

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

Kevin Stillwater

P3-D
of
P1, P2-A, P2-B, P3-A, P3-B, P3-C, P3-D, P3-E, P4
plus the marketing material
remainder to be found at
www.paufler.net

© 2008 Copyright Brett Paufler (2-3-08)
all rights reserved

www.Paufler.net
Brett@Paufler.net

G'narsh - P3-D

G'narsh Saga
Part D - Continued from C

The Prison Farm

(This is my fourth save file for the third partition. Some folks like to backup their dreams sequence by sequence, but I tend to put them into 20-35 click blocks regardless of the number of sequences involved. We are in the fourth such block.)

(And, just in case you care, we are at 89 clicks for the partition, and at a whopping grand total of 161 clicks for the dream. Boy was I off on my initial 100 click estimate. If that number seems wrong, please keep in mind that I'm including 6

clicks worth of -- Bonus Material -- that I've already laid down in the aforementioned total.)

(I don't know about you, but I'm ready for this dream to wind down and come to an end. Actually, I'm hoping you're not (ready for the dream to end, but want it to go on for ever and ever), but either way, I don't think we have much further to go.)

To stretch it out, we can (if you like) watch as G'narsh leaves the party. The moment he exits Melissa's apartment (and/or the temple at the top of the pyramid), everything reverts to how it should be -- and/or actually is. He is in a modern city -- Chicago, I think, but it could be anywhere.

Exactly where makes no difference. G'narsh is not looking at the street signs, anyhow. He's not planning on making his way back to this locale, ever again (to Bones' domain and/or to Melissa's apartment). He's on a mission, and in no time, he retraces his steps back to the tube station where he hitches a ride on an outbound train.

G'narsh has money in his pocket once again (from working his shift at Pseudonym Towers), so I'm sure he pays for the first leg of his journey, but there will be a second leg and a third. After a while, it is easy enough to see G'narsh hopping freight trains and bumming rides from short jump freight haulers (and/or private passenger flits) as he puts the miles (and dimensions) between himself and Bones.

It is, however, a strategy that is doomed to failure. There is no way G'narsh can outrun Bones, and as such, there is absolutely no need to focus on G'narsh's travels any more than we already have. So let G'narsh have a day, a week, a month, or even a year to himself to rest and recuperate.

What is time anyhow, but an illusion?

In the end, it is highly unlikely (like darn near impossible) that G'narsh will be able to escape his destiny, and/or hide from the conniving forces of the universe (which is to say, me).

(Believe it or not, I tend to get hung up on continuity at times. We could have just as easily forgone the preceding and simply started here (.3 clicks later).)

An indeterminate amount of time has passed. G'narsh is disembarking from one of those beaten up old time pickup trucks that you see on occasion on remote country roads. It has been converted to use bottled methane (which is why they still have them out here), but other than that it is in the condition you might expect from an old antique internal-combustion engine vehicle -- dented, rusted, and beaten to Sch©lte. In a word, it is on the edge of disrepair --struggling to survive as if any day might be its last.

As we watch, G'narsh jumps out of the back of the truck, which he has been sharing with a trio of pigs, and waves as the farmer driving the vehicle pulls away leaving G'narsh behind in a cloud of dust.

G'narsh brushes himself off and looks around. The gravel road he is on stretches as far as the eye can see before him (and just as far behind). There's no sense going down the small dirt side road the driver just took. If the farmer had wanted G'narsh to join him, he wouldn't have stopped at the turn off, and not wishing to go back the way he came, G'narsh doesn't see that he has any choice. With a spring in his step, he starts down the center of the ill kept road.

It's a wonderful day -- what a great call. Pull it right up. The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and G'narsh does his best to join them in their tune as he hums along.

The sky even seems a bit clearer here (than it has of late), and G'narsh wonders if maybe he's been finally able to put a dimension (or two) between himself and Bones, but he knows it's not likely. Even if he's skipped sideways a dimension (or two), he knows that somehow (eventually) he'll fall back into Bones' world. It's the way things have been going lately, but no matter. He can't seem to find the will to worry about Bones or anything else right

now, because he's too busy trying to learn the playful song the birds are so desperately trying to teach him.

So it is without a care in the world that G'narsh slowly follows the dry, dusty, gravel road, letting it lead him wherever it will.

(And here we'll let G'narsh wander down the road a ways by himself. Spend a moment with him as you like -- may I suggest observing the wildlife -- before we send Nadia in to join him.)

"What's song are you humming?" Nadia asks as she appears out of nowhere. "One of those ancient war tunes?"

"What? Who?" G'narsh asks as he swirls around swinging.

Luckily Nadia was prepared for this, and so she is out of reach -- hovering more than a dozen paces away, on the far side of the drainage ditch, high in the air. "What's with the flying fists?" Nadia asks. "I thought you'd turned all non-violent and pacifistic."

"Old habits die hard," G'narsh admits, but despite his words he doesn't lower his guard. (And I'll be the first to admit that I have a hard time reconciling this with the rest of G'narsh's non-violent predispositions.) G'narsh, on the other hand, doesn't appear to be concerned at all with the discrepancy as he asks, "How did you find me?"

"Not interested in why I found you?"

"No," G'narsh replies flatly. "I figure if I know how you found me, I'll be able to change what I'm doing wrong, and then I won't have to worry about the why?"

"Good luck with that," Nadia replies stiffly. She would like to fly over and sit on G'narsh's shoulders, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen anytime soon, so she keeps pace with him (off to the side) as G'narsh continues down the road. "Where are you heading?" she asks.

"I don't know," G'narsh admits. "Bones won't let me go. I've tried to get out of here," and leave this dimension (or block of dimensions) far behind, "but I can't seem to get anywhere."

“That’s because you still owe me for the boots,” Nadia points out.

“Take the boots,” G’narsh says as he sits down by the side of the road and starts to take them off.

“It doesn’t work that way,” Nadia replies as she flies in closer. “Look at them. They’re trashed,” and indeed they are. They have seen countless miles since Gimlet last worked on them. They could hardly be called new anymore.

G’narsh is not listening however, and continues to unlace the heavy work boots. When he is done he sets them to the side of the road as he stands back up. “I’m done,” G’narsh declares. “The boots are yours, and I get my freedom back. Case closed.”

“It doesn’t work that way,” Nadia assures him, but G’narsh (as always) is a hard headed one.

I should note that now would be an excellent time to jump into G’narsh’s body (if you’re not already there), and experience the sharp biting pain of the rocks from the gravel road as he -- and/or you -- takes a step. Barefooted is no way to travel through the wilderness or the back roads.

Pause to look around. You are in the middle of nowhere. A long gravel road sweeps before and trails behind you for miles. The turn off is ancient history. Trust me, you’d never find it. To the sides are fields of wheat (or whatever it is that they grow in Minnesota) bracketed by long narrow rows of trees -- break winds, I think. Certainly there must be a house (or a dormitory) somewhere along the road, but none is in sight. G’narsh -- and/or you -- might as well be in the middle of nowhere.

It should soon become apparent that walking down the road without shoes is not an option.

(Somewhere in there is a pun about the tenderness (and implied helplessness) of feet that are used to having (downtrodden) soles underfoot. No doubt a stab at the civilized life and the cost

our (savage) brethren must pay for its existence, but I don't feel like working it out anymore than that (like I ever do).

(I don't know if I ever told you how I handle jokes when I'm by myself. I look at A + B and if looks like C is even remotely funny (or even has the remotest chance of being funny), I laugh. Granted, I get a lot of strange looks and stares at times, but I'm happy, and trying to explain nonexistent punch lines is an amazingly good way to start conversations with strangers.)

(I've been told, girls dig guys with a sense of humor (even crazy guys it would appear).)

Anyway, back to the dream.

Walking over the rocks is clearly not an option, so G'narsh steps into the long grass by the side of the road. He only takes a step or two before his foot hits a twig, a rock, or is it a thorn? Clearly it is going to be slow going. Still, trying to make the best of it, G'narsh gathers up a few handfuls of the grass and ties them into coarse bundles of fibers that he winds around his feet to make shoes (or sandals) of a sort, but they are of the sort that really suck and don't really provide much protection. G'narsh is no cobbler or weaver after all.

"Just take the shoes," Nadia insists -- sick of this nonsense.

"I'm done with them," G'narsh retorts as he takes another careful step. And then after a bit and a dozen more slow steps that take him down the slope, into the ditch that runs parallel to the road, and up the other side, he adds, "And I'm done with you."

What can Nadia do but watch as G'narsh cautiously makes his way across the field, slow and deliberately, step by step. It's only slightly less painful than walking down the road, but G'narsh is resolved, he is done with Bones, Stef'fan, and this fairy, and if that means leaving his shoes behind, then that's what it means.

(I'm not really sure that this is the turn (((of events))), which I would have chosen for the sequence, but it is what it is. For now we will let G'narsh go his way and join up with him later.)

Long after the sun has gone down, G'narsh is sitting by the edge of a lake. He is nursing his bruised and bloody feet. They will heal quickly, perhaps by morning, but they still hurt and he needs to do something about his lack of footwear. Regeneration or not, he's never been a big fan of pain.

G'narsh doesn't bother to look up when the fairy flies into his camp -- not that it is much of a camp. He has not set up a tent, unrolled a bedroll, or even made a fire, but he still thinks of the place as his camp and so that is what we shall call it. It is where he will rest for the night... or would have (before the fairy showed up). Maybe he should just go down the way. There are pine trees here and the floor of the forest is carpeted with their needles. That's why he was going to stop here, but if he were to continue on, the going would be easier (softer than it has been). He could still go another mile or two, even with his feet the way they are.

As the thought of bugging-out works its way through G'narsh's mind and he is busy ignoring Nadia, she does her best to ignore him as well. Though in fact, ignoring is probably the wrong description for what Nadia is doing. She's not talking to G'narsh, but that doesn't mean she's not looking at him, watching him, and paying attention to his movements (and the involuntary twitches of his neck and ears) that give clues as to what he is thinking -- and more importantly, how angry he is getting at any given moment.

Noticing that it is safe (for the time being at least), the first thing Nadia does upon her arrival is to set down the heavy boots, which she has been carrying. (She puts them in the small open clearing behind G'narsh). After that, she pauses to look around. She can see the potential of the place. Under the big pine tree (off to the side) there is a deep layer of needles where the branches hang low -- and form a sort of natural cavern, tent, or shelter. In a light rain the pair of them could stay dry in there, and even if the wind picks up or the temperature drops suddenly, they would still stay warm (or, at least, warmer).

Nadia goes over to this sheltered bedding area and gives the needles a good test (to determine their softness) by jumping -- read bouncing -- up and down on them. Satisfied that they will do, she considers the rest the camp. It is missing something, and with a snap of her fingers, a wave of fairy dust, or however it is that she is effecting a change (in reality) these days (i.e. changing a 0 to a 1, or vice a versa) she causes a crackling campfire to come into being in the clearing next to G'narsh boots. Even with that addition, the place is still missing something (to give it that homey feel), and after a moment, Nadia puts her finger on it -- food. With another wave of her hands she causes a brace of rabbits to appear on a (magically) rotating spit above the fire. A meal fit for a king -- or a troll -- as the case may be.

G'narsh may be able to ignore the fairy, but he cannot ignore the scent of freshly roasting rabbit. It does smell good, and he is hungry. He can't remember the last time that he ate, but he refuses to be tempted. "I'm a vegetarian," he says at last, as he turns to regard the fairy.

Rather than saying, I'm not, Nadia decides it is best to appease the brute. The rabbits turn to rats. "There. Better?" she asks.

"Try a vegetable curry stew," G'narsh suggests and as the words leave his mouth it is done.

(In the end, if I was in a hurry to finish things up (and/or had any real need to keep my click count down) I might have started this sequence here. (((A statement, which in itself, is starting to sound like a recurring theme))). If I had done so, it would have saved me 2.5 clicks, but despite my (seeming) obsession, clicks aren't everything.)

The pair of them eat in silence out of stainless steel camp cups. Nadia doesn't say anything as she feels the need to go slow and set the hook (now that G'narsh has accepted the bait?), while

G'narsh is suspicious and doesn't see how he can come out ahead in any conversation so he simply stays quiet.

Once they are done eating, Nadia ends the standoff by pointing out that, "Pepperoni is a kind of meat you know." Probably not the most friendly rejoinder, but what do you want? It's what's on her mind.

If G'narsh was in the talking mood, he might say, And?, but he is not. He simply lies down in the soft needles, which carpet the forest floor, and gazes up at the stars that shine bright and clear in the night sky.

Undeterred by his lack of response, Nadia continues, "You eat pizza all the time and your favorite kind is pepperoni and onions. Pepperoni is a kind of meat you know."

"So I'm not perfect," G'narsh responds simply as he watches the twinkling stars through the canopy of trees. (For whatever reason this discrepancy does not bother G'narsh, or perhaps he has logged the information for later, but chooses to make no signs of reaction at the moment. The notion of a poker face might fit in there somewhere.)

"I'm not going to hurt you, you know," Nadia continues. (I'm not really sure why she feels the need to say this, but my best guess is that she is looking for some sort of reciprocal reassurance from G'narsh.)

"I'm not worried about that," G'narsh replies. (And like I said, I don't think this was the response Nadia was looking for.)

It isn't cold, but Nadia shivers nonetheless as she rubs her arms. One can never tell if she is playing -- pretending to be scared -- or if she really is cold. "Mind if I come over there?"

"Suit yourself," is G'narsh's unadorned response.

(The problem(s) I am having with G'narsh keeping up his end of the conversation(s) is probably one of the major reasons why trolls end up in action sequences far more often than in philosophical dramas. I guess I should be happy G'narsh is using

words (and complete sentences) rather than simply grunting his lines like a goblin or an orc.)

(The bottom line is, I'm not getting that happy-happy feel out of G'narsh. Hopefully he'll come around (and warm up to Nadia as it were).)

For her part, Nadia is doing what she can and has snuggled up next to G'narsh. Well, sort of. It's not as intimate as she would like, which is to say G'narsh isn't being as... um, ahem... friendly as she would like, but it is what it is, and together they stare at the stars.

"You ever hear the story of G'narsh's Rays," Nadia asks after a bit.

"What?" G'narsh replies.

"G'narsh's Rays," Nadia repeats.

"Is this some trick?" G'narsh asks wearily. He can feel the (((cold))) hand of Bones moving in.

Sensing G'narsh's sudden change in demeanor, Nadia decides it is best to change tacks. "Are you celibate?" but the question does not have the desired effect either and Nadia can sense G'narsh tensing up even further. "Just stare into the sky then," Nadia suggests. "Whatever you are now, you weren't always this way. Can you see all those stars up there?" Nadia asks, and as it is a rhetorical question, G'narsh makes no move to answer. (Not that he's been in a talkative mood thus far, but what do you want.)

"For each one of those stars," up there, "you've killed a man," an orc, a goblin, or whatever, Nadia continues, "and for each one of those stars you've also known a pixie or a fairy."

G'narsh is listening to Nadia's words and watching the sky overhead. He can feel his mind falling into a trance as the stars start to spin and twirl, but he blinks his eyes and shakes his head to break the dweomer.

"Why are you fighting it?" Nadia asks.

"I'm not going to fall for one of Bones' tricks."

Nadia can't help but giggle a little. "You spend so much time meditation now, but you're still scared of what you will find," deep down inside. "Let it go. What is one more lie?"

"Now you really do sound like Bones," which is more than Nadia can stand to hear. She stands in disgust and not thinking of anything better to do (and not caring about the possible consequences) she kicks G'narsh in the arm. "Listen you stupid troll!" she yells. "For every one of those stars you've killed a man, hooked up with me, slept with Mi'lay, and killed Stef'fan. You been down this Fr@cking road a million times before."

She kicks him again. (Because it feels good.) "Sit up!" When he doesn't move, she kicks him again and yells with hysterics as tears begin to stream down her face. "I said sit up you dumb Sch©lting Fr@ck! Look over that lake. Does it look familiar?"

G'narsh finds his mind, his body, and his emotions responding automatically to Nadia's emotional outpouring. As much as he would like to be detached, to ignore her, and to continue lying where he is, he cannot help but sit up and gaze across the water to where Nadia indicates. In the distance, across the water, he sees the search lights of a prison camp. It's not so much a farm as it is a barbed wired, concrete towered, maximum security jail. Dogs howl. Sirens wail. And an attempted escape unfolds before G'narsh eyes.

The drama doesn't take long. Dogs chase after a lone runner in the dark of the night. Search lights swivel back and forth over the ground and the water until they find the terrified man (running for his freedom and his life). Desperately, he dives into the water as he swims for the far shore, but he never makes it. He never even gets close. A sparkle of plasma -- a searing jet of green death -- lances out from a guard tower and the man is no more. What is left of his body is quickly (or not so quickly depending up your point of view) consumed by the dogs. If you care to follow the bolt of plasma back to its source, you will find Stef'fan manning one of the towers. They do that in some places, give the prisoners

guns. They call it a trustee system, and you get extra chow, cigarettes, and other benefits for preventing the escape -- i.e. gunning down -- one of your fellow prisoners. It's a freakishly effective system.

(In the days of old, they'd even take time off of your sentence on a one for one basis. Shoot a man dead for trying to escape and if he had ten years to go on his sentence, you'd get ten years taken off yours. I'm guessing I don't have to point out how comically stupid this was. Guys serving twenty consecutive life sentences were being set free, and why? Because they were good at killing folks. Go figure.)

(As you'll note, we've got Stef'fan in the guard tower, and if we were to wait, I'm sure we would see Mi'lay dancing on the prison wall before long (perhaps enticing others to make a run for it), but I don't think I'm giving anything away when I tell you that we are not going to go down this particular path.)

(If you recognize the reference, I would urge you to pull up -- "all along the watchtower the princess kept the view" -- and pause a moment to play with it for as long as you see fit.)

G'narsh on the other hand does not wish to tarry, and he shakes his head causing the vision to fade. "I'm not going after Stef'fan," he insists.

"Fine. OK," Nadia agrees soothingly. She is standing next to G'narsh as he squats in the brush overlooking the lake. (And is it just me, or in the darkness did it look like G'narsh was back in camouflage there for a moment?)

For her part, Nadia wonders if G'narsh realizes that this is the same lake, the same angle, the same positioning that was used during his -- Raid on Elvin Home -- sequence.

Not knowing what else to do, Nadia decides the best course of action is to let the scene (across the water) flicker between the prison camp, Elvin Home, and all of the other countless military

prisoner of war camps G'narsh has raided over the years. They are all strikingly similar -- very strikingly similar.

"What are you doing?" G'narsh asks as he closes his eyes and turns away.

"Look inside then," Nadia agrees. (She might not know much, but she knows that it is best to allow G'narsh to take the lead and to follow (and/or push him along), in whatever direction it is that he will go.) "Go back to the -- Betrayal in the Forest. That's where you first met Stef'fan," she suggests.

"Around the stone dais?" G'narsh asks as he remembers and the vision comes to his mind (as if it was only yesterday).

"Yes around the stone," Nadia urges. "Now remember how many times you fought him. Can't you see yourself plunging a dagger into his heart? Grabbing him by the neck and choking him to death with your own bare hands?" And killing him in any number of ways? (Need I go on?)

"Those are lies, false images," G'narsh protests.

"Is that what Grandpa Willie would say?" or whatever you're calling that crazy elf you so admire?

G'narsh doesn't know. "What are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying you've been down this road before, G'narsh -- a thousand times or more. You've killed Stef'fan more times than you can remember and to set the score straight you need to rescue him."

G'narsh thinks on it, considers it. "I mean, even if I wanted to... How could I? I'm not storming a jail. My fighting days are over."

"I know," Nadia assures him. "I never really knew you as a fighter you know."

"What are you saying then?" G'narsh asks once again. He's not following the thread of the conversation very well. It seems as though it is resolving itself ((and/or revolving around)) on its own just out of reach of his consciousness.

"I'm saying if you look into the past and look at all the times you killed Stef'fan, at all the times you raided Elvin Home or

cleared out an enemy camp, at all the times you've danced with Mi'lay... and don't even try to tell me you don't remember that."

"They're just fantasizes," G'narsh suggests, but he's not so sure anymore. (He comes from the land of Chaos after all. In the end, anything is possible.)

"They're not fantasizes... Not with you, G'narsh. You're a troll, you don't have that great of an imagination. All those dances... all those worlds where you met up with Mi'lay for one final dance," again, and again, and again, "all of those things happened," Nadia insists.

"You mean like in some sort of reincarnation, endless circular of life type thing?" G'narsh asks as he spits out the first thing that comes into his mind.

But Nadia cannot answer that. It is her turn to not know. "Bones is forcing your hand and sending you around in circles." I know that much. "If you want to get off the treadmill, you have to make amends to Stef'fan."

"What if I don't want to get off the treadmill?" G'narsh asks, and sometimes you've got to wonder at the motivation behind his statements. I mean, his whole quest, his entire reason, for pursuing a non-violent, pacifistic, vegetarian, meditative, contemplative, and conscious life has been to get off the treadmill, and to end this endless cycle of birth, life, suffering, and death (which is to say, to break out of this endless cyclical story, which we all know by the name of G'narsh's Rays and/or G'narsh: TML).

The bottom line is, that last comment would normally tick Nadia off, but she can see G'narsh is trying to make sense of it all, that he is weakening, breaking through, and seeing the cycle for what it is, so she is happy to remind him, "You're the one who rescued me from a life on the streets. Do you remember running into me? Making love under the bridge, in the," fetid, "waters of the city river? You know, its not just you who goes through the cycle. When you repeat," the story, "the rest of us do as well," every last one of us, "and some of us want off." I mean, "if you're

not going to end the cycle, the least you could do is remember that you love me,” Nadia suggests hopefully.

“So that’s why you’re always acting like we’re old friends?” G’narsh asks. (And I couldn’t tell you if Nadia has broken through at this moment or not, but she seems to think so.)

“Yes... but we’re more than just friends,” Nadia says as she settles down on his shoulder. “I guess you’ll just have to trust me on that, but if you break Stef’fan out, you won’t forget anymore,” and you’ll know for sure.

“I’m not breaking him out.”

“Not tonight,” Nadia suggests, as she indicates the bed of needles under the pine tree, “but in the morning,” she continues hopefully.

“Out of a fortified prison? It’s not happening,” G’narsh assures her.

(But the plan was never to spring Stef’fan out of a fortified prison bunker and Nadia knows this.)

So, without worrying about it any further, Nadia snaps her fingers. The stars in the sky turn purple as long sweeping green and yellow coronas dance across the heavens. “There’s more than one type of jail cell,” Nadia points out as she joins G’narsh in the pine tree shelter (on the soft bed of needles) and snuggles up next to him. “We can worry about that tomorrow. Right now we need to catch up, get... um, ahem... reacquainted, and then there’s that story, more of a legend really about G’narsh’s Rays.”

Coming around, (I think for real this time) G’narsh replies, “I think I may have heard that story before.”

“Good. Then you know that during the Wandering G’narsh Saga we’re usually lovers.”

“Are we?” G’narsh asks as he decides to play with her -- i.e. tease her. “But you want me to break the cycle this time?”

If I really wanted to play with Nadia (and drive her nuts with frustration), I would have G’narsh be serious at this point, but... um, well... you can decide that on your own.

(We -- which is to say, I -- will give them the night and rejoin them in the morning. Hey, it may not be two dream booths, but a rig is a rig, and you do what you can.)

(When we load G'narsh up for the next sequence, we are going to give him full recall of all of his past actions, interactions, and existences. We won't tell him he's a proxy as such, but then again, maybe we will. Who knows? Not I. On that, you may rely.)

((And, if it hasn't been entirely clear, until this point, we haven't given G'narsh full knowledge of his predicament, so if his thoughts and/or action seem out of kilter, it has been because he has been out of step with the rest of the dream. A thing that is hardly his fault considering the stacked deck he's up against.))

(Many folks (me for instance) believe that life is simply an endless test, and that as one passes certain milestones (say like forever swearing off violence (no matter what, and I mean, no matter what)), then as one achieves this state of mind, specific layers of the illusion (which surround us all) simply fade away.)

(But having said this (and even though I have definite opinions on the matter), I believe it is best for me to say that not only do I not know the test questions, I don't know the answers either, and therefore, I most definitely do not know the rewards involved -- and/or what waits for us beyond this world of illusion. Like all religious ideas, I take it on faith that there are rewards for being nonviolent, and believe it or not, this argument (as unclear as it is) is enough for me.)

(Despite the aforementioned disclaimer, it has been proposed that the reward for forsaking violence has been transcendence into a world where violence does not exist. Sounds pretty fair, I'd say (i.e. if you decide to forgo violence, you get to leave it behind). True or not, one might get a fuller understanding of the twist in the next sequence (a change of reality in which the prison camp no longer plays a role), if one keeps this in mind. Also, one might

wish to consider that this means that each (and every one) of us is responsible for (enables, creates, and makes possible) all of the violence in this world in which we live. Obviously, I'm not taking a holier than thou attitude on this one. My dreams are fairly well dripping with blood and gore. If it wasn't for MM and M.O.M. you'd be waist high in the stuff and need to wear waders just to stay dry.)

(((That is to say, I am in this world with you, because -- now, for the moment -- this is where I belong. May it be that this is not always the case.)))

A Kinder Gentler - Prison of a Farm

(Going to sleep at the periphery of a prison camp is a bad idea, and not just because of the dogs and the night patrols. There's bad juju in those places.)

(Sometime if you're lucky (but probably not in this dream), I'll tell you the story of a vision I once had when I bunked down for the night in a railroad yard's drainage ditch. All night long, I kept one eye on the bulls -- the security guards -- even when I was asleep, but it didn't help. With every train that went by I saw the condemned leaving for Auschwitz -- or do they call it St. Paul these days?)

(Fr@ck 'em if they can't take a joke.)

(Or even if they just look like they can't take a joke.)

Nadia awakes to the sound of gunfire. Laser bolts fill the sky, while plasma beams rip through the forest around her. (She is dreaming obviously.) G'narsh is nowhere to be seen. He has left the safety of their pine scented bedchamber. Frantically, she looks around. Finally, her eyes alight upon him. He is up by the wire, crouching low, and firing at the enemy.

G'narsh is trading salvo's with Stef'fan. Nadia knows this even before she makes her way up to the line, or peers over the hastily constructed defensive berm, which consists of a log, a

deceptively reassuring boulder (that glows like a illuminated beacon for anyone equipped with an IR sight), and a shovelful of dirt to fill the crack between the two.

Like I said, it is a dream sequence, and you know how these things go. Nadia makes her way towards G'narsh -- like a puppet on a string unable to control her movements -- as she yells, "G'narsh! Don't! Stop!" but her whispering voice doesn't carry over the explosions or the incoming shells.

G'narsh however doesn't need a cue (or unwanted advice from one of Bones' messengers). "You're going to die once and for all you Sch©lting elf!" G'narsh (or that is to say, the dream persona of G'narsh) vows as he lets loose another barrage of plasma beam pulses. But high energy weapons aren't doing the trick, so G'narsh lays the assault weapon aside and picks up a rocket launcher.

Nadia would like to run to G'narsh and urge him to stop. The two of them could run away together -- just the two of them -- somewhere safe. They could leave the rest of the world behind, but Stef'fan has other plans for them. He answers G'narsh's salvo with one of his own, and a beam finds Nadia's heart -- or an arm -- or just a wing tip.

This then is when Nadia would wake up screaming.

(Dreams within dreams within dreams can get tedious, but...)

(My mind works in a fractured sort of way, and the tales I wish to relate, the dreams I wish to dream, meander down twisting, turning pathways. I guess I have the need to include these scenes of what might have been, because for me, they are part of the story, part of how it was related to me, came to me, and/or evolved within my consciousness.)

(Of course, if you don't like that explanation, consider that Nadia & G'narsh (along with Stef'fan & Mi'lay and/or Eileen & Doug) have spent a long -- long -- time bouncing back and forth in the rigs. All of those false trails have a certain reality for the proxies. To say that G'narsh has never done a frontal assault of the

prison camp is erroneous. He has, and he has failed. Thankfully, he has also learned from his mistakes.)

Nadia wakes up with a muffled cry, but G'narsh does not hear her. He is down by the edge of the lake looking across the water. He recognizes the lake from -- The Raid on Elvin Home -- sequence. The island that was blown up (by Bones' draco-wraith rockets) has been reformed, as has the muddy bog that stretches down the left side of the water towards the distant encampment.

The complex is now a farm. One would be hard pressed to call it a prison (unless one actually lived there). In the middle of the compound, a giant steel silo stretches towards the sky. It is large enough that ((by law)) it must have an aircraft warning light on top of it, and at night who knows what it looks like -- perhaps a guard tower ((or perhaps at times, something less sinister)). In the yard, around a small two-story compact white farmhouse, are the assorted creatures and animals you might expect to see featured on a children's -- Farmland -- disc. As always, the fences are apparently just for show. The chickens and roosters mix with the pigs, sheep, ducks, cows, and goats as they eat their morning meal, which has been spread across the ground by Farmer Brown -- or John, or Old MacDonald.

But old MacDonald is probably the best call. The man is old -- ancient. He could be Grandpa Willie, or more accurately, he could be Grandpa Bones with thin leathery skin stretched across his head, face, and bony hands.

"I had a dream about this place," G'narsh remarks as Nadia flies over to join him (back where they are on the other side of the lake -- far away from the farm). She is still troubled by her own dream (troubled that she awoke with a plasma beam hole through one of her wings -- magical creature that she is), and desires to be comforted.

Sensing this, G'narsh does as he is bid and holds her close -- almost as one might hold a baby or a small child -- as he

distractedly continues to recall his dream, “I was walking through a field. It was autumn... or maybe spring. There weren’t any crops in the ground, but the soil was so lush, so loamy -- so deep, rich, and fertile. I must have sunk down a good foot,” or two, “with every step,” even though it wasn’t muddy at all, just good old dry topsoil -- dirt, as some folks like to call it.

“Gorgeous land,” G’narsh continues. “I’ve never thought of myself as a farmer, but with land like that, I don’t see how you couldn’t want to be,” a farmer, or to at least to grab a clod of earth, crumble it in your hands, and put a pinch of the stuff in your mouth betwixt you teeth and gum as you get a taste for the land, and reconnect with your bad ole’ medieval, pastoral self).

Nadia has been silent as G’narsh tells his tale, and now that he is done, she doesn’t really have much to say. Finally, she comments, “We should go over there.”

“I’d like to,” G’narsh agrees, but he has had bad experiences with farmers and their dogs. Not that you would have known his aversion to canines considering his previous interaction with Poopsie, but then Poopsie is a special breed -- a very special breed.

“I’m sure it will be alright,” Nadia assures him. They’re probably expecting us.

(I don’t know how you would know, so just trust me on this. The dream seems to be twisting away from any inclusion of Flicker -- the young fire elemental that inhabited the candle flame at the very beginning/end of the dream. I was going to have her appear as a stump fire (((from cleared land))) when Nadia changed the Prison Farm back into a regular farm, but in the end Nadia didn’t effect the change, I did. So once again, an “in” for Flicker has passed us by.)

(I guess the best place to leave it for now is that Flicker was the motive force -- the proxy control -- that operated the jail’s electric fence (((and security system))), and now that the fence is gone, she needs a new home -- one that is insubstantial and

tentative -- like a stump fire, a cigarette lighter, or a pocket warmer.)

(At this point though, we are simply going to leave her till the next sequence -- and not mention her any further for now.)

(((And this might seem sort of extraneous, adding the detail of Flicker being the security system. And yeah, it's not really that clear or cohesive, but look back on it tomorrow, play the scene again, and your compiler will integrate the information. It's just how these things go. So this tidbit isn't so much for the first play, but for future iterations of the dream. (Unless, of course, you're using a skimmer, and then it might be really important, right now, at this moment.) Enough said. The jail has a security system. Its name is Flicker. Use the information as you will.)))

G'narsh's feet are still sore, so instead of walking around the lake he decides swimming across will be the best course of action. It's not that far, and he's a swampy -- bog water -- type guy. Besides, in most places waterways are considered public domain. If they (Nadia and G'narsh) aren't welcome when they get to the farm, they simply needn't go ashore.

So it should come as no surprise when a half hour later the pair of them are in the middle of the lake: G'narsh swimming slowly across, enjoying the morning air, the talk of the birds, and the schools of fish beneath his feet, while Nadia flitters here and there in the air as she joins the birds in their song and (on occasion) stops to rest on one of G'narsh's heads.

Personally, I am a big fan of the northern lakes -- Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Boundary Waters -- so you'll excuse me if I let the dream take place in a sidereal dimension a skip or two towards Chaos where wildlife still flourishes. Trust me when I say, there is nothing like swimming across a lake in the early morning hours and watching a loon -- an extinct species of waterfowl like a duck -- take flight.

Perhaps I should walk you through it.

Strip down. (((Take off your clothes.))) You are alone with your love, or your newly betrothed. Perhaps it is your honeymoon. Perhaps you are visiting her family's farm. Or, perhaps you have merely loaded a disc. Whatever the case, she is lovely, beautiful, and you wouldn't want her to be wearing anything (or would you?), so strip down. Set an example.

When you are naked, enter the water. It is cold. It is late fall -- early autumn . The seasons have shifted, the leaves have turned, and it is cold, but the water is warmer than the air and so a steam, a fog of sorts rolls off the top. It is a thin layer of mist, just a wisp, just enough to give everything a surreal aura -- an unreal feel. It is barely there, but it is -- just enough to set the tone.

As you wade into the water, feel the coolness of the liquid (and/or the freezing cold -- as is your desire) as it wraps around your skin. Feel the water as it rises up against your ankles, knees, groin, and chest, as you walk ever deep into the water. Go through the cycle (((of entering the water))) a time or two if you like, and as you do, take the time to notice the feel of the sandy (or if you prefer, muddy) lake bottom as it seeps between your toes.

Wait patiently -- with eyes bright and wide -- as your partner enters the water. (Be they man or woman, I know not, nor care not.) Watch amused as they half hide their body (and half show off their alluring form), as the water slowly envelops them.

One cannot deny the coldness of the lake. Steam or not, the water is cold. This is the most overpowering sensation, but once you get beyond that -- get used to it -- there is a freedom, a bit of magic, and a wonder of the moment that makes it all worthwhile.

You are almost all the way in the water now, so lean over, push off the bottom, take a dive, and start to swim. Go under the surface for a moment if you like, or if you are anything like me, feel free to keep your hair (and headset) dry. It is for this reason (as much as anything else) that I -- myself -- am partial to a frog like breast stroke. It is a slow, easy (and deathly quiet) swimming technique that avails itself of viewing the landscape and watching

the wildlife unobtrusively as you slowly glide by. Speaking of which, take a moment to enjoy the antics of a family of raccoons that scamper along the water's edge, and then, after they have departed, let your attention return to your body and concentrate on the sensations of the flesh -- the flow of water about you as it glides over your arms, past your abdomen, and down your legs. Enjoy its soft, gentle resistance as you take another stroke. Feel it cup in your hands. Hear the bubbles sing. Watch the ripples that you make slowly drift away.

You are out in the middle of the lake now, but this is misleading. The bog has turned into a cove of sorts. Do not fight the transition. Let the change take place. Without ceremony, jump over another dimension with me, one that is even further removed from reality. Look around. Find that you are in a rocky walled cove with high cliff faces. It feels safe and reassuring. It is safe and reassuring. It is a private channel of sorts, an inlet. In the distance there is a small island. Your partner, your SO, your significant other has told you childhood stories about the place -- his or her first kiss, and so on and so forth. Perhaps later you will have a picnic there and relive the best of the tales, or make your own (legends come to life), but for now enjoy the solitude. Together you are alone, so commune with the world. The Garden of Eden -- must have had a swimming hole in it somewhere, a cool lake in which to enjoy an early morning swim, a crystal clear fjord, or something along those lines, and this is it. So enjoy it. That is why it is here.

As of yet, the sun has not risen. The sky is a light blue, tinged with a sliver of bright gray. It is clear (there are no clouds), and it will be a bright sunny day, but not quite yet. There is light enough, but the sun has not yet risen from behind the trees. It does not (as of yet) shine on the smooth surface of the water -- almost like the surface of a mirror -- and as such the lake is still asleep -- dreaming. This is the best time to experience a body of water. It is why we are here (now, at this hour of the morning).

Watch in the distance as a loon majestically runs across the surface of the water gathering the speed and momentum it requires to take flight. In the quiet of the morning, the loon's thrashing of the water is loud and disruptive, but it is all relative. When the bird is aloft, its call echoes off of the trees, there is once again an eerie all pervasive silence -- except for the birds in the trees.

In the morning stillness, take a moment to embrace your lover in the water, to kiss them, and to tell them of your undying passion. In the quiet of the morning, your voice seems loud, obtrusive, and out of place, so say no more. Let silence return to this place (and envelop you).

As I swim, I like to pretend that that I am a frogman, a caveman, and/or an elder of an ancient race. I try to commune with the lake, become one with the spirits of the water -- to feel them, and to know them. So with this as your goal, take in a mouthful of crystal clear water and taste its refreshing flavor. These are not the polluted waters that you are used to. There is no disease here, no bacteria count -- no poison. The locals call this body of water Crystal Lake, or Clear Water, or something like that. It is easy to believe that running this water through a filter would not change it in the least, perhaps only serving to insult it (and quite possibly removing the magic of the moment).

Know that there is nothing to fear in this body of water. It is safe, so take a deep breath, and dive straight down. Swim for the bottom. It is fifty feet below, and although there is no direct light, you have no problem seeing about you. The water is like glass, like an optician's prism. There is no limit to your vision.

Take a moment to follow a school of fish that swims about (and encircles) you. Frolic with a giant turtle. Run your hands through the sandy bottom of the lake (the secret to the water's purity), and then here once again, at the bottom of it all, hold your lover close, kiss them, and let your hands explore their flesh in this -- Clearwater -- undersea paradise.

Just remember to breathe. The water will not harm you. You will not drown. Rather it will refresh you and rejuvenate your

lungs. So stay at the bottom as long as you desire. Explore the hulk of a sunken rowboat. Wonder at a cast iron stove (complete with chimney) that has made it's way into this -- Deep Sea World -- and then when you are done (but no hurry, take your time), look to the surface and the hazy mirror of the sky.

When it is finally time to rise, plant your feet in the sandy bottom and give a good push. Let your breath out and watch as the bubbles dance around you. Float to the surface with the bubbling reminder of your life dancing around you, and break through ((((the boundary)))) to the surface as the bubbles burst forth (in a rush to rejoin their kinfolk).

Rise, splash out of the water, and watch as the sun appears above the treetops.

The sunrise is exhilarating, glorious, and magical. It is a mystical moment of transcendence. It is a spiritual awakening, a point of renewal. And to join in the celebration, the sky is doing its best to mark the occasion with a robust show of color and light.

I urge you to enjoy the lake. This is what the dream world is all about. It is so easy to get lost in the plot, the heat of the moment, but in the end a swim, a morning excursion, a moment of enjoyment with one's love, this is what makes life complete.

So take a moment to smell the roses, the dripping wet hair of your companion, the scents (sounds and sights) of the lake come alive as the sun washes over the water. Enjoy this second, this moment. Enjoy your time here. The dream will wait. It always will.

And then, when you are ready, and the time has come, take a last look around. The sun is out, the birds are singing, and although cold at first, the water has either warmed or we have gotten used to it.

But now we must say goodbye. Let the twist happen. Do not fight it. If this sounds alarming, then perhaps you are not ready, and you should enjoy the morning (and the lake) further, but if you

are ready (to rejoin the plot), then let point of inflection take hold and forgive me the limitations -- and the vulgarities -- of the dreamers' craft.

Take heed.

It is the dawning of a new day.

Eileen and Doug are out for a swim on her father's -- or is it grandfather's -- farm.

I hope you have enjoyed your moment in their skins, walking a mile (as it were) in their shoes.

(.6 clicks on a swim. With any luck you can see why I keep on returning to this place.)

They -- G'narsh & Nadia along with Eileen & Doug -- meet in the middle of the lake, but (do not worry) Eileen and Doug have no reason to be scared (of a quarter-ton two-headed troll). Eileen's a bit of a hippy, while Doug's a bit of a (dream/game skimmer) player, which is to say she is accepting and he's seen it all. Nothing fazes them.

"Hello," one says. (There is no need to delineate who.)

"Hi," another replies.

"Nice morning for a swim," and all that.

Both Eileen and Doug have (gold coin) implants and so they are plugged in even out here -- in the middle of nowhere -- whilst swimming in a lake. It does not alarm them to meet up with a troll and/or a fairy during their morning constitutional. Why, just yesterday they met the Loch Ness Monster, and the day before that Big Foot. It takes a special breed to come this far north (and leave the security of the city behind). If you want company, you learn to be accommodating and take others as they are -- or as they wish to be.

"Why don't you join us for breakfast?" Eileen suggests as they tread water.

(You also learn to be hospitable up here. In the long run, it can be (((far-far))) cheaper to feed strangers on demand, than to deal with the other options -- most notable, theft in the night (especially once one considers that domesticated animals are (((far-far))) easier to hunt than wild ones, and a pig is worth much more than a few slices of bacon or even an entire roast.)

“That would be great,” Nadia replies, eagerly accepting the offer for both G’narsh and herself. (Oddly, when I called that out the first time, I mislabeled the call as “yourself” instead of “herself.” Maybe we’ll have to do the breakfast scene first person as well? But we can decide that when we get there.)

“What happened to your wing?” Eileen asks next. (It probably doesn’t flow from a conversational point of view, but one can hardly overlook a fresh plasma gun wound. It sort of stands out and begs for attention.)

“Just a bad dream,” Nadia answers noncommittally. “It will heal.” (The wound has had (and will continue to have) no effect on her ability to fly.)

The initial pleasantries done, you can be sure, the conversation continues. You know how girls are. It doesn’t take long for Eileen and Nadia to fall into a mindless, never ending blather-filled conversation.

Doug just shrugs, as does G’narsh. They will leave the talking to the girls. They are as birds of a feather -- Doug being modeled on G’narsh (after all) -- and the pair swims to shore together but alone, never once speaking a word, bothering to share a feed, or even asking what the other is thinking (or dreaming) about.

(It is tempting to just jump way ahead here, but the moment of truth occurs as they (Eileen mainly) gets out of the water.)

I think we have been over Eileen before. She is a heartthrob, my hippy dream girl with blonde hair, killer body -- whatever that might mean -- and a toe ring.

Watch closely as she leaves the water. I guess she must be wearing a bathing suit -- think tight string bikini -- to appease M.O.M., but that would be the only reason.

As she rises out of the water, what I want you to do is concentrate on her body. OK. If you're a guy, I know I'm not asking for a lot, but if you're a girl ((((and your interests don't flow that way)))), just play along.

We are at the modified version of -- Elvin Home -- complete with Grandpa Willie Bones and all the animals, but the details aren't important. What is important is that there is a swimming pier here (with a rowboat tied to it), and that Eileen is climbing the wooden ladder that hangs from the rickety pier down into the water.

Watch as the water cascades off of her body. Savor the moment in slow motion. Get right in there. Focus in close and pay attention as the liquid slowly flows down her skin. Watch the water as it catches against the thin hairs on her arms, and as it trickles down her back in tiny rivulets. What arms! What legs! (What a back! Yowza!)

But what's this! Since we have last seen her, Eileen has gotten one of those newfangled electro-tattoos. It's a big one, centered in the small of her back, but she didn't get inked alone. Doug has a matching (albeit smaller) tattoo on his shoulder. I'm sure I could spend a long time trying to figure out what the tattoos look like -- what picture or design the pair has decorated themselves with -- but the surface appearance of the tattoos is not important. Yes, they shimmer and sparkle as the fluorescent pigments dance in the morning sun, but the design hidden beneath the surface image, is the one that catches the eye -- of G'narsh and Nadia, at least.

Follow along (if you will) and realize that a golden pickup isn't the only way that a mind can be hi-jacked (or a soul

imprisoned). Neurons are present throughout the body. (Are we not thinking beings -- from head to toe, and start to finish?) Technology has come a long (((long))) way since they first designed pick-ups (and neural relays). As we have already pointed out, the gold coins are no longer required, and depending upon your intent, neither is an antenna. (Like a virus needs an antenna to contact its brethren. Like a bacteria cares to tell its fellows about the infection it is spreading. They do not! And the curse that an electro-tattoo brings with it need not be broadcast to the world. It is, and that in itself is enough.)

So (as I have said), follow along -- with your eyes. Delve (((or is that dive?))) into the tattoo -- past the surface, past the glowing lines, shimmering swirls, and pulsating patterns that capture the eye, and follow it deeper. (Trace it to its core). Notice the threads of desire, which power the mechanism (the charm, the dweomer -- the tattoo). Notice the tentacles of control that accompany the pleasing, intricate pattern of the tattoo -- i.e. the mark (and the face) of Gra'gl. This thing, this spell, this mark of ownership and control, this electro-tattoo must get its energy from somewhere, and (if you wear a tattoo) that somewhere my dear friend -- is you.

This, of course, is mindless anti-technology paranoia drivel, and Luddite foolishness, so let us let it go, and revert to the symbolism and rationale of our dream.

Beyond the surface, beyond the implants, the feeds, and the blinking fluorescent lights of the electro-tattoo -- hidden where no mortal could possibly hope to see -- both Eileen and Doug are imprinted and wear the swirling mark of Gra'gl -- god of old, harvester of souls, and slayer of youth.

As I've said, there is not a chance that either Eileen or Doug would notice the pattern (or even realize that they carried such a curse), but G'narsh and Nadia immediately see the tattoo for what it is -- the mark of the beast -- a deed of ownership, and a portal of control.

(No doubt this is all idiocy, but there is a story in there somewhere, and it is this tale that our dream shall now follow.)

(And that's all for today. Tomorrow (or the next day) I expect we shall join Grandpa Bones, Eileen, Doug, G'narsh, and Nadia for breakfast (or maybe one of those champagne brunches) as the plot hook (the electro-tattoo/Gra'gl connection) is explained further, but you know how things change with me from day to day -- so maybe I won't end up explaining anything at all.)

(Anyhow, I'm going to stay in the water, change a 0 to a 1 (or is that a 1 to a 0?) as I loose the men folk (G'narsh, Doug, and whoever else might be around), and take a private tour about the lake with Eileen. I mean, if she's got one new tattoo on her back, maybe she's got a second one somewhere else. We're going to... um, ahem... have to give her a good going over from head to toe.)

(Yep. I think something like that could take me the rest of the day.)

(Hopefully, by the time you get to this note I will have smoothed the dream out some, but this change (Prison Camp to Family Farm to Eileen electro-tattoo with Gra'gl imprint) has been on the drawing boards since -- G'narsh 101. If it seems choppy and haphazard, that is due more to my lack of ability to make it flow, rather than through any lack of planning or intent. We are on track (more or less) for the resolution of the dream (within reasonable bounds) of what I've intended for quite some time.)

(I should also note, that since the Stef'fan/Prison Camp issue has been whisked away (by shifting dimensions and/or changing our focus), the G'narsh/Stef'fan issue will need to be resolved in a different format, arena, and/or way. That is to say, we are not simply leaving Stef'fan in jail. Stef'fan got sent to prison without G'narsh's help, so no doubt he will be able to get out just as easily. Besides, there's that whole trustee -- kill escapees to reduce your own prison sentence -- rational. Stef'fan is an excellent shot (and Mi'lay's ability to convince men to do stupid things -- like trying

to escape while Stef'fan is standing guard -- is unrivaled.) No doubt, by this point, Stef'fan is a paid guard, and can leave anytime he wants to -- or perhaps he just goes and works a shift at the jail every once in a while as a hobby... just like some folks go hunting and shoot deer.)

Breakfast of Champions

a.k.a. Rest Your Feet and Set a Spell with Grandpa Willie Bones

(No need for an intro, let's cut right to the chase.)

Grandpa Willie Bones (in his old man, human form) sits on the front porch of the old farm house. It's a nice house -- maybe a salt box style home, maybe a craftsman. It's old and weathered, but it's got a certain homey feel to it, and you just know Grandpa spends an hour or two every day slapping a coat of paint on a bit of siding here, or replacing a board there. So you can be sure that the structure is solid (despite its age) and is in impeccable condition.

Perhaps the only thing Gramps loves more than the house, the farm, or even Grandma -- may Gra'gl rest her soul -- is the rocking chair he is sitting in. (It is made of hand crafted Koa -- the wood of the gods.)

Bones rocks gently back and forth in the chair savoring the motion as he smokes a pipe -- full of homegrown (tobacco) -- and considers the board of checkers that sits between Doug and himself. He is creaming the lad, just burying the kid, giving him a good dusting, and all of that, but one of these days (or not) Doug will finally get the hang of the game and be able to hold his own.

In short, the men folk are idling passing the time on the porch, while inside the women folk -- this being Nadia and Eileen -- are preparing breakfast. This is good and proper and as it should be. The women slave over a hot stove preparing breakfast, while the men sip on fresh squeezed orange juice, nibble on nuts, and talk about matters of great importance -- like politics, the current

decline of civilization, and the weather -- you know, things the girls could never hope to understand, no matter how hard they might try.

“No! Don’t move there,” G’narsh bursts out as he breaks the silence (and gets the conversational part of the sequence rolling along). “You’re setting up a triple jump.”

“No kibitzing,” Grandpa -- Bone thin -- Willie instructs as he looks at the towering two-headed troll with annoyance. “I thought you said you didn’t know how to play?”

“No,” G’narsh corrects. “You asked if I wanted to play, and I said, ‘No,’ and I don’t. Not with you.”

(And I don’t know about you, but right now I’m thinking that no one likes a literal minded troll.)

No matter my personal feelings, Doug has taken his finger off of the checker he was about to move and starts to scratch his head. (And although most hardcore checker players will tell you that if you touch a piece, you have to move it, Bones has never played this way, so Doug isn’t bound by this convention.)

“Well, don’t just sit there like an idjit, make a move,” Bones says with growing annoyance. “You had the right move the first time,” (the one that led to the triple jump), “and as for you, you game spoiling kibitzer, don’t they teach manners where you come from?”

(We could go off into the color of the checker game for a long while before we ever got anywhere, but I don’t feel like doing that, so instead I’m going to nudge things along and refocus the conversation.)

“Argh!” (((Ugh!-? or Erg!-? take your pick))) “The game’s as good as over now anyhow,” Bones complains bitterly.

Doug has opted for a slightly better move, and has left Grandpa Bones with the option of moving into a double or a triple jump... but if you don’t move you can’t lose.

(And if you are interested, there is an important lesson in there somewhere, a lesson I learned early in life. Plenty of folks who were quite capable of beating me handily in a game never got the chance (or only got the one chance at it) simply because I never played them to start with (and/or never played them after that first time). This can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, so if you're taking it the one way, it might make some sense to sit on it, till you've seen the other side as well. That is, you can interpret the idea as wise -- avoiding a lost cause-- or as foolish -- i.e. cowardice, fear, and/or an unwillingness to learn from the experience. That last idea might come up again later in the conversation -- and then again, maybe it won't.)

“You can't quit now,” Doug complains. “I've got you on the run.”

“You think boy?” Bones asks dangerously, through squinted eyes -- as if daring Doug to repeat the words. “I think you've got some chores to do before breakfast... and if you can't find something, I'm sure I can.”

Discretion -- as always -- is the better part of valor, so Doug leaves the game unfinished, and heads off to the kitchen where the rest of the ladies are.

(I'm still not getting anywhere (or any satisfaction, I might add), but at least we've gotten rid of the third wheel and paired the conversation down to a dialogue between Bones and G'narsh.)

“Care to play a game?” Grandpa Willie Bones asks offhandedly ((and habitually)) as he clears the checkers off the board and resets the pieces for another round.

“Doesn't seem to be any point,” G'narsh observes. “I don't see how I could win?”

“True,” Bones agrees. “Maybe you're a dominos man?” or chess, or backgammon, or Parcheesi. (I've got a master's disc for them all).

“I think I’ll just sit here and enjoy the morning sun,” G’narsh decides as he takes a seat on the front porch -- where the pair of them will stare off into the distance, gaze at the trees, study the clouds, and engage in that sort of parallel activity for a spell as the idle moments of the early morning drift by.

(And I do believe that this laidback mood is closer to the feel of what we are looking for.)

After a bit, Bones ((in all his grandfatherly human glory)) puts down his pipe and breaks the silence, “I’ve got a garden out back.” He pauses for a moment to let G’narsh jump in should he desire, but the odds of that seem pretty darn small at this point. So it should come as no surprise when G’narsh chooses to stay silent, or when -- a moment later -- Bones continues with, “All sorts of critters would like to get at my vegetables. Rabbits want my carrots. Moles favor the radishes. And, I’ve even got a family of mice who,” it seems, “prefer to eat my lettuce to anything else. I put up a fence to keep them out, but it only goes so far. If you really want to get rid of mice you need to trap or poison them.”

Bones lets this idea hang in the air for a moment -- letting G’narsh draw his own conclusions -- before he continues, “I’ve even got snails. I’ve got snails real bad. Seems like every sprig of parsley that I grow has a family of snails living on it. You like escargot, G’narsh?”

“I don’t know what it is?” G’narsh admits. He’d probably be just as happy to stay silent, but I’ve got control of his voice circuits, so sometimes he just up and talks before he thinks about it (and afterwards doesn’t quite know why).

“Escargot is snails, boy,” Grandpa Bones explains simply. “Some folks like ‘em, but they just look plain disgusting to me,” and then upon reconsider he clarifies, “That is if you’re talking about eating them. Just to look at, snails are awfully cute. You ever look at one?”

“No.”

“Well you should. They got these four antennas,” two big ones and two small ones, “and when they feel safe,” like when you toss your lettuce into a pot of water to rinse it off -- i.e. to soak out the snails -- well then, they climb, crawl, and slither their way to the surface just so that they won’t drown. If you pick them up at this point (and save them from asphyxiation), they’ll be so grateful they’ll forget all about that pulling back into their shells crap and climb all over you fingers thinking you’re their friend... or maybe it’s just that they can’t tell the difference between something that doesn’t want to eat them and a tree limb or a rock. Anyway, when they’re on your fingers, “They just crawl around,” and they’re the, “cutest little things. Of course, they’d eat me out of house and home if I didn’t do something about them.” They’re a veritable plague, “so every couple of days I go over every plant in my garden, pick off the snails, and throw them to the side. I don’t figure it hurts them much,” flying through the air, “but every time I do this, I’d reminded of,” the story of, “Exodus and the Garden of Eden.”

“I don’t think I know that story,” G’narsh remarks from where remains -- still sitting on the porch, still gazing into the distance, not once bothering to look around. But don’t let that deceive you, he’s paying attention to Bones, alright. Like it or not, G’narsh realizes (now) that he’s never going to escape Bones. All of this is his world, every last square inch of it, and when Bones’ is talking about a garden, Gra’gl only knows what he’s really talking about.

I recon that the thoughts coursing through Bones’ mind mirror those of G’narsh’s as well (i.e. that this is Bones’ world), but Bones is a fool for believing that there isn’t anyone (or anything) more powerful than he is. There’s always someone (or something) more powerful. Always. (((For everyone... even Gra’gl.)))

Anyway, back to the topic at hand and the Garden of Eden, Bones summarizes the story simply by saying, “Gra’gl had this wonderful place, like -- Elvin Home -- or -- Elf Central -- and he

let his creations play in it, but one day he up and kicks them all out. You know how Gra'gl is. He made some fool excuse when he did it, though," but it was ignorant and ill-thought all the same. "The logic he used was pretty much akin to me saying, you owe me a quest just because you'd killed Stef'fan... or because you're still wearing those Sch©lting boots."

This... um... topic of conversation sort of gets G'narsh's attention and he pricks up his ears as he finally turns around to regard Bones -- Grandpa Willie Bones, that is. "So why do I have to do this quest?"

"Because you want to. H\$rlk, I don't care," (and I still don't know about that word). "Do whatever you want," Bones advises as strikes a match and sucks on his pipe before continuing, "but if you don't help Eileen and Doug, you know as well as I do, the pair of them will be in for a world of hurt, and I'll make sure you hear every last one of their screams."

"So, I don't really have a choice," G'narsh surmises.

Bones shrugs as he concentrates on the glowing embers in his pipe, "Of course you have a choice. You can either listen to their screams or you can do something about it."

"Its not really a choice," G'narsh observes.

"No. I guess not," Bones acknowledges finally, and then quickly changing the subject, "As long as we got a few minutes before we eat, got any questions for your dear old dad?"

Being a bit quicker than me (or Bones), G'narsh points out, "I thought Gra'gl was my dad," since I'm the, "Son of Chaos and all that?"

"Gra'gl's off screen. You'll never see him," Bones replies dismissively. "I was thinking maybe you'd want to spend a moment considering why you spend so much time hating me," lover of the world that you are, "and never listen to a thing I say," or any of the advice I give you (((helpful or otherwise))).

G'narsh might have had something to say to in regards to that statement -- hanging in the air as it does, all simple and unadorned -- but before he can respond, Bones takes the liberty of loading up

a few skins and cycling through them -- the old elf, the original Grandpa Willie, and a dozen or so other characters from G'narsh's life (and wanderings). "If you're only paying attention to a select few, only getting your," learning and, "teaching from a limited number of individuals, you're selling yourself short. Everyone you meet is a teacher in one way or another."

"Sometimes I get the feeling you're not always talking for my benefit," G'narsh replies, and might I add how perceptive he is (at this point, at this moment). Anyhow, if you'll excuse the editorial rant, you're really limiting yourself if you only accept the words of wisdom or teaching from some guy that lived a few thousand years ago. He probably didn't know squat about modern electronics, media, or culture, and if you're going to live with the later ((((and let's face it YOU are)))), then you're going to need a more up to date source of information than the former.

"Yep, true," Grandpa Bones acknowledges. "Its just an idea I thought you might have come across in your travels. A notion some folks call -- The Godhead," but you know it's probably got other names as well. The point behind this particular philosophical nugget is that, "The creator is supposed to drift around from person to person, from time to time, so you never quite know where, when, or who will be the lord of the universe. You just might want to keep that in mind," in your travels G'narsh. "What makes you think Lulu," that crazy woman in the park, "and that old elf you so admire aren't cut from the same cloth?"

It is G'narsh's first impulse to rise to his mentor's defense, but it is also, just at this moment, that Nadia arrives -- quite conveniently I might add -- and announces, "Breakfast is served."

"I know you probably have a bunch more questions," Bones remarks as he taps the rest of the tobacco out of his pipe onto the arm of the rocking chair. "Why don't you ask them while we eat?"

(I could/should put a sequence break in here, but I don't feel like it. Instead, I'll just pick up here tomorrow.)

(And as always, I don't think anything major to the plot would be missing if we had left out the first half of this sequence, but then you never would have heard about the forced Exodus of the Snails from their personal Garden of Eden -- or been given the opportunity to think about what that might mean.)

The five of them -- Grandpa Bones, G'narsh, Nadia, Eileen, and Doug -- are sitting (down in the storm cellar of the house) around a table that is loaded -- sagging, as it were -- with a tremendous bounty of food. We probably could have done this scene as a picnic (and you certainly could still do that if that is your desire), but Bones is more of an indoorsy type guy, and down here in the basement, surrounded by jars of canned peaches and sacks of potatoes with sausages and cheeses hanging from the rafters, along with all the other supplies that one might need (or want) to get them through a long, cold winter (or an endless afterlife), Bones feels more comfortable. (And after saying all that), I hope I don't need to point out the similarities between this room and a crypt.

In fact, Nadia or Eileen could have opened up (one or more of) the window-well covers when they were preparing the food and setting the table, but they didn't. Certainly the window-wells -- the cellar's air vents -- are large enough, and plenty of light would stream in if they were open, but Bones is in the mood for a more medieval feel, and so the room is lit by a pair of candelabras and a trio of oil lanterns that hang from hooks in the wooden-beam rafters.

Of course, if you are anything like me, you wouldn't really be taking in the ambiance of the room, you'd be staring at the vittles. Did I mention the food on the table? There's so much of it that as well as being loaded onto every available square inch of the table, it's also stacked on boxes to the side, and on every other available surface in the room -- wherever there is an open space between the baskets of peaches, apples, and nuts, the room is packed with savory delights.

(((But that doesn't really set the scene very well, so let's give the delicacies, which surround us, a rundown.)))

A mound of hot -- steaming, fresh out of the oven -- biscuits form a center piece of sorts on the table, surrounded as they are by dozens -- literally dozens -- of preserves and condiments. Everything a person could dream of slathering over the biscuits is here -- everything from grape jelly (who would pick grape?) all the way to dragon fruit jam (it's real -- it exists) to passion fruit preserves (better known as poho berry jam -- mm-mmm good). There's also butter, honey, and if you are in the mood, hot maple syrup, but that's more for the pancakes. If you're the adventurous type, we've got genuine country fare here as well. There's grits (nasty stuff), and hominy (even nastier). Personally, I'd recommend the oatmeal (with raisins). Of course, what I've mentioned so far is just the filler. Once you get by the jars of canned peaches, pears, and other fruit, the blueberry muffins and all the other assorted pastries (jelly and cheese filled), there's the good stuff, the stuff I like to load up on -- the bacon, the sausage, a whole ham (slow smoked and brushed twice a day for over a month with Grandpa's secret sauce -- brown sugar, cinnamon, and cloves) along with mutton chops, fried chicken -- and anything else that your mind can imagine or your heart might desire.

It is a bountiful offering fit for a king. It's the type of table setting (and/or last meal) that you find spread out in tombs all the time (only in this particular case the food is fresh and edible).

At the head of it all sits Grandpa Bones who raises a crystal goblet filled with water in salutation. Nadia and Eileen who sit next to him -- bracketing him on either side in the seats of honor -- lift their glasses as well, while further down the men folk do the same.

"To Gra'gl," Bones toasts, and the glasses clink as one... all of the glasses that is except for G'narsh's (who still isn't quite with the program -- i.e. not with the game plan, not playing along. See, I told you we'd come back to that idea.)

“I’m not drinking to Gra’gl,” G’narsh declares as he looks around. “I’m not even sure why I’m here,” breaking bread with my mortal enemy, “but I’m sure as Sch©lte not going to drink to Gra’gl,” his health, or whatever.

“But he’s your dad?” Eileen urges. “Surely you owe him something.”

“Surely, you do,” Bones agrees.

It’s odd how you can like a joke or a gag when one person says it, but not another. Although the words, Don’t call be Shirley, rise in G’narsh’s throat he fights them down and instead replies --quite harshly, I might add -- to Eileen’s previous inquiry, “I can only assume, the only reason you’re willing to toast Gra’gl is because you have no appreciation for the evil which he represents, or of the curse that’s been laid upon you at his behest.”

Eileen looks aghast. “What curse? We’re just having a nice celebratory dinner -- well, breakfast -- with Doug and me standing in for Mi’lay and Stef’fan. You know, to show that all’s forgiven.” She looks worriedly -- and accusingly -- over at Grandpa Bones. “You didn’t say anything about a curse.”

“Oh? Didn’t I?” Bones muses distractedly. “I guess it must have slipped my mind. Those tattoos you got will drain your soul and eat your mind slowly, bit by bit until there is nothing left of your sanity.”

“What?” Eileen shrieks.

“Wow! You sounded just like Lane there for a second,” Gramps remarks appreciatively. “But don’t worry about that now. We’ve got this banquet to enjoy.”

“You expect me to eat,” with you, “after you tell me something like that?” Eileen asks appalled. (Apparently learning that she’s wearing Gra’gl’s brand has ruined her appetite. Go figure?)

“You still got to eat,” Bones points out and then turning to G’narsh, remarks sourly, “You were just supposed to offer a counter toast, something like, ‘To the Good,’ or something stupid like that. Why do you always have to ruin everything?”

“This is dumb,” G’narsh declares as he stands up from the table. “I don’t know why I thought you’d be civil.”

“SIT DOWN!” Bones bellows. “You are NOT ruining my scene!”

(And with that in mind, let’s take it from the top.)

“Shall we try again?” Grandpa Bones hisses. “To Gra’gl” he offers as he raises his glass.

No one moves. Fear will do that sometimes. The proxies have been stunned -- and/or shocked -- into silence.

Bones cracks his knuckles as he flexes his rigid (skin covered) metacarpals. He is beside himself with rage. “What is it with you people? It’s a simple dream. Get with the program.”

Ignoring Bones (and after recovering slightly), Eileen asks G’narsh, “Tell me about this curse.” It is clear the idea has spoiled her appetite. She cannot think of anything else.

“The tattoo that you have, that you both have,” G’narsh replies as he indicates Doug as well, “has a magical imprint. It will slowly drain your life-force and will-power away and give it to Gra’gl,” (and if you want a more elaborate explanation than that, you’re going to have to come up with it on your own. (Dwell on it and I’m sure it will come to you.))

“How do we get rid of it? Can we cut them off?” Doug asks while Eileen winces at the suggestion. The tattoo hurt going in. She can’t imagine how painful it would be having it gouged out.

“The easiest way to remove a brand is to have the person who inked it in the first place erase it,” by taking it out in reverse, “dot by dot. I think you remember where you got it,” Bones suggests.

“In some college town,” Eileen says as she recalls the memory slowly -- the episode just now being built up in her mind.

“You should probably go with them,” Bones -- ever the helpful one -- advises G’narsh.

“I’m not doing anything you say,” G’narsh declares.

“What? Won’t you help us?” Eileen responds almost in tears. “You know we’re doomed if you don’t help us.”

“You have to help them, G’narsh,” Nadia agrees.

“Why are you always doing stuff like this?” G’narsh asks Bones -- both defiantly and angrily -- as he gets up from the table. “We are not your toys!”

“Why are you mad at me?” Bones asks innocently -- and quite calmly. “They’re the ones who ran off to the city to live in sin,” and get matching electro-tattoos. (((It’s all the rage, you know. And personally, I don’t see why G’narsh is blaming Bones.))) “It’s their own H\$rlking fault.”

But G’narsh has had enough. He doesn’t need to talk things through (with Bones) any further. “Let’s get out of here,” he says to Nadia as he storms out the door.

Nadia looks over the delicious food spread across the table and then at G’narsh’s retreating form as he climbs the stairs back into the light. As he pushes the storm door open, a brilliant shaft of sunlight floods the cellar. (I’m not really certain what this is supposed to symbolize, but whatever it is, the fact that something is being alluded to is hard to miss.)

“We should go,” Nadia echoes indecisively to herself as she looks longingly at the food spread across the table once more. “Maybe we could fill a doggy bag or something?” she asks Eileen hopefully.

Doug, however, lives in this sort of mythical world all the time (in his discs and dreams), so he has some inkling of the rules. But just to be sure -- that he is on the right track -- Doug looks around the room once more. The cellar is stacked high with boxes, crates, and cans of food, bundles of corn, barrels of wine, and kegs of beer, salt pork, and pickles. Sausages and cheeses hang from the ceiling. Baskets of fruits and nuts are filled to capacity and overflow onto the ground (and every other available surface space, as well). But despite the overwhelming abundance of good, wholesome food, Doug can’t help but notice how cold, dead, and entombed the room looks -- especially with Old Man Bones

presiding at the head of the table. Considering all of this, it should come as no surprise when Doug points out, “If you eat in Hades, or whatever this place is... If you eat in Hades, you can’t leave.”

“Don’t believe it,” Bones assures them, and then staring at Doug he adds, “It’s an old wives tale,” i.e. only something that sissified old women believe.

“I’m not taking any chances,” Eileen decides.

It pains Nadia to hear, but she follows Eileen’s lead and puts down the biscuit she had previously picked up. As hungry as she is, there is no sense taking any chances, and without further ado, the trio rushes out of the cellar, after G’narsh.

(Well, that scene didn’t go as I intended. I’ve still got a lot of... stuff on my plate -- i.e. things I wanted to cover in this sequence.)

Grandpa Bones considers the gigantic table of food before him. He shrugs. What else is there to do? He stands and walks around the room as he loads a gigantic platter full of the best food for himself: lots of greasy bacon, eggs, hash browns, buttered toast, and all the good -- i.e. sinful -- stuff. He pours himself a half dozen glasses (of liquid) containing everything from water, milk, orange juice, to coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. It’s a feast fit for a king -- even an undead one.

(Originally the intent had been to go into a food orgy, sensory stimulation -- i.e. overload -- segment, but...)

(Enjoy the cool refreshing flavor of the fruit juices, the strong fortifying aftertaste of the coffee, and the greasy decadent flavors from the meat and cheeses to your heart’s content, and then when you are done, and Bones is done (and/or done for) we will continue.)

Grandpa Bones leans back in the wooden chair at the head of the table (the one facing the doorway and the stairs) and lights his pipe. He is alone, just him and the dancing embers from the flame in the bowl of his pipe.

It's an odd thing, but if you spend enough time unplugged away from it all with just your own thoughts for company, the world -- the universe -- comes alive ((((or at least, seems to)))). This is simply the way things work -- the way that things are.

(Take it for granted that reality -- as we know it -- is a magical place and that after a bit (of looking at it unfettered and unencumbered) we throw off the lies that bind us. Or, if you prefer, man is a herd animal and his need for companionship is so strong that alone -- in isolation -- he will create "Others" and broadcast these creations into his surrounding world -- just like a feed, only organic and natural. Or, if that doesn't do the trick either (because I am just bound and determined to have this idea make some sort of sense to you), one can view the mind as a pattern seeking organ, and whether there are intrinsic patterns or not, the brain will find something to organize, decipher, and decode.)

Or maybe Bones has simply gone over the edge.

Whatever way you wish to look at it, it is not long before Bones (perhaps in the form of a senile old man in the last moments of life when the organism is in failure mode) is talking to the cherry red flame in the bowl of his pipe.

"That whole thing about eating food in Hades is just a sham," he remarks to the embers, but Flicker does not have a talking role in this segment, so she just dances (as she has been known to do) back and forth, this way and that, in a hypnotic display of randomness and beguiling color.

"You got to wonder how rumors like that," about eating the food in Hades, "get started?" Bones muses as he takes another drag of the pipe, and then another, and then another.

I suppose one of the glasses before him must contain strong wine or whiskey, because after a while he starts to see more than he usually does.

(Or maybe the leaves that he smokes contain more than tobacco -- i.e. have a bit of herb, ditch weed, or spice added for flavor (don't you know).)

After his third or fourth bowl, and fifth or sixth glass of wine, Bones is feeling no pain... or perhaps that is all he is feeling. (I suppose it matters if you are running MM or not.)

Morning has turned to afternoon and the sky has changed as well. One might presume that down in the cellar Bones would not notice this, but he does. There is a charge in the air, a bit of electricity -- and magic. A storm is on the horizon -- and all that. A man as worldly as Grandpa Bones knows the weather is about to turn for the worse. (His bones ache if nothing else -- which means the barometric pressure is falling fast (and therefore that a storm is on the way.)

So perhaps it is just the wind, but I like to think that it is Lane that flings the storm door open. It gives Bones quite the start. A chill of fear runs through him as shadows fill the room.

“Where did they go?” Lane demands as she shakes the old man. It is like a vice has grabbed hold of his chest. “Where did they go?” Lane repeats her demand. There is no sympathy, emotion, kindness, or even mercy in her voice.

“To the city... the tattoo,” Grandpa Bones manages as he watches on, a bit removed, and away from himself as this demoness questions him: the four armed goddess of his dreams... accompanied as she is by a dozen walking lizard henchmen -- the cobalts.

“Oh'd he'd got the foodies,” a Charlie notices.

“Dis da righters placers,” another decides as he starts to load up a plate.

“We's gotta da juicers.”

“And da jammers.”

“Wat dis?” a final Charlie asks, but Lane hits his hand and the mug of coffee the cobalt was sniffing goes crashing to the floor.

“Why’d you’d do dat?” Charlie asks as he holds his smarting appendage.

“If you eat the food in Hades, you stay there,” Lane explains simply.

“Dat no true.”

“He’d joost say’d.”

Lane lets go of Bones’ body, and if you didn’t realize it before, you do now, Bones is having a heart attack -- or a stroke, or whatever. He is too busy dying to worry about the intruders who have barged into his cellar, or (far more likely) he simply believes that his escort to the next world has (finally) arrived. No doubt Lane will ride him hard in the Realms of Chaos when he is dead.

They say it is odd -- queer -- what a person will focus on when they are busy dying. Grandpa Bones himself is intent upon deconstructing this vision before him (of Lane and the Charlies) as if disproving the reality of the moment might have some higher purpose (or have some possibility of saving him from Chaos and a H\$rlking future -- of pain and torment).

So as he dies, Bones’ thoughts go something like this: When the wind swung the cellar door open with a mighty BANG! it must have given him (((that is to say Bones))) an awful fright, and what with the emotionally charged conversation that he just had with his children (and/or grandchildren) that led to them running off (to the city once again)... not to mention the fatty foods he’s been eating, and the fact that M.O.M. has been gunning for him ever since he lit up a pipe (or sipped a glass of wine)... Let’s just say, Grandpa Bones’ should have known that the remaining seconds of his life were numbered from the moment this sequence started.

And let’s face it. In retrospect it seems obvious. But don’t you think Bones should have known better than to put ditch weed into his pipe? Gra’gl only knows what it really is and the odds of having a catastrophic allergic reaction (from doing something as

blatantly wrong -- or if you like, stupid -- as that (on a MM approved disc like this, no less)) is without a doubt -- a near total certainty.

Like I said, odd -- queer -- thoughts. It is indeed strange the concerns, which consume humans, in their final moments of life.

(We need not draw it out -- or paint a pain filled, grimace inducing final moment. But, hey! Do as you like.)

Lane indicates Grandpa Bones' dead form. He rests face down in a plate of bacon, while (as we watch) the hand holding his pipe slides off the table. Cherry red embers fall to the floor and land on a hastily discarded napkin (that one of the old man's guests must have previously dropped).

"Oh'd right," a cobalt acknowledges as he picks up the thread from the previous conversation with Lane about the problems inherent in eating food in the spirit world.

"Good pointers," the Charlies agree (as they can't help but notice that Bones -- the only one who has eaten any of the food -- is dead).

"We's suddenly not hungries."

"We's skippers dis meal."

"He'd tellers you where'd da G'narsh'e go'ers?" another Charlie asks. (Got to get this dream moving along somehow.)

"Yes," Lane replies. Her eyes, however, remain on Flicker -- the glowing embers in the pipe. Lane watches as the napkin smolders and slowly catches fire. She watches as the flame works its way up the jeans (and/or overalls) that Grandpa Bones is wearing, and as it jumps to a nearby bale of straw, and then to a stack of old newspapers, magazines, and books. She watches a final moment more as the blaze encompasses a bolt of cloth and a roll of canvas (because they were always pretty big on putting raw fabrics in those old tombs.)

It is clear the fire will be out of hand in mere moments (if in fact, it is not already). I suppose (at some point) it would have

been an easy matter for Lane (and/or one of the Charlies) to stomp out the flame, but for whatever reason they chose not to.

I suppose, when you get right down to it, in this scene they -- all of them -- are but spirits, angels, and/or a vision. They are but mere observers, nothing more than explanations for a thing that would have happened with or without their help, one way or another, anyhow.

“We’d be da corpororally challenged,” a Charlie explains simply.

They are like ghosts -- haunted spirits -- and the souls of the departed.

And with that final observation, we will exit to the exterior of the building and watch as Lane and the Charlies emerge from the smoke, which grows ever thicker.

Not bothering to stick around, Lane and the Charlies immediately exit to stage left and disappear into the forest. They are hot on the trail of G’narsh and soon (relatively speaking) they will rejoin him, but for now we (or at least I) shall watch as the smoke plume Flickers and flashes into flame. Before you (or once again, at least I) can count to 100 the entire -- dry, wood frame -- building is completely enveloped by the blaze.

I myself shall stay and watch the fire -- maybe roast a few marshmallows. In a half hour or so, the storm that is rising in the distance will unleash its waters on this farm, but by then the house will be gone -- totally consumed. What will remain will be a simple black scar on the landscape turned muddy from rain and nothing more.

(I’m kind of surprised that we worked a direct reference about Flicker burning down a house into the dream. That whole arson thing was just some randomness I added for flavor during the opening sequence. But there it is. We’ve almost come full circle.)

(Also, you might want to note that Grandpa Bones is just a momentary avatar for Bones. Fire doesn’t do much damage to a

skeletal warlord, and I'm sure we'll see the conniving necromancer again, real -- real -- soon. And, as long as we're on the subject (of Bones), it just sort of stands to reason that an entity that gets its power from death -- i.e. a necromancer -- would just sort of grow more powerful in its own passing.)

(Hey! Now there's a great rant. Did you know that in ancient times they believed in life after death -- i.e. vampires, revenants, and zombies? It's just the way things were. Sometimes folks just didn't stay dead and buried like they were supposed to. Brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and all sorts of folks were coming back from dead, demanding the terms of their wills -- and last testaments -- be followed, their deaths be avenged, and/or their cooking recipes honored (correctly and exactly, which typically means using measuring cups). The Good News -- is, if you thought there was even the slightest -- and/or remotest -- chance Aunt Ge-my-ma was going to haunt you for all eternity just because you didn't like as much salt in your brownies as she did, there were many time tested procedures for insuring that one's loved (and/or unloved) ones did not return from the beyond. These precautions included: pounding iron stakes through the hands and feet, burying the dead with thorns, poking holes in their guts (and/or sides), and burying the no-good evil doer under a great big rock, stone, or boulder. You might find some correlation between these ideas and other stories you might be familiar with (from myth and/or legend). I couldn't tell you which came first, but one thing is clear: If you claim that you're -- The Almighty -- and that you're going to rise from the dead, some folks are willing to put you to the test.)

(But let's return to the dream at hand (if only for a moment). Back when I thought G'narsh and Bones were going to have a civil discussion, I had planned on having them discuss the circular nature of god. I've already gone into how, being a creation of god, I've made my own creations, who in turn have made creations of their

own. If you follow this line of thought down far enough, it is quite possible that at some level, one of those creations (of a creation of a creation) has taken it upon itself to create a sub-creation, which is known far and wide as god. It's just an idea -- otherwise known as heresy.)

(One of the reasons a person might want to delve into this -- heretical -- idea is that lots of folks -- Atheists, for instance -- want to disprove the existence of god by showing that god is man's creation, or that all of the trappings of religion and spirituality can be built up from a primitive mind (subject to its fallacies of input and interpretation -- i.e. hallucinations, illusions, delusions, and deceptions) as it struggles to find a reason for its own existence. That is to say, an explanation (and/or rationale) for the apparent existence of -- i.e. the perception of -- a spiritual world can be built up completely within a Darwinian, materialistic, and mundane framework, but this is (in and of itself) hardly proof that the universe is not a magical place. I mean, if you start with the ordinary (i.e. a Darwinian framework) and end up with the mystical (god), then something special is taking place (regardless of exactly wherein all of that the Truth might actually Lie). That is to say, if magical things happen in a mundane world, isn't that so much more wondrous and special than having mundane things happen in a magical world?)

(I'm sure both (all) of these ideas are fairly unclear (and/or unconvincing), but that is part of the nature of spiritual beliefs. Those who believe will find proof in everything and those who do not, will find confirmation of the opposite in the very same things.)

(And now (once again), back to our dream. I don't know if we have (or ever will have) sufficient motivation for G'narsh's actions -- i.e. hanging out and sitting down for a meal with his arch nemesis Bones -- other than to say, G'narsh is a proxy in a dream. I'd like to have more clarity (and continuity) than that, but I guess it's not to be. Rather, it's going to be one of the things I'll need to concentrate on when I am done with the first walk through and

start the major editing process. (((But guess what? I didn't really change much.))))

(Anyhow, if you're thinking that maybe G'narsh isn't acting the way you would act, or how you would have him act, then what can I say? I've got a dream to tell here folks, and as we near the end (like it or not), G'narsh is going to get railroaded into taking the action I want (and/or need) to pull everything together for the finale.)

It could be fun to do a final scene here where Bones -- in all his skeletal glory -- emerges from the smoking, rain soaked embers of the house fire. Picture if you will a skeleton tossing aside a charred board as he emerges from the scorched ruins, but then alas, we will forgo that pleasure...

It's a lie when they say that eating food in the spirit world will trap you there. I don't know where that nonsense started. If you're on a mystical quest -- an otherworldly journey as it were -- at some point you're going to want to break bread with a prophet or nibble on a bit of manna in the desert. It seems silly to condemn a soul to oblivion -- for all eternity-- simply because they sampled the wrong fruit, but then I suppose some folks are stupid, and it is only appropriate that their gods have a matching intellectual capacity.

Of course, rather than go down either of those aforementioned paths any further, what I wish to do instead is to join up with Bones later in the day towards sunset. He's been on a forced march -- double time -- as he needs/wants to catch up with Lane, G'narsh, and the rest ((((and end this bad boy of a dream once and for all)))). It is to this aim that Bones has left the homestead far behind.

Well, maybe not that far behind. Bones is at G'narsh and Nadia's previous campsite -- the pine forest, bed of needles one -- where he sits beside a crackling fire.

(Take a moment to smell the smoke. Sure it gets in your eyes a little, but that's half the fun of camping out.)

On the fire is a fish, probably a trout, fresh water salmon, or one of those other oily fish. The greasy skin sizzles and crackles over the flame. Take a whiff. It's going to be some good stuff.

Having lost all of his belongings in the fire, Bones doesn't have any pots or pans, or any other equipment to cook with, so he is forced to grab the fish roasting on the fire with his bare hands. Being quite hot, he then proceeds to toss the smoking carcass back and forth between his bony fingers until it cools down.

((Obviously he's back in all of his skeletal glory. Don't know if I made that clear -- enough.))

Licking the oily fat off of his bones, our hero -- my hero, the skeleton -- produces a shaker of salt (from somewhere) and applies its contents liberally to the fishy flesh before taking a bite. The meat is soft, moist, and tender -- in a word delicious -- flavored as it is by the oak and/or hickory wood fire.

The fish is quite large, and there is plenty for all. If you are of the mind, Bones would be happy to share. When you are done, you can wash it down with a bit of crystal clear water from the lake (or perhaps as long as you're sharing the food, you can get Bones to share -- whatever else he might have, like a smoke, or a drink, or whatever. I'll let you decide).

Then all there is to do is to watch as the sun goes through a glorious sunset and a cloud of insects rise into the sky, along with the countless birds that swoop down to eat the flying grasshoppers, mosquitoes, and other bugs of the evening. Once the moon starts to rise, notice the slight Technicolor shimmer in the sky from the Northern Lights as you lay down in the pine needles -- perhaps snuggling close to Bones if you so desire, and/or trading ghost stories as the two of you drift off to sleep.

(Far be it from me to preach, but the whole reason to dream such a sequence, is so that one can enjoy it better should they ever encounter it in the real world -- or perhaps I have that backwards.)

If one has never tasted a cool glass of water -- and made it unto wine for themselves -- or savored a plain -- unadorned -- slice of (whole grain) bread as if it was buttered, salted, and dripping with perseveres -- i.e. as if it was fit for a king, and/or the food of the gods -- then perhaps (as of yet) one has not truly lived.)

(Which is to say, I can see how someone who was dead (to this world) would be afraid to sample the food in Hades, but for someone who is alive, perhaps the only thing to fear is fear itself. In short, I cannot imagine that eliminating scarcity and death (from one's mindset) would not also have the side effect of bringing the very opposite into being -- i.e. an abundance of life, not to mention a total lack of fear.)

(Once again, I seemed to have slipped sideways and gotten preachy, but there is a kernel (of truth) in there somewhere.)

(Obviously I haven't laid it out very well, and I will leave it to you to correct that error, but as we leave this sequence behind, the parting thought, the activity of the day as it were, is to focus on the flavor, the texture, the substance, and origin of our food (nourishment and subsistence) in any of the worlds in which you wish to exist.)

(I also feel the need to point out that if you lace the fish with enough pepper and spices -- just the regular ones (cayenne, etc.) -- a mellow sort of buzz can be nurtured. But if this is something more than the enjoyment of the moment and the feeling of being satiated, I cannot say.)

((--End P3-D--))

((--Cut in P3-E--))

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

Kevin Stillwater

P3-D

of

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

plus the marketing material

remainder to be found at

www.paufler.net

© 2008 Copyright Brett Paufler (2-3-08)

all rights reserved

www.Paufler.net

Brett@Paufler.net

G'narsh - P3-D