything I say about... anything -- but construction specifically -- with a grain of salt.

Anyhow, as the goblin workers continue to bore out this gigantic hole in the ground and line the walls with fiber reinforced concrete, the steel girders and beams, which will eventually support this towering monolith, already reach far into the sky. Eyeballing it, I would guess that the building currently stands fifty stories tall, but how high will it eventually go? A hundred stories? Two hundred? It doesn't matter actually matter. Besides what is a story? If you are going for levels, splitting a level will give you more bang for the buck fitting two where by all rights there would only be one.

(((And I suppose you could take this as some sort of dream within a dream overlay-criticism/metaphor, but it was intended to be a discussion of building heights and nothing more.)))

This last aside, of course, is not important. (It's just a personal beef). The exact building doesn't matter either. (Like any specific reference matters in my dreams). Use whatever you want. And, although they are still there, the parade -- the crowd of sightseers, gawkers, and tourists, which surround the site -- are also not overly important. All that really matters at this moment is that the site is being picketed by a group of twelve (Angry?) (Young?) cobalts carrying signs reading:

Meester Unfair
Ebil Goblins
Union Yes : Goblins No
Will Work for Dream Time

And other things of that nature.

"Meester unfairs," the Charlies explain as they march around in a circle and complain about the poor working conditions and those ebil, job stealing goblins.

"Dey stealer all'd da jobbers," a Charlie explains to ace reported Jeannette Stevens. My she is a hot one -- blonde, blue eyes with a red-hot fiery disposition to boot. (She wants me you know. It's kind of embarrassing when proxies start to throw themselves at you like that. Anyhow, I (or perhaps it was she) had

to get a restraining order, so we can longer appear in the same scene together, but if we were both there, you can be sure the sparks would fly.

“You sure HE’s not going to be here?” Jeannette asks, starting the interview with a strange sort of question.

“Who’d?” Charlie responds.

“You know who,” she says while indicating the sky (as if I was GOD -- sad really, the way she idolizes me). “Is HE going to be here? Because I’m not doing this if he is.”

Being slightly more professional, the Charlies ignore her question and explains how the goblins, “Dey workers cheappers.”

“Et crappiers workies.”

“You’d getties what you’d payees fors,” another agrees.

“There you have it,” Jeannette says as she turns towards the camera and wraps up her interview. “Pseudonym Towers, or whatever the idiot is calling this project is being built by shoddy unskilled labor... Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go,” and with that she drops the microphone and scurries away (in a voluptuous -- I want the creator -- type way. The way she throws herself at me. It’s embarrassing.)

(Needless to say, not every proxy is anxious for the work. Jeannette’s shtick is that she hates me, is repulsed by me. It’s so over the top that you know it can’t possibly be true, but you’ve got to give her kudos for her professionalism and eye for detail. I mean, she even went so far with the gag as to get a restraining order. How cute is that?)

(I should probably also mention that in the first walk thru, the reporter was played by -- a reporter -- so if Jeannette’s role seems a bit thin, it’s because it is. It was added during the second edit, so it’s really just color.)

(If you’re into melodrama, or just want to see a good fight, you could redo the scene with Artismo/Bones as the director, but I don’t feel like dragging it out, so you’re on your own for that.)

(Also, if you decide that you want to play the interview out further (with or without Bones), the Charlies will be happy to go on about how the goblin scabs are taking the good jobs away from hardworking union cobalts -- blood of steel, I tell you. You can bet, they'll be sure to point out that nine out of ten goblin constructed buildings collapse within the first year. It sounds like an exaggeration to me, but what do I know?)

“Et da safeties concerns,” the Charlies insist as they engage the crowd around the dream shoot in an effort to garner popular support for their cause.

“Just sayer NO’s to da cornering cutting capitalistic piggy!” they say as the scene cuts away from them and back to G’narsh and Nadia.

“I thought we were going to the police station?” G’narsh dubiously notes as Nadia stops in front of Pseudonym Towers. (It has a certain ring to it. Besides I’m a fool for Jeannette. Anything she says sounds simply dreamy... “Pseudonym Towers,” she called it...)

Anyhow, while I reminisce about a certain blonde reporter, G’narsh and Nadia are in front of the building, in the middle of the street, and surrounded on all sides by a crowd that is pushing hard against the line of barricades that the police have set up. Not uncoincidentally, G’narsh is standing right on top of a big red X.

“We’re going to the police station,” Nadia assures G’narsh as she picks up the conversation where it left off. “We just need to pick up some old friends first.”

“Dat you’d G’narsh’e,” a Charlie asks (right on cue), as he stops mid-step in the picket line.

“Et da G’narsh!” another happily agrees ((((bumping into the first, I might add.)))).

And then they all shout, “G’narsh’e!” in delight as the rush to surround him.

“Hey Charlie,” G’narsh says, you know, coolly -- like he’s always running into old acquaintances from the horde in his travels. “Did I take a wrong turn somewhere?” he asks himself.

“Noper’s dis where’d da G’narshers is’d supposers to be’s,” Charlie assures him.

“We’se gotters da problemers bossman.”

“Da no gooders gobliner stealie all’d our jobs.”

“Dey no unioners,” Charlie explains as he hands G’narsh a union card with two ID pictures on it (one for each of his heads don’t you know).

“What do I need with this?” G’narsh asks.

“You’se helpees Charlie’s,” a cobalts explains as they jump all over each other’s lines and interrupt each other trying to explain the situation to G’narsh.

“You’se no remembers running off?”

“Leabering da Charlies all’d alone?”

“You’d da bossy mans.”

“So’d we chasee after you’se.”

“But den we runs out of da moneyers.”

“So we’d getters da jobs...”

“Only’d we’d cants because of der no gooder gobliners.”

“Et no fairs.”

“Bossman come to helpy Charlie?” the last of the cobalts concludes, happy that they have explained their situation (and/or dilemma) so succinctly.

(((Clearly we are ignoring any previous innuendo or reference regarding the Charlies escort duties in relation to the blonde, the brunette, and the redhead.)))

“I’m not your boss man anymore,” G’narsh says simply as he cuts to the chase of the matter. “You guys don’t have to follow after me.”

“Dat no’d da wayee et work,” Charlie explains.

“Once’y da bossman, always da bossyman.”

“Unlesser you’d die’rd,” a cobalt suggests.

“Yea’d dat doer et,” another agrees.

“I not dying,” G’narsh points out. “You’ll just have to get yourself another boss man.”

“But where’s?” a Charlie asks.

“You’d da boss man.”

“You’d sayers we’d go wit da odder boss mans, den dats dat.”

“Buts who’d we’d goers wit?”

“That’s not my problem,” G’narsh insists. “I left before. I can leave again,” he continues as he looks around and tries to make a plan (for escape), but Nadia is there and she runs interference for the Charlies.

“They’ll be stuck here forever if you don’t help them,” Nadia explains.

“That’s ridiculous,” G’narsh says as he looks down the avenue. There are too many bodies blocking the streets. He can barely think with this many people around, much less plan a retreat... or, a er... strategic redeployment strategy. “What’s with all these people?” he asks. “And why are they following us around.”

“You’re a war hero,” Nadia explains simply, “And you’re a,” dream, “celebrity.”

“I’m not a hero,” G’narsh insists.

“That’s part of what makes you a hero,” Nadia points out. “Your insistence that you’re not one. Either way, the Charlies will be stuck here forever if you don’t help them get them a job, and work a shift with them.”

“That makes no sense,” G’narsh argues as he holds up his hands to block the flashing lights from the cameras. “These people are starting to get on my nerves,” he notices.

“Just go through the gate and sign on for the day... You need some cash anyhow. Your pockets are empty,” Nadia reminds him.

“Did I hear somebody say they needed a job?” a tall, handsome man in a construction hardhat says as he enters the scene. Why it’s John Greetle -- star of stage and dream. He looks G’narsh up and down (well up mostly) and then quickly decides, “I could use some good union labor. Those goblins are Fr@cking Sch©lte.” Every last one of them.

“He’d wit us,” a Charlie jumps in as he grabs onto G’narsh’s leg.

“You’d getter da powered house, you getta da Charlies to,” a cobalt says hopefully.

“Et only’d fairs.”

“Right bossers mans?” Charlie asks G’narsh.

“So you’re a whole crew?” John Greetle muses as he mulls over the idea of hiring G’narsh -- Charlies and all. John’s a professional actor, but you’ve got to give him kudos for cleverly following the scrip and pretending he’s thinking the proposition over as he scratches his chin.

“Sure,” G’narsh agrees as he accepts the inevitability of the situation. “We’re a team.”

Once again, I’m not really sure why G’narsh is agreeing to team up with the cobalts again so readily. He’s of the horde. He knows the Charlies are only going to take this act as an admission that he actually is the boss man. Maybe he feels that he doesn’t have a choice, which is true. He was going to work a shift at this site one way or another. Maybe G’narsh can sense that, and is just saving himself the strife.

Nadia already knows it’s a done deal, so she happily falls into John Greetle’s strong, powerful arms as she suggests, “I can work in the office. Be your personal assistant.”

John eyes her, explores the possibilities in his mind, and then calls over his shoulder, “Get rid of those no good scabs. We got ourselves a new crew!”

At which point the big red applause sign lights up (just in case all the folks in the parade missed their cue from the feed) and the crowd erupts in celebration as streamers fill the air.

(OK. Fairly stupid and campy. No doubt it will get a little more focused as we iron it out, but those are the plot points we've been looking for. Nadia's dropping of gold coins is explained to some degree. The Charlies are back in the fold. And we see a little bit of how G'narsh has made ends meet over the missing eons (and the Charlies have not) by working construction.)

(It's three plus clicks (seven after the second edit -- I obviously added a lot) on basically nothing critical to the plot, though we did get a lot of good, inside the dreams (parade) material put down, which I am taking as my secondary goal at the moment. Nonetheless, the next sequence will take place later in the day at the police station and we will not worry too hard about the rest of the logistics in getting there.)

(Of course, if you've ever wanted to work a crane, now's your chance. The Charlies may be union, but that doesn't mean they have the slightest clue how to work the construction equipment. I'm thinking that there are all sorts of side possibilities in there. After all, why fire the goblins, when they can be used as some sort of target practice -- construction site cannon fodder?)

(Also note: John Greetle is just an empty place holder. It's a (nonexistent) skin of a (nonexistent) dream sensation -- an open call -- so utilize that however you wish. The main reason for including John is simply to show how I might give a cameo to a real star. Can't hurt to show off my skills at seamless character integration. Plenty of opportunities for cameos in my dreams folks. Want to give somebody a custom dream for their birthday? I'm your man, and (currently) I work cheap.)

(But back to the dream at hand. If you're looking for some tips on advance planning, we're off to the police station and then my sister's party. Boy is she going to be surprised when that crowd (the dream parade that's been following G'narsh around) tries to crash it. Maybe we can get somebody to cater it... or

maybe not. A thousand people in her tiny two bed-roomer could be fun.)

(And as long as I've given you the brief outline, I might as well give you the full expanded version of the dream to come. The final few sequences, which I have planned are:)

(((Note the sequence names are generic at this point.)))

(Police Station = Explain UBI, Binders, and the gold coins further.)

(Sister's Party = Swami Yamma, and Art's UBI Rant.)

(Prison Farm = Reintegrate Mi'lay and Stef'fan into the dream -- and if possible bring in Eileen and Doug. I'm not sure how that last part is going to happen yet.)

(Return to College Town = G'narsh buys pizza place and loose ends are tied up.)

(Final Unravel = ??? = Work it all out so M.O.M. is happy and the dream stays MM.)

(That's a mere five sequences to go folks. Of course, the way things have been going that means we're still a good 30 clicks from the end, but we are definitely winding down -- and/or on the downward spiral.)

(But before all that (as always), we do have a bit of further housekeeping to attend to.)

It is lunch time at the Fritz Heinmillerstien - Eddie Takosori Pseudonym Towers, cum Character Tie-In Estates. Talk about an unwieldy name. We should probably just shorten it to The G'narsh TML Building.

It is lunchtime, so G'narsh, Nadia, and the Charlies (along with John Greetle and all the extra's) are fifty odd stories up, sitting precariously on I-Beams with nothing below them but a long fall. You know the scene. Lunchboxes in hand, the worker's feet dangle over the side of skinny metal girders, while the

cameramen do everything possible to instill a sense of vertigo into the moment.

Far below, the crowd is still there, but it has thinned out quite a bit. Maybe half to three quarters of the gawkers have wandered away, but that still leaves hundreds if not thousands behind -- who have absolutely nothing better to do with their time than wait till the end of the day on the off chance that they'll catch a brief glimpse of the stars before G'narsh and the rest are scurried off to the next scene in the waiting limousines.

It's going to be a long wait for the crowd because G'narsh and the Charlies really are going to work a full shift... Well, yes and no. This is the dream world after all (no real world presence at all), but if was a real shoot, we'd probably put the Charlies in charge of the cranes and all the other heavy equipment for the afternoon, while a human (or proxy with a human override) worked the controls behind the scene. No doubt, the Cobalts would then drop loads of girders -- seemingly at random -- and cause all sorts of problem and havoc. We could even have John and G'narsh get into a shouting match at some point over the cobalts' work habits, lack thereof, or omit the argument entirely.

Anyhow, that's my first impulse. The other way to handle the scene is to simply let the Charlies work beside G'narsh and put in a good solid day's work -- an honest day for honest pay, and all that. As long as you stay on top of the Charlies, and tell them exactly what to do, they will comply. It's not like the cobalts are malicious or vindictive by nature, but they are prone to misunderstand instructions and/or have inappropriate priorities -- like concentrating on dropping a steel I-beam on top of a goblin rather than setting into place.

The point is, come lunch, I'm sure we're at something like 32 -- maybe 33 -- minutes since our last time-loss incident. It's only been such an amazingly long time because the goblins are getting thinned out and becoming harder and harder to find.

(On the other hand, if this were a game, you might find that as you advance, there are more and more goblins at each level and

not only do the varmints move faster, but some of them get downright sneaky as the game progresses.)

Oddly (game or not), the truth of the matter is, goblins are job stealing vermin, and they won't actually quit until you crush them to death under a heavy lode of ore.

That's all color, though. The real reason we are here -- halfway through the shift -- is to let Nadia explain things -- life, the universe, etc. -- to G'narsh as everyone else relaxes and shares a large stack of Chicago's finest thin crust pizza. (What did you expect them to be eating?)

(And at half click to set up an end of sequence afterthought of a conversation, you don't have to wonder why the clicks keep on adding up and I never seem to make any progress on my outline.)

After G'narsh has had his first (((whole))) pizza pie and is starting in on the second (((and you have paused to savor the hot gooey goodness that the call implies))), G'narsh asks Nadia point blank, "Explain things to me... I was doing fine -- happy -- on my own for years, and now the horde is moving back in. I can feel the hand of Chaos. Care to explain why?"

Nadia is game. She flies over and sits on G'narsh's shoulder as she explains it all as simply she can, "You may have found peace... or whatever... but that doesn't mean the universe has made peace with you."

G'narsh listens as he takes another bite of pizza and waits for Nadia to continue. There has to be more than that. It isn't much of an explanation after all.

"Bones... Artismo Bones... the leader of the elves and the horde is the same guy," Nadia continues.

G'narsh smiles appreciatively as he nods his head (((perhaps confirming what he already knew -- and what had already been told to him by Mi'lay))). It makes perfect sense. Playing one side off of the other, causing an endless war, and then Bones rising to

the top (on both sides no less) in the ensuing aftermath of confusion and strife.

“It’s more than that though,” Nadia continues. “He’s like way more powerful than you have any idea. Me, the Charlies,” Nadia looks down the girders -- fifty stories -- to the street below, “all those folks down there and more. He controls them all.”

“I’m not killing Bones,” G’narsh says simply. He doesn’t know where this is headed, but killing the good guys or killing the bad guys, it seems all the same to him. If killing the good guys is wrong, he doesn’t see how killing the bad guys is right. I mean, he can see how someone might think that it would be, but in his mind it’s the killing that’s wrong, not the who, what, how, or why.

“You don’t have to kill Bones,” Nadia assures him. “You probably can’t anyhow. He’s a necromancer.”

“I always wondered what that means,” G’narsh says, and so (((in response))) Nadia looks into the code. “It means someone who works death magic... but HE doesn’t see it that way. HE sees it as overcoming death by magic.”

G’narsh shrugs. It is easy to find a justification or a rationalization for anything, and, in the end, the definition of a necromancer means nothing to G’narsh. It might as well be so much gobbledygook. He lets his feet dangle in the air and enjoys swinging them back and forth. He likes knowing that there is nothing between him and the ground hundreds of feet below. It makes him feel free, alive -- and conscious of the moment.

After a pause to reflect, G’narsh returns to the conversation, “That doesn’t explain why he’s calling me to him. I can feel it. I can’t see much in the way of magic, but even I can see this. He’s forcing the issue, forcing a confrontation. What does he want?”

“He wants you to succeed in your quest to be good,” Nadia replies simply and honestly.

“Does he?” G’narsh questions. It seems unlikely to him. “Why?”

“If da G’narsh’e go freed,” i.e. transcend the limitations of the mind, “den eberydodied go’d freed,” a Charlie interjects.

“Den da G’narsh’e be’d da real heroes,” another cobalt agrees.

“We’d all’d says hippy hippy hurrays.”

“And den we’d all’d be’d happies.”

After the Charlies have settled down a bit and stopped swinging from the girders (like monkeys) in premature celebration, G’narsh turns to Nadia for a fuller explanation.

“Bones hopes that he can follow you. You know, if your path should lead to enlightenment, then he hopes to simply follow you through.”

“It doesn’t work like that,” G’narsh points out.

Nadia shrugs. “That’s his plan... or, at least, that’s what he’s allowed me to see of his plan. You’ll meet him in person again tonight at the party,” she adds. “Maybe he’ll tell you more at that time.”

G’narsh forms his hand into a fist. “I don’t like having my destiny controlled.”

“Who does?” Nadia agrees, and having said what we need (((or want them to))) in this section, we will let them drift away as we slide over the edge of the railing and fall to the ground far below (perhaps in a stylish freefall if that is to your liking). At the bottom, rather than crashing, we will swoop in low over the crowded masses, which patiently wait behind barricades. There might be some symbolism there... and then again there might not be. If one looks hard enough, one can find symbolism in anything, so I will leave it to you to decide if you wish to look that hard... or if there is -- indeed -- anything to find.

One thing I will point out is that in many Buddhist sects upon reaching enlightenment (a state that is typically denoted by a lack of concern over the material world, among other things) a practitioner is expected to turn around and help others reach this same (consciously mindful) state of being. At first glance it might not appear as such, but this is a disjointed, contradictory directive. To help others -- to care about their fate -- is the antithesis of

transcending the concerns of this world and reaching enlightenment. If nothing really matters, then guess what? Nothing really matters. I hope you can see how caring about the outcome of something -- anything -- is philosophically at odds with accepting everything as it IS. I mean, if you feel passionate about anything (even your own salvation or enlightenment), then you are hardly a disinterested observer at peace with it all.

Obviously (and really how many times must I say this), not everyone agrees with my analysis of the situation, but if you do (or, at least, are willing to accept it momentarily), then you may appreciate the conclusion that anyone who claims to be enlightened probably is not.

Or, if that is not entirely clear, anyone who would create a two-bit, pulp-fiction dream for the avowed purpose of leading another down a path towards self realization, can't possibly be enlightened (or know the way) in the first place.

I know you already knew all this, but I am a simple minded fool, and I felt the need to pause and remind myself.

(Having nothing to do with enlightenment, but being of imminent importance if you plan on doing any traveling about the countryside, is the problem of logistics. If you're on the road, be it for days, weeks, or centuries, you're going to have to have some equipment -- a backpack full of gear, a bedroll, or something. It gets cold at night even in the summer. If you're going to camp out, you'll want a sleeping bag -- at least (if not a whole lot more). And eventually you're going to need to stash your stuff somewhere. So, the question arises: Where is G'narsh's stuff? I suppose you could simply assume that G'narsh is storing his backpack in a locker at a tube station, but I figure he's just doing what I do whenever I'm in town, and that is to keep my stuff at my sister's.)

(Believe it or not, this little tidbit of logistics has been bothering me. All this traveling and no mention of being tied down and saddled with so much as a small bag of support gear, or anything. I personally find that it's a constant struggle to haul a

backpack around, no less so because lots of places (museums, stores, libraries, and pretty much anywhere else you might want to go) won't let you take your bag (or luggage) inside with you, so you are forever ditching your pack somewhere, just hoping it will still be there whenever you return.)

(And I don't care how enlightened you are, a change of underwear and clean pair socks are not only among the simple pleasures in life, they also go a long ways towards ensuring your own personal happiness. To wit, if you can maintain your happiness while shivering in a blizzard, not having anywhere to go, having no money in your pocket, and having eaten nothing for days, then you -- my friend -- are a much better man than I... or perhaps simply crazier, which is often what we label those folks with the happy switch turned on all the time -- despite the fact that is should obviously be turned off, if not now, at least on occasion... for maintenance if nothing else.)

((--End P3-B--))

((--Cut in P3-C--))

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

Kevin Stillwater

P3-B

of

P1, P2-A, P2-B, P3-A, P3-B, P3-C, P3-D, P3-E, P4

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G'narsh - P3-B