

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

Kevin Stillwater

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

Part E - Continued from D

An Evil Wind This Way Blows ###
a.k.a. Making a Bad Dream -- Naughty

(We are at 173 clicks for the dream. (Excluding the BM, that is. OK. Is it just me, or does that not sound good, like at all? Maybe we'll just keep on calling it -- the Bonus Material.) Anyhow, we're at 173 clicks, and just for cheap thrills, I'm starting a new save file -- Part E of the Third Partition.)

(I've had a hard time starting this next sequence, so if it seems convoluted -- and long winded -- bear with me.)

(Oh, and one need not wonder too much about the plot, simply enjoy the ride.)

The wind.

I like the wind -- the breeze -- the cool drifting air that circulates around us.

I am not alone in this. Survey results indicate that flying is one of the most popular pastimes in the dream culture. Some folks like to turn into birds, flap their wings, and take flight. Others opt for the Superman thing and just jump into the air (not that I understand how Superman is supposed to turn, but we need not get into that). While yet still others go for levitation, broomsticks, or any manner of mechanical conveyances -- care for a magic carpet ride anyone?

I myself (in my free time) favor a random free-floating experience where I hover about and bump off of walls -- something akin to a balloon filled with helium. I guess a certain awareness of my real world body must seep through, because when I do this, I am almost universally lying on my back with my arms and legs rigid -- like some sort of Egyptian mummy. (And, if one wishes to be truly adventurous and to try this without the benefit of a rig), I believe keeping one's breath slow and steady is helpful in this endeavor

Anyway, although all of these are good starts, if you really want to take flying to the next level, you need to leave any semblance of your real body behind -- and not just enter the dream, but forget you are dreaming and/or that there is someone who is even having a dream in the first place. Once you have done this -- a thing that is easy to say, but amazingly difficult to accomplish (like so many things) -- one can become anything: a dragon, a Pegasus, a horse in a stampede, or even the wind.

May I recommend the later? There is simply no other way to travel. Why walk on the clouds and fly through the air, when you can become the very breeze itself?

(Why indeed?)

To this effect, let us rejoin Bones where we last saw him -- at the lake -- a little later in the evening. The stars are out and the moon shines bright, but rather than resting, Bones is up and about collecting wood. (He's an industrious one that Bones.) He's busy hauling logs out of the forest and scrapping together huge heaping piles of pine needles, which he then adds to the ever growing bonfire, which at some time in the distant past was his small cozy campfire.

All of this activity is in preparation for Bones taking flight, but please, don't ask me why I don't simply editing out the fish eating segment, and let Bones take flight from the burning house. We had a perfectly respectable fire going back then. Why build another?

(I suppose the answer to that is simple enough. I hadn't thought of having Bones take flight at that point, and now that I have, I don't want to go back and redo the previous sequence. Besides, we needed an additional eating scene in the dream (or at least I felt that we did).)

The roaring fire that Bones has been gathering together is now quite large, but it still isn't big enough. Luckily, Bones remembers that he's a wizard -- a dark sorcerer/necromancer -- and/or something like that and snaps his bony fingers together. As he does, a pillar of fire leaps to the sky -- something akin to a napalm explosion -- and all of the forest is instantly set ablaze.

Stand for a moment in the roaring inferno of this forest fire. Watch as the fire elementals dance around you. Breath deep. Let the blistering heat burn out -- i.e. sear out -- your lungs. It only takes one breath in a roaring inferno like this to kill you. Heat damaged lungs simply do not function (at all), but that doesn't really matter to us, so breath deep and inhale the crisp, blistering heat. While you're at it, enjoy the smoke as well.

(Pretend that you are underwater if it helps. Or, if you are of the mind and like continuity, imagine that you are in Hades surrounded by the burning hellfire of eternal damnation, and then remember that this moment is what all of those Buddhist meditation breathing exercises are (((Fundamentally))) about -- to stay calm even in the face of death (and/or complete (((spiritual))) obliteration).)

What I am suggesting is that you step inside of Bones' for a moment, experience the fire through his eyes, and ride him as an avatar as you enjoy -- it all.

Or (if you are of the mind), you may wish to experience being burned alive at the stake. Instantly -- as in, without preamble -- you are tied in place, the fire has been lit, and there is nothing left to do but to experience the relevant sensations as the flames slowly lick at your feet and the blistering heat begins to gnaw at your toes. Let the moment come alive as the pain... let it seep through you, consume you, and become you. But don't give in to the rage or the fear. It is just fire, just pain, just death. In the end, it is nothing to be feared -- and in fact, it is to be welcomed. (You who have crawled through the very bowels of Earth and soared high in the Heavens, you who have seen it all, felt it all, and (most recently) tasted it all: What is a bit of terrestrial fire to the likes of you?)

So as the flames rise about you, breathe in deep. Let death take you fast, but notice that in fact, you do not die. You are an immortal creature and death is not -- an option.

As the flames embrace you, come to the realization that all fires, all flames are the same -- be they fueled by a burning house, a napalm explosion, a forest fire, or the flames that blanket a monk who is busy immolating himself -- and who is therefore not quite with the whole monkish (monkey?) program. But that is a side thought, one of those twisted diversions that seek to pull us from our course -- and realization -- that all fire is one, and the same.

So once again, enjoy the flame for as long as you can (or for as long as you desire, which amounts to pretty much the same thing) as you squeeze out -- or take in -- all of the detail, nuance, and meaning that you can muster from the experience. And then, when you are done, rise with the smoke (and the flames and the sparks) and take to the air.

Let the breeze carry you. Look down at the burning forest, the scarred remains of the farmhouse, and the echoing reminder of a witch trial that fades from view as it slips into another sidereal -- Shadowy -- dimension. But all the while remember, it is important to let the visions go just as soon as you see them. They have no meaning, need not be remembered, and have no purpose other than your momentary amusement and/or spiritual edification.

(Testify brother, testify!)

(Hallelujah!)

(Can I get a praise Swami Yamma?)

(Perhaps with any luck we can now let the dream drift as it will and fly wherever it so desires -- on its own accord without any further input from us.)

(((Fat chance that.)))

It is night, as we have said, and you are the wind, so watch as a moonlit landscape goes drifting by. Gain altitude and leave the ground behind. Dance with the clouds, swim past the stars, and bathe in the Milky Way -- whatever that might mean. This is the only way to travel, my friends. As you will -- where you will -- with no future, no past, and precious little of the present.

(Freedom is, after all, having nothing left to loose. Nothing baby, nothing, or it ain't free -- which just means that one's self -- one's sense of identity - is just one of the many things, which must be lost along the way (along with everything else, I guess). What better way to accomplish this then to die? (And to become

Gratefully Deadedicated to a Higher Calling in the process, but once again, I feel that I digress.))

We could bounce around the Heavens (among senseless allusions)) for a long time, but we have a destination, so let the sun rise over the horizon. Watch the morning sky turn to pink, to red, and then to orange. The view is bright and beautiful, colorful and majestic. Watch as the sun's rays and the scintillating colors of the morning bounce off of the clouds, which have come together to form a sort of false floor below you.

(It is odd how reassuring the insubstantial form of a cloud can be. There is (in actuality) nothing really there -- nothing which might give support.)

(Don't believe me?)

Go down closer, nearer to the surface of the cloud, and you will find that there is no edge -- no beginning, no end. Just a mist that slowly gets thicker the closer you approach (and as you go down through the cloud), but do not worry. You cannot fall. You are the wind. This is your domain. You are supported, comforted, and blanketed by whatever the sky has to offer. Yet even with this being said (and even as this is being said)), let a downdraft carry you along -- gently and easily -- to a lower elevation. And as you look back (if only for a moment), watch as the overcast skies break apart to -- let the sun shine in.

We have dallied here long enough, longer than was my intent, so let us make up some time. Gather a force of will behind you and surge on, over (and across) the landscape. Come in low and graze the tops of trees and then drop in even lower as the forest gives way to fields of corn, wheat, and grass. (Or, if you prefer, repeat it all, only this time weaving in-between the tree trunks, gusting and/or oozing through the branches, and skipping and hopping over the tips of the grasses. Notice how soft the wheat is -- how it tickles.)

And then notice that there is a troop of cobalts up ahead. The twelve of them walk along as they scamper and dance around

Lane. So whiz past her. Get under her cloak. Brush past her skin. It is surreal, erotic, and enticing, but the sensation is gone before it even began.

(So repeat and dally as per your own desire, and/or dance and play with the Charlies).

When you (((and/or they))) are done, continue on. You are the wind after all, and there are countless miles to go. Countless lakes, roads, rivers, and valleys to cross, but in a blink we will past them all by and in a mere moment we shall arrive at the edge of the Northern College Town where we started this adventure so long ago.

(Beyond enjoyment of the moment, the only reason the preceding 1.6 clicks are in the dream is so that we may explore the college town as the wind and set the scene -- the background and/or back story -- for the upcoming showdown between G'narsh and Stef'fan (which happens in the next sequence -- or so) without really being here/there -- in any sort of a conventional sense.)

As a breeze, explore the avenues and the byways of the college town. Pick up a piece of paper -- it looks like a bit of homework that someone has carelessly put down beside them -- and whisk it away. (It's fun being the wind.) Mess up the hair of the young gents, and then there are the girls. It can be an enjoyable game to diffuse oneself, seep between the layers of cloth, and flow around a young coed's body. Feel her rippling pleasure at your passing, the cooling delight of your touch, and the quickening of her pulse in response to your presence.

It can be quite the game, going down the street, dancing around this girl, entwining around that girl, caressing yet another, before kissing one more with insubstantial lips that hardly exist.

(I'm sure one could take this game... um, ahem... further, but other than showing you the door, in this particular endeavor I can

offer no detailed support (lest M.O.M. get wind of it and shut it all down).)

Dancing with coeds, however, is not the final destination, goal -- and/or resolution -- that we are looking for (in this sequence or the dream as a whole), so when you are done chasing the girls (and/or the boys), leave them behind, and fly down the street a little further.

Notice Nadia fluttering about in the air. She's always up for a little fun, so lift her up, wrap your elemental arms around her and give her a great big, gigantic -- hurricane gale force -- hug hello. Let your fingers trace over her body and feel the delicate structure of her wings. I don't believe that we've ever really gone into them, but then you know what pixie, sprite, and/or fairy wings are like -- gossamer threads of silk, like the web of a spider, or the wings of a butterfly.

Take your time with Nadia. I'm sure I haven't done tactile justice to her form, so fill in whatever I might have left out, and then, when you are done, dive down from where she hangs in the air and flow down, through, over, and around Eileen. Experience her as you have always wanted, and then (when you are done) move on towards the building that they are standing in front of.

(I suppose, if you are of the mind, you may wish to give G'narsh and Doug the same treatment before you move on, but I am not of the mind, and so I shall not. I feel that I will be a (((much))) happier man if I do not explore the dark hidden cracks, crevices, and creases -- of either.)

(((Makes me shudder just to think about.)))

(Note: This upcoming segment has caused me all sorts of grief. Not that the section is overly important to the dream, but it just hasn't seemed to flow (as of yet). I suppose the problem is that I have been trying to break character and see the building as I might, rather than as a breeze does.)

So, the first order of business (in order for us to get into -- and stay in -- the role of the breeze) is to brush up against the side of the building. Feel the brick façade and/or faded, splintering weathered wood. I wonder how the wind views brick siding? And if splinters bother the breeze?

After we have nuzzled up against the building -- much like a friendly cat -- take a step back and notice that Ray's Pizza (future home of G'narsh's Ray's Pizza) takes up half of the first floor with the other half being given over to an unnamed bar -- tavern, and/or nightclub. It is a separate establishment and it is surprising how seldom I actually walk into the bar (maybe twice in all these years -- which is to say I've used this locale for a lot of dreams, but the bar hardly ever). For whatever reason, the place simply doesn't interest me.

Both establishments are identified by painted wood signs that are bolted to the crumbling brick wall -- neither being of the sort, which is much fun for a breeze. (Even the mortar, which is coming loose, just gets in the way -- and into the air, and one's eyes, nose, ears, and throat -- making everything gritty.)

Luckily, between the two eateries (and/or watering holes) is a narrow -- alley like -- stairway that leads up to the second level (and the heart of the building). Above this opening is an old wooden sign that swings in the breeze (hanging as it does from a metal rod that extends out from the building a few feet). (((Speaking from experience, I can say that))) it is the type of adornment that breezes love to play with (swinging it back and forth -- to and fro) as the rusty metal links holding the sign in place squeak their complaint. The sign itself reads -- Tiger Splits -- and (((explaining what this means))) there is a picture to match, but this really gives no indication of what lies up the stairwell. In this particular locale, however, word of mouth is the preferred form of advertising (and this is especially true for the type of businesses that have taken root at the top of the stairs).

As such, it makes perfect sense that we hear Eileen explain to G'narsh, "That's where we got our tattoos," as the wind gathers force and blows us up the narrow -- refuse strewn -- staircase.

(I still didn't get into the details of the building as far as I would have liked to. This particular piece of real estate is a major quest item if you are using a game skimmer, so perhaps I should just lay down some logistics. Ownership of the building gives you ownership of the two ground floor locales (a restaurant and a bar), five second story offices/retail spaces, and a rooftop penthouse apartment, but having said that, somewhere it should be noted that being an owner and being a tenant are not the same things.)

(We'll have to expand on all that further, but it's a good start -- i.e. good enough for now.)

(Besides, I'm anxious to get to the (real) reason why we -- Bones -- turned into a wind elemental -- and/or a bit of breeze -- in the first place.)

Most folks -- me in the past for instance -- tend to think that the wind blows in a single direction, say by coming in from the North West and leaving towards the South East, but if there are any obstacles in the flight path (like buildings or mountains), wind does strange things. It is not uncommon for the prevailing wind direction to be 180 degrees out of sink on opposite sides of a mountain, or for wind to shift directions from one moment to the next (sometimes by as much as 360 degrees over the course of a complete night and day cycle).

These changes might not be obvious to anyone who is outside only for a moment or two, here and there (or who spend their time in the flat open expanses of the prairies), but take it on faith that the shifting nature of the wind is part of the precarious nature of Air. Water is not the most fickle element. It is far too sanguine -- and level headed. And, despite the apparent contradiction (and/or counter intuitiveness of it all), Air is far more

fluid and chaotic. (And with a call like that, hopefully) it is no wonder why Bones' has chosen the form that he has.

Nor should it be any wonder then when the breeze gathers force ((((once again)))), carries us (and whatever ((((other)))) trash is lying about) up the staircase, reverses direction at the top, swirls about a time or two, and then carries us back down to the bottom where we started. It will do this several times -- like a roller coast ride -- taking us up past the first landing, to an apartment on the roof, and then back down to where the five retail boutiques are located... which I should just go ahead and fill in at this point. There is the aforementioned Tiger Splits -- Stef'fan's tattoo parlor, along with a jewelry store, a private detective's office, a used clothing store, and an unmarked door -- rented years ago to a mysterious stranger. (The details of which we will not explore any further -- leaving all of the calls open for your personal use and development. I recommend plugging in a separate disc or story line for each.)

Having taken in the dilapidated -- unkempt and unclean -- condition of the elevated second story, let the breeze carry you up further to the third story (yet once again). Here, there is a large suite that covers half of the building (and that has roof access to the rest. The open roof can serve as a patio or a garden, but for now it is simply a large level gravel expanse -- vacant and devoid).

The apartment is in total disrepair. I have laid down countless dreams in this room, and it seems to be central to all of them that no one has ever completely installed the large double French doors that open onto a small balcony (that is actually more of a roof ledge). Rather the un-hung doors lean against the wall next to the opening (or having been installed have swelled in their frames and cannot close) -- a condition which allows leaves and other detritus to blow into the room. (It is fall after all -- and/or again).

It should be obvious that when it rains, water is a continual and ever-present problem -- or part of the delightful ambience. I suppose it depends on your point of view. Speaking of which, the

balcony doors overlook a forested creek bed, and beyond that are the fields of corn, wheat, or whatever it is they grow in these parts -- K'fr for all I know.

For the most part, these details are for your own use (and/or the use of your game skimmer). The formal dream will end soon enough, and from there, what you do with the apartment (and/or the building) is entirely up to you. (The odds of a formal sequel seeming... um... slim at best.)

Of course, we're not quite to the end yet, and before we get there, you can be pretty sure that G'narsh will be buy this piece of property. I go into detail here merely to set the scene and to let any other interested parties -- i.e. virtual real estate investors, and or gamers -- know what they might be getting.

That being said (and the tour over), the primary purpose of this sequence has been to pop in on Stef'fan and visit his tattoo parlor. So once again let yourself go, and let the wind carry you along as it reverses direction and goes back down the staircase, where it will deposit us as a playful swirling mini-twister in the cubby hole of a studio that Stef'fan rents on the second floor.

(I hope you are enjoying these long intro's; they're what's driving the click count at this point.)

(I'd normally cut the next bit and redo it, but instead of deleting it, I'm going to leave it in and then rework it. It's not so much intended as a dream editing example (there are plenty of those in the -- Bonus Material -- at this point), but rather it is so you can understand and appreciate a new character -- Zen -- more completely (and why introducing her to the story at this late date was ultimately required -- and/or desired).)

Mi'lay sits on the counter of Stef'fan's tattoo studio by the open door. She is wearing a long flowing black silk dress that is not altogether present. Let the breeze -- that is, (((let))) your hand -- go up and down her long, smooth, supple legs. She's been in

prison -- perhaps in solitary confinement -- for a long -- long -- time. Her body arches to meet the soothing caress of the wind. It is a welcoming -- permission granting -- gesture, so continue up her body. Explore her flesh, her cracks, and her crevices (as only the wind can). Brush against her lips. See the desire in her eyes -- and perhaps notice the pits of darkness, solitude, and despair that they have become -- before flinging her hair into the air with a final -- friendly -- gust.

“A playful spirit has joined us,” Mi’lay remarks... and although it is much -- much -- too soon, we will leave Mi’lay behind.

(That was the first take. Now it is time for the second -- and final version. Probably nothing wrong with it, but it just didn’t feel right.)

Mi’lay -- we shall call her Mi’lay -- but my how the years have changed her (these last few moments most of all). She has cut her long hair (or maybe not if that pains you, but it will be shortened soon enough). She sits cross-legged on the counter at the entry to Stef’fan’s tattoo studio. Note the distinction. It is not their tattoo parlor. It is Stef’fan’s, but this does not concern Mi’lay. What does she want of money -- or worldly goods. Her mind is on other things these days. To wit, the gun, the plasma pistol, the pocket laser, the Tazer, or slug thrower that she is cleaning. No doubt the weapon is illegal, but she works at the prison (or could) and so has an exception. (You know how they are always granting exceptions.)

Whatever the logic ((or despite the logic)), Mi’lay is concentrating on the work at hand, and does not seem to notice as we glide along her body. Granted, her army surplus dungarees are not as becoming as a thin black dress, but underneath it is still Mi’lay. The legs are still those of a dancer -- tight, thin, and taunt -- and the plain black t-shirt that she wears reveal much... even more after we wrap ourselves around her body and give her a tight,

lingering hug hello. But once again, she does not notice, or does not care. As the wind tosses her hair about, she focuses on seeing through it, despite it, and beyond it. Her concern is that she should see the enemy -- whoever he, she, or it might be -- before they see her.

In confirmation of this idea, she draws another weapon, and switches it out with the first (which she holsters, thoroughly clean and ready -- a killing machine unto itself).

Mi'lay is still an elf though, and the air elemental about her has not gone unnoticed. "We have a visitor," she announces -- all business -- before she asks of it, "Any news?"

Anyone, or anything needing killing?

Any instructions from Bones?

She is as a ninja -- or an assassin -- preparing for the night. I cannot tell you exactly where this change came about (or why), though a person could guess.

(It is perhaps for this reason -- her change of heart -- that I believe we will let her fade from the dream. No doubt we will come back to say a final goodbye, but I do not think we will ask her to dance anymore. I recon she dances to a different tune these days -- perhaps one sung by the likes of Gra'gl himself -- if not one of his minions.)

(((And now months after I have laid down the tracks, for the life of me I cannot recall what was wrong with the first take. Perhaps I thought it was too soft... or perhaps it was Mi'lay who made this decision. Whatever the case, having made her (and/or allowed her to become) colder and harder... once I allowed the change, it took hold, and... um, ahem... this more violent, bloodthirsty Mi'lay no longer seemed to be an appropriate -- dance partner.)))

(((Whatever the case, whatever the rationale))), we shall leave Mi'lay and her cruel smile behind as we blow -- like the

wind that we are -- past the leather jackets, the antique smoking pipes (relics, and works of art that they are), and the small bookcase filled with hard to find printed matter (and even harder to find unrated discs -- along with all the other items and accessories one might expect to find in a head shop pushing the limits of legality). We shall not go into a full inventory -- who keeps track of these things anyhow -- but suffice to say that all the equipment necessary to install -- and therefore remove -- an electro-tattoo or UBI implant is also present.

Beyond the merchandise -- that never seems to change -- the most important detail (((tidbit of information as it were))) that one might immediately notice upon entering the shop is that Stef'fan is working on a girl -- or a boy, take your pick (but I will pick a girl, for I have a newfound desire to create a replacement for Mi'lay).

(((Once again, not really sure why that is anymore. Perhaps I should have left a note for myself somewhere...)))

(((Still))) unaware of these changes), Stef'fan's needle hums merrily along as he works a design into the cheeks -- back flank, upper right quadrant -- of the blonde (or is it the brunette, or the redhead). No matter really...

(This I say on the first walkthrough, but now, further along, it does matter, and it is the brunette. Take a moment to explore her form, leaning over the table as she is -- receptive and submissive -- as Stef'fan goes to work. Take in her long black hair, her tanned body, and the tight lithe muscles (of a dancer -- I must have a thing for dancers). Not a complete stand in for Mi'lay, but then, I am no longer sure how central Mi'lay is to the plot.)

(But back to where I was then.)

All of them, the three of them -- the blonde, the brunette, and the redhead -- have at this point each gotten one or more tattoos. No money has changed hands. I will leave it to your clever mind -- and knowledge of the black market -- to determine the source of payment. Perhaps it is an IOU to be sold, bartered, and/or traded away. Or perhaps, when you are implanting Gra'gl's brand on

beautiful young coeds, getting paid up front is the least of your concerns.

No matter the details.

(As the wind), we will flow over the young girl's body, as we take in her form, and (relish) the pain that she endures to become more alluring -- or simply in the hope of becoming more alluring.

When you are done with her body -- and I'm just going to assume that you know your way around the female form and can take that call and turn it to your own desires...

When you are done with the girl, turn your attention towards Stef'fan. Wrap your hands around his as you feel him work his magic. Feel the flow of energy as it leaves his fingers and weaves its spell of entrapment on the girl. Watch as the needle moves back and forth from the girl, to the pool of ink, to the flickering flame.

The flickering flame shall be -- Flicker. Watch as Flicker dances in your breeze, but even if we were not here, she would have much to dance about. When one of the gods of old draws power, they all do, and Flicker benefits with the rest. She regards the curse that is being laid on the girl as a man might regard a chicken he was about to eat, or a hunk of cheese, or an apple. Does a fire feel pity for the candle it burns? One's existence (by its very nature) requires that others do not (exist). It is simply the way -- the way that things are.

(This is an idea central to Buddhism, so I will elaborate on it a little. To live one must eat. What one eats another cannot. To recap: survival requires food, which is consumed in the process of surviving (and therefore which cannot be shared). Ergo, facto, sum, (whatever), existing (eating) means others do not exist (and/or eat). Taking this as a generalize concept, everyone lives at the expense of another.)

(It might seem simple, but you'd be surprised how far ranging (and therefore off the mark) different interpretations of this idea go. It's not really supposed to be complicated. If a snail eats

your food, you can't. It's you or the snail (or the snail's ever expanding family). Short and simple.)

(Anyway, one can take this concept and live on rice (eating little) and living in the mountains (on rocks which support little life) with the intent of minimizing one's footprint, or one can say to H\$rlk with it all, and conclude that one more death here or there can't possibly matter. What is one more, when I have already killed so many? It's the type of question G'narsh must have asked himself a time or two.)

(((Anyhow, that's the idea involved. Now, let's return to our story...)))

We have arrived at the end of the tattooing session and before long Stef'fan is done with his work. He gives the girl's rump a playful -- albeit painful -- slap and informs her, "All done. Don't forget you owe me."

"I won't," the girl assures him with a smile as she dances out of the room. (And, because I as the dreamer can do these things), in this moment we shall snatch her IOU from wherever it exists. Stef'fan shall not miss it, and well, if you're going to give away an IOU like that, you've just got to assume that it's going to change hands a time or two before it is finally redeemed.

(It started as a short sequence, but somehow it has doubled in length to a respectable 5 clicks. No worries though. Even though we haven't really moved the plot along much (the point of this sequence was (originally) to have G'narsh confront Stef'fan), tomorrow (and/or in second -- or two) we'll get around to that and then we'll be one step closer to putting this bad boy to rest.)

Zen and Now

(This sequence is more or less, self indulgent... um, ahem... bonus material from beginning to end. Take it for what it is. I feel like a dance. I get that way sometimes.)

(I'm also going to try this sequence as a Stand Alone -- i.e. something I could rip out of the dream and sell as a short. We'll see how that goes. You might want to notice how vague I make most of the calls. While it is true that I have a whole dream at this point to pull from, hopefully this little ditty will make sense all by its lonesome (and not be too overly vague).)

(Normally, this is something I might put in the -- Bonus Materials -- but I get the feeling that -- Zen -- is going to tie into the plot somehow, so it makes sense to include this background information on her inside the partition break.)

((You might also want to pay attention to how this section affects the rest of the dream vis a vis the increased militaristic backdrop/background overlay. Most of that flavor ultimately originates right here.)))

Times are hard... times are always hard, but now -- after the war -- they are especially hard.

Zen... Zephyr... Z'hen...

The girl -- the stunning brunette -- muses over possible new names as she walks down the street. She has left it all behind, everything -- the war, her home, her past -- everything -- even her name.

I'd like to tell you more -- about her childhood dreams, teenage desires, and even the family farm, but like I said, the war came and when it was over she left them all behind. They might as well not exist. Maybe they didn't.

Did I mention that it's after the war?

Rather than live with the memories she's decided to move on, start someplace fresh, and take on a new name. After another block she settles on Zen. It a good name, a crisp name, and a short name. More importantly it's the sort of name that says, Don't ask me my real name -- or anything else about my past -- I don't want to talk about it.

Which is to say, for Zen, it is an exceedingly useful name. And having finally decided on a name, it is only fitting that Zen now arrives at her destination -- an old run down warehouse converted into a trendy conglomeration of retail establishments and apartment spaces. The pathetic excuse for a rooftop suite on (((where else, but))) the top floor is hers. I could say that it's a long story about how it was made available to her, but I haven't got the time. Besides, I happen to have a knack for making things simple -- and easy to understand.

Let's start with the abstract.

After a war, or similar tragedy, it can be strange where the different refugees head. Some stay in the land where they fought, others return to the land they defended, while yet others try to get as far away from it all as possible. Of course, some of those who wish to return home find that their old haunts are now... er, well... haunted -- by real live ghosts of the sort that will never die.

If that dear sweet girl -- Zen, as she is presently known -- were ever to be in the talking mood, she might tell you that she fell into the later category, but it seems unlikely that Zen will ever be in the talking mood again, so you'll just have to take my word on it.

Having returned home from the war and then immediately deciding to move on, it did not take Zen long to consider that a college town -- maybe somewhere far to the south that was nowhere near the action and was therefore full of bright young kids who were bursting with life (and, having never seen the war, devoid of despair) -- would offer the most hope. An application here, a deferment there, and after a little help from the GI Bill, at 25 Zen was off to school for the first time. Maybe she'd make something of herself, pull her life together, and start to live -- again. That was the hope, but I suppose you had to go to class for it to work out that way.

More correspondences were sent. This time from the school, but there was no use responding. Zen was out, expelled for poor performance -- and/or lack of performance -- but along with the dismissal came another transmittal -- an offer.

It was from a guy who called himself Harry. He said that he had been in her unit (back in the war), and that he had a place she could stay while she worked out the details of her (re)enrollment with the administration. There hadn't been a Harry (that she knew of) in her unit (not ever), but she figured, as long as she didn't mention this little fact to anyone, she had a place to stay.

And if I know Harry -- and I'm thinking I do -- his thoughts likely took a similar turn.

If you try, you might be able to picture an investigator -- of the war crime variety -- coming around and asking Zen a question or two. "Know anything about a Harry?"

And Zen, tight lipped, holding her cards tight, saying, "He lets me stay here... You know," and then looking down, averting her eyes right on cue, "on account of the war."

No one ever says anything more. No one ever gets charged. After all, by the end it was hard to tell which side you were on, much less anyone else. If Harry said he was in her unit, he probably was, and if not, well then, maybe he owed her something.

I suppose -- given the proper motivation -- you can justify anything.

The bottom line was -- scratch that is -- Zen doesn't think much of it when she's offered a place to stay, even if it's for free. Doesn't much think about it either when she never sees Harry, never meets Harry -- and for her part never even bothers to ask about Harry. She doesn't want to be the one to set the ball in motion.

See, I told you I could make it easy -- simple to understand, and crystal clear.

For the most part, none of that matters. I'm just a long winded guy. I like to set the scene. We wouldn't have lost that much if I had started by saying:

Zen is a beauty -- a long, black haired beauty with strong arms, a fit body, and shapely legs. She works out -- a lot -- and when she is not running, lifting weights, or sneaking into the gym to use the equipment, she dances on top of the roof of the building where she lives.

Her apartment is a wreck. It's a spacious three bedroom with a restaurant style kitchen and a great room, but none of that matters (either), and even having said all of that (and tried to build it up), the place is still a total wreck. If the housing inspectors ever showed up, they'd condemn the place due to the rotting walls, leaking ceilings, virtually nonexistent plumbing, and frayed -- undependable -- wiring. As if that isn't enough, (for some reason -- don't ask me why) the balcony doors are jammed open. I guess she likes the wind -- the fresh air -- and (of all things (((-- grimace)))) the rain.

An empathy for the weather and the elementals might explain her dancing... and what she did in the war, but as to the later she's not saying, and I'm not telling -- no one who really knows anything ever will. But if you want a hint, you should visit her around sunset.

Every day it is the same. When the sun is a diameter from the horizon, she lights a pair of large -- black and white -- candles that bracket the west facing doors, and then with a quick jump she alights on the balcony railing before flipping herself up onto the roof. It's a flat -- gravel topped -- expanse and it gives her plenty of room to work her magic.

I like to let her warm up for a spell -- before I join her.

Watch as she gracefully moves about, as she twists, turns, and twirls through the air. You really have to see her to appreciate it. And that dress... tell me you've ever seen a luckier swath of

cloth -- tight in all the right places, loose, flowing, and insubstantial -- nearly nonexistent -- in the rest.

I don't know what she would do if ever she was ever wrong... or maybe that is the wrong way to say it. Perhaps it is I who would not know what to do and she simply doesn't care -- or knows that I would do anything to prevent her fall...

Whatever the case, whenever I arrive there is no time to think, for she has thrown herself high into the air... and over the side of the building. It is then up to me to catch her, to hold her in my arms, and to lift her high and whisk her away safely into the sky.

From there the dance gets a little squirrely. How do you dance in the sky? With the sky?

I do the best that I can, blowing her this way and that, and spinning her about. All that I know is that it gives me great joy to see her smile and to run my fingers through her hair. But as much as she enjoys this, I have come to watch her dance, so always it is too soon (from her point of view, at least) when I finally set her down again. No matter how long it has been, she is always disappointed. I can tell this from the look in her eyes.

Still, for my delight, she finds the will to run, twist, twirl and jump, but ever more throughout the evening I must stand guard, and blow her back to the center -- and the safety of the roof. I fear, it is but a game for her -- to see if she can get around me. I wonder if she knows how hard it is to double up and catch her whenever she manages to break through, jumps over the edge, and falls toward the ground?

I say that... but is it true? It will be the end of me should I fail, so diligently I hold her, and as always, I lift her high. I wonder if she knows how much I treasure these moments, when I can feel her, caress her, and run myself over her -- curves.

These flights of fancy are, of course, more intense on days when my power is greater -- when lightning flashes, and thunder fills the air -- but I will lie still all day long awaiting my love, so that I have the energy to lift her up high when her time has come.

Do not think that it has not occurred to me that our powers are matched -- equivalent, opposing but equal -- or that I am only able to provide the strength that she calls forth from me. As she tires, so do I, or perhaps it is the reverse. One need not dwell on it. What does it matter?

Saying that -- and realizing the uncertainty, the doubt in the moment that it implies -- I know my strength wanes. It is time for me to blow gently and cool her off as she winds down. Her scent fills the air, as does her hair and her long supple limbs as she takes one final -- playful -- twirl.

The sun has gone down -- perhaps hours ago. In distant windows, lights shine, and I can see those who would watch -- and those who would join (me, her, or both) -- but it is not to be. She is mine and mine alone, as I am hers. I could not -- nor would I if I could -- tell you to what purpose she has put me. We do not talk of such things.

We do not talk about the war -- no-body does.

But in the long hours of the night, as she sleeps by the open doors of the balcony, under the watchful eye of the candle's Fire, in sweaty Water drenched clothes, on the bosom of Earth, I -- too -- will guard over her to keep her safe, hold her from harm, and make sure no ill wind blows.

The tale is poetic -- it flows -- and I could end there, but in the night I must admit that I conspire with Fire. By his light, I blow softly across her body sweeping Water away...

And when I say she sleeps in the bosom of Earth, this is but an exaggeration -- being on the third floor as we are; and do we not dance on the rooftops, and in the Air?

I guess what I am saying is, although it would be nice to say all is forgiven and all is forgotten, or that I can even look beyond the occasional shower or bath, but (when all is said and done) if she were to ever take up swimming -- or water ballet (abhorrent thought that it is) -- there would be another war... or at least a

battle. I know this in my heart -- and perhaps so does Zen, my moment of calm -- before the storm.

(This is the second total lay down for this scene, but I still don't know if I've given the moment -- the dance -- its due. I mean, how could I? Maybe if you did it on your own and upped the ante a little by taking MM away and letting Zen give herself -- completely -- to the breeze, we'd come closer. You know, take over the breeze -- occupy it as an avatar -- and flow over every inch of Zen's body, through her clothes, and in her hair. There is a great deal of delight in there for both of you. Can you sense the delight? And/or its fulfillment? I know I can.)

(I also don't know if this works as a Stand Alone, but it is a scene that has been calling out to me (((for some time))). Not central to our dream... but then again, we will work some of this in. We always do. But don't be expecting anything further on a grand elemental war. Not going to happen. At least, I don't think so.)

(Anyhow, G'narsh and the rest have been standing in the park in front of the pizza joint and/or the tattoo parlor long enough. It is time for G'narsh to confront Stef'fan and end this senseless cycle. I mean, if you're going to go round and round in a never ending circle, there are better motivating forces than anger and hate. Perforce(?), I give you Zen, her alluring form, and an enchanted calm in the midst of an approaching storm.)

Tiger Splits

(The only reason I called this sequence -- Tiger Splits -- was to keep my mind on track and to remind myself that it is time to pull the dream together for the closing scene. I can really feel myself wanting to continue down the Zen storyline. Maybe we'll get back to her at the end of this sequence. Oh, who am I kidding? It's a darn near certainty.)

(I am also confident that you and/or G'narsh are quite capable of crossing the road and climbing the stairs on your own. Pad it out as you wish with townsfolk staring -- or not. They already have a pair of elves living in this town along with a girl who dances with elementals and... who knows who or what else? By now, I'm sure the locals are just as jaded as the rest of us.)

(And while we are at it, here is as good as place as any to point out that after a 100 odd years in the joint -- having paid their debts to society-- both Stef'fan and Mi'lay are -- innocent -- as far as M.O.M. is concerned (until they go and do something stupid, like blow G'narsh's head off.)

(Or, if you don't like that explanation, the crime was relatively minor -- compared to what many (some... or at least one) of the returning vets have done -- and the two of them are akin to visiting royalty and/or dignitaries from an important ally country (that helped our cause during the war... of course, which one I'm no longer exactly sure -- not that it ever mattered). The bottom line is, I'm sure allowances have been made, things have been smoothed over, and charges made to disappear.)

(((With all of the preceding as explanation and without further preamble))) G'narsh barges into Stef'fan's tattoo shop just as Mi'lay finishes snapping together the plasma -- beam weapon of death -- that she's been working on, and levels it at the troll.

"You want something troll?" Mi'lay sneers. "Just sit on his shoulder and don't do anything stupid," she advises Nadia when she notices the fairy start to move.

"You can't just kill us," Nadia objects.

"I'm not killing you. Not yet anyhow," Mi'lay points out. "What do you want troll?" and that probably would have been good enough, but just to be sure any murdering that takes place will get the ole justifiable homicide exception she angrily continues, "Killer of my people -- ancestral enemy -- why do you hunt me down and torment me so?"

G'narsh is calmer than you might think a person staring down the twin barrels of death should be, but then he's a troll -- he can regenerate -- and he's got that whole personal enlightenment thing going for him, so his mind is quite understandably on other things when he asks Mi'lay, "Aren't we supposed to be lovers?" (And basically ignores and sidesteps most of what Mi'lay has just said.)

"So now you remember? A thousand times through this Fr@cking thing and now you remember! It's too late troll. You're lucky I don't kill you on general principles," and then just so her threat has some sort of meaning to the idiot monster, she adds, "I'm an elf. I know how to kill a troll," (all permanent like), "so just say your peace and get out."

"OK," G'narsh shrugs. He has no time to figure out what's gotten into Mi'lay's bonnet. (She's changed. Leave it at that. Combat has a way of doing that to a guy... or a girl.)

G'narsh turns toward Stef'fan -- the same Stef'fan who hasn't bothered to get out of his chair or even acknowledge the existence of the foursome who has just entered his studio. In fact, rather than looking up or paying attention to his guests, Stef'fan is lazily flipping through an old picture book. Some tattoo design sketchbook is my guess, but it could just as easily be a politico manifesto, or garden explosive primer.

(Speaking of which (or just in case you are wondering), they took the doomsday device away from Mi'lay in prison. It was only a momentary addition to the dream and now it is gone -- explained away -- i.e. the thread is closed.)

(((Of course, if you really wanted to get complicated, you could assume that the book Stef'fan is reading is the starting point for a -- BOMB -- sub-thread. Not that I'm going to give you any further guidance, but I'm sure you've got a disc in your collection (somewhere) that can take this open -- TERRORIST -- call and run with it. And if not, nothing ventured, nothing gained.)))

“Take the sigils off of Eileen and Doug,” G’narsh demands -- when our attention returns to him.

Stef’fan looks at his manicured fingernails as he replies coolly, coldly, and callously, “Why would I want to do that?”

Eileen has never really been the cool sort, so this is her cue to hysterically shriek, “Remove the brand! I never said you could put the mark of Gra’gl on me!”

Stef’fan shrugs as he pulls out a sheet of paper. (Perhaps the oddest bit about all of this is that the piece of paper has a picture of Eileen’s tattoo on it. It’s odd when you consider that just two seconds ago I didn’t know what the picture (and/or the tattoo) looked like, but now I do. Ah, the wonders of dream magic.)

Just in case you are curious, it’s the same artwork that adorns the sign down by the street -- Tiger Splits. And, at this point it is only fair (or highly unfair) to suggest that Split is slang for... well, something that I’m sure M.O.M. would not approve of.

(((Perhaps the widest -- least defined -- open call in the dream thus far.)))

All the color aside, the important factoid out of all this is that the design Stef’fan holds matches Eileen’s tattoo -- dot by dot. “Is this what you wanted me to do?” he asks.

“Yes,” Eileen agrees, “But there’s nothing in there about Gra’gl.”

“No?” Stef’fan asks as he waives his hand and the magical sigil in question rises to the surface -- outlined as it is by a blue hue.

“You can’t do that!” Eileen protests, but once again Stef’fan merely shrugs.

“I can. I did. I will.”

In response, G’narsh cracks his knuckles as he clenches his fists in rage. He can feel the anger -- the ancestral hatred -- and the pure uncontaminated malice boil away in his heart, but just as G’narsh is getting ready to throw a punch, he notices that Doug’s actions are mirroring his own. (Not too surprising when you

consider that they are cut from the same cloth.) It is enough to shock G'narsh out of the moment, and give him the calm -- serene -- removal that he needs in order to pursue a more intelligent course of action.

G'narsh grabs Doug by the shoulder and prevents the boy from attacking the smug elf. "It's OK," he assures Doug calmly -- and evenly. "There's a way through this." (There always is.)

"Sure there is," Stef'fan agrees sarcastically, while Mi'lay -- for her part -- casually slips behind G'narsh. But rather than the cold steel of gunmetal that he was expecting, G'narsh feels Mi'lay's soft caressing touch. "I'm sure we can work something out G'narsh," she suggests sweetly. "One last time. You... um, ahem... know for old times sake."

"It's a trick G'narsh!" Nadia squeals automatically -- and warningly. "Everyone will die. She's a walking contagion."

"Stay out of this fairy!" Mi'lay hisses as her face contorts into a caricature of malignant rage, but within seconds she gets her features back under control and returns her attention to G'narsh... as she runs a soothing, supple -- erotically inviting -- hand down his chest. "What do you say? For old times?"

But G'narsh isn't really listening to her proposal. Instead he asks, "What happened? How did end up turning evil?"

Mi'lay smiles -- coldly -- as she removes her hands from G'narsh and once again draws her guns. "Get the Fr@ck out of here. If you ever return... any of you," she adds while taking them all in (and memorizing their faces, I might add), "you're dead."

"You heard the lady," Stef'fan responds coolly from where he sits. "Scat. The lot of you."

"But the Gra'gl..." Eileen would have finished the sentence by saying, but the Gra'gl brands, however Mi'lay fist has found her jaw. Pistol whipping I think they call it, but I could be wrong.

"We run a respectable business here!" Mi'lay remarks as she stands growling with fury over the prostrate form of Eileen. "Don't be coming in here with your requests for death magic," and then, after pointing both of her guns at the terrified -- broken

jawed(?) -- girl adds, "Unless of course, that's what you're looking for... death."

"Get out of here," Stef'fan suggests -- helpfully(?). And what else is there to do? Doug helps Eileen to her feet. He'd like to strike Mi'lay down, pound the elvin whore to death, but he's got enough control, foresight, and awareness to see the futility of attacking a heavily armed opponent head on.

Thus, beating a hasty retreat, our quartet departs.

(I'm always a little unsure about things when a proxy's behavior changes radically, but it is what it is. Mi'lay has already shifted once in this dream, if that didn't bother you then, I can't see as how another change could bother you now.)

"What do you want to do after they evict us?" Stef'fan asks his sister. "You know they're going to evict us, right?"

"Yes, I know," Mi'lay responds without looking around. "He's already got a replacement for me... the slut on the roof. I'm not sticking around."

"Right. OK," Stef'fan agrees. "Any ideas?"

"Troll hunting," Mi'lay responds habitually, but then thinking better of it, as she holsters her pistols with a twirling flourish, adds, "Maybe a Western. You still got that sniper rifle?"

"I can get it."

"Let's go then," and with that, the pair of them will depart from our dream. They'd probably prefer to simply fade away, but I think its more dramatic if they have to walk out the door and pause for a moment as they stare back into the studio tattoo parlor -- as if they are recalling all of the good times and memories the room has held. But seeing as how you've been in the room as long as they have, it's just a show.

"Gunfighters then?" Stef'fan asks as they disappear from view.

“Or hired guns,” Mi’lay accents (as if the distinction is important), and then finally out of sight, the pair does -- finally --fade away.

(I guess the beginning and the end aren’t going to match up after all.)

(Since we’ve pretty much given all of the proxy’s some degree of self awareness as to their state of being, don’t ask me why Mi’lay and Stef’fan never considered that one of the options the future might hold for them is for me to simply pull their access to my rig until I need them again, but I guess that would be kind of like sleeping for them, and as it is fairly likely I will be doing a Western before long... who knows.)

(Oddly enough, another blonde elvin heartthrob and her minataur companion are already slated for a western, so maybe Mi’lay and Jeanette Stevens will go toe to toe. Jeanette has already called dibs on the sheriff position and I think it was kind of obvious Mi’lay was gunning for the role of the villain. I suppose I brought the war to her door one to many times.)

Oh, and hey, as long as we’re at it, let’s get lazy. I mean, like really -- really -- lazy...

I’ve done like a bazillion more clicks than I set out to do, so I can’t feel too bad about leaving some important stuff off the disc. I mean, I can’t paint every line -- brush every stroke -- and if I do, you’ve got to expect some of them to be thinner, more transparent, and more glossed over than others.

I mean, let’s be honest for a second. In the Wandering G’narsh Saga alone we’re leaving all sorts of stuff out. The sheer magnitude of the traveling (the billions of footsteps that we’ve left out) is mind boggling, and then there are the thousands of encounters we haven’t expanded upon and the derivative conversation from each of those and so on...

I suppose we’ve been over this. That’s what your six pack is for. Anyhow, in that light -- and with that in mind -- I’m going to

resolve a lot of bookkeeping stuff lickity split (as apposed to Tiger Split, I suppose).

What I'm saying is, you seem like a bright young group of boys and girls. You've got your disc collections, your rigs, and (with any luck) a top of the line biological integrator -- i.e. a fully functioning brain -- so if you want more details than I'm going to provide you for any of the following, I'm sure you can work out the specifics on your own.

(Besides, I am going to add that segment with Zen on at the end, and when it's all said and done -- be honest -- which would you prefer: An expansion of the following or another scene with Zen?)

(I guess that's one of those rhetorical questions, because I'm going with the Zen material.)

(Anyway, now that we're all on the same page, let's crank out this boring logistical stuff.)

G'narsh and the rest come down the stairs and pause at the bottom as they try to figure out the next step. That's when they see the for sale sign in the restaurant window, go in for a bite to eat, or maybe Nadia just takes it upon herself to explain to G'narsh how it's all supposed to go. Whatever the details, before you know it, G'narsh is buying the pizza place (and the building) from Harry, the owner. Whether Harry is a human, an ogre, a nasty cross between the two, or something else entirely, I'm not really sure. After he sells the place, Harry will probably just stick around to work as the late night bartender next door, so I'm don't really know what's motivating him to sell the building in the first place.

Beyond that, another kink that you'll have to work out on your own is how G'narsh comes up with the money to pay for the place, but I suppose there's always a mortgage and/or the GI bill. Originally (and there's always an originally), the elves had given G'narsh a healthy pension check each and every month (so cash was never going to be an issue for G'narsh in this dream). But,

H\$rlk! I don't know. Like I said, (you'll have to) figure it out. Maybe Harry and G'narsh fought together in the war and he owes G'narsh (for saving his life and/or a gambling debt), or maybe the building is a complete and total piece of Sch©lte and getting any sort of money for it is a bargain. Or (and this could be real fun if you're using a skimmer), Harry might simply be desperate to unload this toxic (elemental -- spirit horror infested) waste dump of a building at any price (even if it cost Harry -- himself -- a few hundred/thousand bucks -- or whatever -- to sweeten the pot).

However you want to look at it, in .25 (going on .45) expeditious clicks, G'narsh buys the restaurant (and the building it's in), and then proceeds to evict Stef'fan and Mi'lay (who make the whole eviction thing that much easier -- having departed in a previous segment.)

The only loose end to take care of (in this sequence, there are still plenty of other loose ends) are the tattoos on Eileen and Doug ((and I suppose if you want to get picky, Eileen broken jaw. But, in truth, I'm going to ignore that last one entirely. Presto. Eileen's jaw is fixed. Turns out it wasn't really broken. Isn't dream logic fun?))).

Moving on then.

The magical brand is simple enough to take care of. Nadia will sprinkle pixie dust over the tats (((i.e. tattoos)))), which will highlight the sigils, and then G'narsh will work the needle (in a sort of reverse anti-acupressure sort of way) to remove the curse. If he makes a mistake, I'm sure Flicker will be right there to guide his hand. She was there when Stef'fan inked them in the first place, after all, so no worries.

There are plenty of other options as well, so if you don't like what I've outlined, try something else. I'm sure it will work. In no time, the magical curse associated with the tattoos will be gone (although the carrier patterns themselves will remain -- perhaps forever -- so I guess if you don't want them to be that easy to remove, you can play it that way too, but for me they're history.)

Perhaps that's all a little fast, free wheeling, and open ended, but it is the way I'm going to leave it. By the time we see G'narsh again an entire month (or two) will have passed, and he and Nadia (and perhaps Eileen and Doug, but probably not) will be working the pizza place trying to make a go of it -- and I suppose doing some repairs on the building to boot. Have I mentioned that the building is falling apart and is a complete and total piece of Sch©lte?

Yes?

OK, then.

Did I mention the radioactive - pan galactic - elemental - anti-necromantic - yada - yada - toxic waste dump that it is sitting on top of?

Sort of?

Well, I guess we'll leave the specific details about all of that for another disc. (((Perhaps not one of mine.)))

(Cause I'm feeling a little frisky, and its time to relax and unwind. It's been a long hard dream and I think that each and every one of us deserves a little break.)

Someone has given Zen a present...

Syntactically it can get a little cumbersome, because by someone, I of course mean me, and by Zen I also mean me -- and/or we. I don't want to be exclusive.

Maybe I -- I mean we -- should simply start over.

Zen, you, me, I, (and whoever else wants to tag along) have been dancing on the rooftop. Our legs are tired and worn out -- man, I just love those legs -- and our whole body aches. It's the good kind of pain though -- the happy, healthy -- pain that comes from giving a killer body a first class workout with a storm elemental.

Hold your arm out -- look at those long slender fingers -- and watch as your hand starts to shake from the effort. You're spent.

Time to go home, crawl down the side of the building, and fall asleep like you always do out on the floor of the open balcony.

But what's this! Someone has left you a present. Backing up against the low half wall of the roof, and overlooking the college town, is a Victorian claw-footed tub. (I pretty much have a Victorian claw foot tub fetish. You'll find them in all my dreams, but you need not concern yourself with that right now. Suffice to say that it is my personal preoccupation with this particular fetish item, which will serve as an explanation as to why we'll veer our attention away from Zen's body for a moment and instead focus on the porcelain bathtub's crisp, clean -- sanitary white -- features.)

Raised by silver (eagle's) claw feet, the white porcelain tub is brimming over with water -- it literally cascades down the side. The water is hot -- steaming -- and is no doubt kept warm by the dozens of tea candles placed under the bath. (There's a reason a raised tub is so important after all.) Floating about on top of the water are a dozen water lilies, a few floating candles, and a sprinkling of flower petals. If you take a deep breath, you will note that the water is scented heavily by cinnamon (as if someone had dumped the contents of a entire bottle (or two) of the spice into the water).

I don't know about you, but to me it all sounds simply luxurious. Someone has even put a potted plant -- a palm I think -- on either side of the tub, but in this wind (and in this climate) they're not likely to last long. Anyhow, it's the thought that counts.

It's amazing what a bit of novel stimulus (like a bath) can do to make you forget about your body, but let us return to it for a moment as we walk over towards the tub on shaky -- energy depleted -- legs. You -- Zen -- give your all when you dance, and now that it is over there is nothing left, so slowly make your way over to the water being sure to concentrate on your body as you do. Notice the stride of your legs, the way your short black (sweat soaked) dress swishes with every step (and clings tightly to your body), not to mention the way your hair dangles about your neck

and face -- or the droplets of sweat that gather at the tips of your hair before they fall to the ground, and/or trickle down your back, front, and sides.

You are very tired -- exhausted -- so stand over the tub for a moment and just take it in. Inhale the cinnamon vapors. Spend a moment looking around for your benefactor. This gift -- this tub -- could be from any one of the many (((window))) lights in the distance, or from the wind that even now comforts, blows over, and cools you down. Of course it could also be a gift from Fire (and the flames) which surrounds the tub, or the Water that it is full of, or even the Earth represented by the gravel that it sits on top of.

But you are tired, and don't really feel like figuring it out at the moment, so instead touch the water with your hand. It is warm and inviting. Slowly stand over it and take a step. Concentrate on the sensation -- the comforting and soothing heat -- that flows over your leg as you do this. Then put in your other leg, and just slip on down. Let the water envelop you, surround you, hold you, protect you, and (perhaps most importantly) embrace you.

(Have I mentioned that you can load up the bathwater and use the liquid as an avatar -- i.e. wear it as a skin -- as you drape yourself around Zen? Or for that matter, become one with Lane as you wrap yourself around her and become her sentient fur coat?)

(Undeveloped calls no doubt, but then, here in an MM framework, could I ever really hope to explore them to your satisfaction? Not to mention Zen's and/or Lane's?)

It should come as no surprise (then) when Water takes it upon itself to flow around you. It is as though a thousand tiny jets suddenly start to massage your shoulders, back, arms, and legs. Enjoy the sensation. Do not worry about the candles floating in the water. They will manage to take care of themselves. (As will everything else here. Your job is to simply enjoy. It is enough that you are. Nothing else is required of you.)

Add some soap to the mix if you like. Simple self indulgence ((((mine and yours)))) is what this segment is all about. So lift a leg out of the water and run your hands down its silky length. For many, this is the ideal set up -- to be both the object (of) and the desire (itself) all rolled up into one. For M.O.M.'s sake, you still wear your dress, but at some point you have to wonder which would really be the more erotic (to be clothed or unclothed). No matter. We shall only wash our arms and/or legs. (If you wish to take it any further you will be on your own.)

(Now where were we?)

Ah yes, those legs -- long, supple, strong, and desirous. Run your hands over them. Soap them up. Clean them. While at the same time concentrate on the sensations. Maybe do it again -- and then again. (Don't worry we'll wait for you. There is no hurry.)

I suppose there is more to do here, but having cleaned oneself, washed one's hair, perhaps even scrubbed down -- and cleaned up -- one's dress, all that really calls -- and asks for attention -- is the warm -- hot -- water, so lay back and relax. Let the mind unwind and worries of the day slip away.

There are things we could do here, things that we have done here:

We could have the cobalts arrive and attend to our needs by giving us a massage (they like doing that you know), feeding us freshly peeled grapes (the skins being so bitter), and/or standing over us with fans. Your slightest whim is to them a command.

Of course, what with the gathering storm -- the hail, the rain, the thunder, and the lighting -- there is not much need for a cobalt to fan us, so instead, we could spend a moment out on the roof taking a bath in the rain, and watch the wind as it scurries across the bathwater's surface leaving frenzied ripples in its wake. Which is to say, we could watch as the elements battle it out.

Or, just because Zen has been kicked out of school, doesn't mean she (and/or we) cannot attend classes. As she relaxes in the tub, perhaps she is looking over her note cards, studying for a test -- or an exam -- which she will never take.

Truthfully, this just sounds like a wonderful opportunity to join her and flip through a note card or two -- as we remove a few (final?) undeveloped ideas from our rapidly disappearing list:

Survey of Dream Ethics - Final Exam - Study Cards

Moonsighted Elves - Means What it Says - Undeveloped - Dead Trail

Grandpa Willie Bones - Maybe Went Hunting - Explains Hole in Nadia's Wing Better

Lane's Question - Do Proxy's Have Secrets? - Answer = NO!

Lane - Midnight Society - Open Call - Undeveloped - See Bonus Material for Guidance

Prison Farm Proxies - Like Kids in a School Playground Pretending to be Trapped in Jail - How cute!

Never Did Much on Contests - What's with that? - See Bonus Material

Flicker Nervous - This Is Her First Dream -- And it's almost over...

Farm - Twirling Cyclone of Leafs - Walk Thru - Enjoy - Experiential Segment Cut

Roof Top Dance - Join with Flock of Birds and Dance Among them - Tie in with Mini Leaf Whirlwind

Zen Bath - If Being Zen is too Twisted - Might Want to Be Bath - i.e. Water Elemental (We've done this one.)

The Doomsday Bomb - That Trail Hasn't Really Ended - Leaving Open at End - Albeit Watered Down

G'narsh as Woodworker - How about giving G'narsh a handyman gig at end? - Good tie in for a sequel

Prof Art - Always Disappointed in Dream Endings - Both his and Others - What does that tell us about him? His Dreams?

“My Dreams Belong to Me!” - Bloody Unlikely - See UBI

If a Dream Doesn't Make Sense till the Last Sequence - You're Telling it Wrong

If a Life Doesn't Make Sense till its over - You're Living it Wrong

(And I think that's it. There is precious little left in this dream of ours.)

(I should also note (to nip any criticism in the bud) that I am operating from the school of thought that it is better to include undeveloped ideas (than not). A capable mind, a spare disc, a functioning rig, and an open call should be all it takes to occupy even the most demanding of souls for endless hours.)

(And if not, what have you lost? .225 clicks (for the flip cards) and not a moment more.)

Still (even after our housekeeping detour), we have time enough to return our focus to Zen's body as she soaks in the tub, so as we do, sink down under the water. Let the warm liquid flow over your face, body, and hair. Stare up at the lightning that is

flashing far overhead -- high in the sky, through the water -- and wonder at the interface (the boundary) between the elements. And then, when you are tired of holding your breath, return to the surface, gather your hair together in your hands, and squeeze out the moisture.

Look around a final time. Take in the city -- the college town -- the clouds, the wind, and the rain, and then notice an envelope -- elegantly tied with a blue ribbon and sealed with wax -- that has (somehow -- mysteriously) found its way onto the brim of the tub.

Without figuring out the exact wording of the message, I will simply tell you the intent. A mysterious stranger has invited you (Zen) to the pizza place for its grand (re)opening celebration. It seems that a fire elemental -- a certain Flicker -- will be doing the closing dance, and your attendance would be greatly appreciated.

As you open the card, you might notice an IOU falling out -- something about (payment for) a tattoo. It would seem that both you and Zen have little choice. That is, of course, assuming that having come this far, you will both indulge me in one(?) final sequence.

All Things that Begin Must also End

(I am done with this dream.)

(((My mind has moved on.)))

(Let me wrap it in a bow -- tie a final ribbon around it -- and then we'll all be on our way.)

(((Except, of course, for the endless editing.)))

(((My how it seems to go on.)))

(((And on.)))

(((And on...)))

G'narsh is in the pizza joint. He is working on the stage -- constructing the stage -- with hammer and saw. It will eventually become his elevated office, but for now it is merely an elevated platform. He is hot, tired, and sweaty from his work, but Flicker is

scheduled to dance tonight and he needs to finish the stage. All the same, something stirs his senses, and he turns around.

Lane is there. Lane...

Perhaps I need to put Lane into context again. Lane, consort to the house of Chaos, right hand man... er... woman to Bones, and his enforcer -- judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one.

She arrives wearing her lovely fur coat. (Perhaps she wears you.) The Charlies stream in behind her as she walks through the door, but the most important detail is her arms -- two are out where they can be seen, while the other two hiding under the folds of her jacket are most assuredly holding twin-plasma beam weapons, a brace of laser pistols, or perhaps a sawed off portable fusion cannon.

G'narsh takes it all in. It is a lost cause -- hopeless. One can run, but they cannot hide. Bones has obviously sent Lane (to assassinate G'narsh for his betrayal so long ago). It is time for the end. What does it matter? He is but a proxy after all. He will be reborn.

But this is not what Lane has in mind. Though she approaches with certainty of purpose, death is not on her objective. She kneels before G'narsh -- I like to think that if MM were turned off (or M.O.M. were to look away), Lane's coat would slip invitingly open -- as she vows her eternal devotion to G'narsh (and forsakes Bones in the process I might add).

Do not look too hard into the scene for some hidden meaning. Accept the moment for what it is -- a childish, juvenile, wet dream of a fantasy -- with Lane kneeling at your feet promising to love, honor, and obey -- eternally and forever.

It flows and makes perfect sense (to me and/or to the mythos), especially when you consider that Nadia -- and her sisters (figure it out) -- float in the background. They do not seem to mind the prospect of an addition to their party, but rather would appear to welcome the company.

(Short and sweet. One down.)

At the beginning of the sequence, G'narsh was hard at work on what will eventually be his office, but tonight it is the stage on which Flicker shall dance, so let us jump ahead (into the night).

As always, Lane works the door, while the cobalts run the kitchen. Do not be surprised at how quickly they have learned. They have been here before (and have been doing this sort of thing for eons). Nadia and her sisters are also here and they serve the customers (with a smile -- and sometimes more than a smile), while on the main stage, Flicker dances.

She jumps around a ring of torches, causing them to flare and sparkle. Sparks fly and multicolored smoke of shimmering hues fills the room as Flicker dances this way and that. She becomes as a tiny ballerina, filling the flame, enlarging the blaze to fill the empty space available to her on the stage and then falling back to her more customary size.

We have done dance scenes enough. She is a fire elemental. What are the factors -- fire, smoke, color, heat, light, intensity, hue, and ___?

The list could go on. The dance could go on. Tell me you do not know what it means to watch a fire elemental dance.

(Short. Sweet. Ambiguous. I am sure a fire elemental wears no clothes. Perhaps it is easy to understand why Flicker was so nervous -- or why she is always so cold.)

(Or, for that matter, why I keep on going back to dance scenes.)

Zen has come to watch. She has entered by the back door -- this place must have a secret or two that I have not revealed -- and she sways with the music. (I suppose a dwarven band that I have neglected to mention plays in the corner. No doubt they are the remnants of some heavy artillery regiment left over from the war -- but that is a dream for another time, and another place -- i.e. now is not the time nor the place.)

Concentrate on Zen's swaying form.

Fr@ck!

Sch©lte!

H\$rlk!

(I'm sure we need a new word to describe the indescribably motion, allure, and desire that Zen's body conjures forth.)

I don't know about you, but I want her. Her body. Her love. Her desire.

Fr@ck the consequences.

Let us take on the form of Bones once again. Let us wrap our hands about her hips, as we move in close and press our bodies...

“STOP RIGHT THERE!” the ogre police officer demands as he pulls Bones away -- out of the scene -- and back to a podium during a lecture in a college server hall).

Let it flow. Do not worry. It makes no sense, but then has anything to this point (in your entire life) made any sense?

Art -- Professor Art -- Artismo -- Just call me Artie -- Art* and all that implies is on stage at the front of a giant classroom -- i.e. a lecture hall.

He is surrounded by the police. They have come to arrest him. Please do not tell me you don't understand why (((or that you didn't see this coming))).

We are flipping out, back, and away... (of the dream -- as we collapse levels in the process).

G'narsh 101 -- G'narsh: The Troll, The Myth, The Legend -- is but a homework assignment, a group project for a symposium, a case study for Dream Culture 225, or Ethical Studies in the Virtual World section #4556, but you can go too far, say too much, and at some point, you cross the line.

“What about the ending?” Professor Art pleads -- apparently the police have not disconnected his feed. It reeks of sloppiness, corruption, and departmental politics. (But then perhaps the department that is corrupt is the college's own Dream Studies

program (and all of this has little at all to do with the police). Who knows? Certainly not I.)

“The ending?” Art pleads again.

“Fine. Fine,” the police officer accents -- uncharacteristically.

“There’s a lot of unfinished threads,” Art begins.

“Keep it short,” the officer reminds him.

“Um... OK. Short,” Art agrees. “For your final,” exam, “identify all of the loose threads,” in the foregoing dream, “and bring them to a satisfactory conclusion,” ((feeling free to amend any portion of the preceding dream as required -- and/or desired.))

Without further ado. The police haul Art (and all of his derivative incarnations) away.

As the dust settles, out in the lecture hall Doug looks at Eileen, Mary looks at Stephan, and Nadia looks at Gary. (No doubt there are others. I will let you sort it out.)

“What kind of ending is that?” one asks of the other.

What kind indeed?

What No Partition Break?

We have one final scene, one final moment, and then I will cut you free.

It is later that same night. The lecture hall is empty. The only light (by pure coincidence and happenstance) falls on a biology lab skeleton that the professor has been using as a prop during his lectures for the past umpteen weeks.

In its hands, the skeleton holds a Magic Eight Ball -- an ancient joke of a fortune telling device. As we watch, the skeleton’s eyes flick open, its teeth chatter, and it gives the best approximation that a skeleton can of a smile.

(Gone but not forgotten, that’s what I say.)

(But we are not quite yet -- gone. One last moment, one last twist, that is all I ask.)

(Though to be fair, it arrives without any well developed foundation, so just let it wash over you. No need to be judgmental. It will never hold up to scrutiny, so clearly that is not its intent.)

Watch as the Magic Eight Ball reverts to its true form. Watch as it changes into the doomsday device glowing malignantly with raw power (in the dark of the night), and then watch one final time as it changes into a Holographic Brain Matrix.

Peer into the eyes of this monstrosity.

As you do, realize that all of the students have submitted their finals, and that inside this black ball of death they duke it out. No human hand need touch the controls. Rules ancient and arcane decide the fate of the proxies, and with them the souls they represent.

Perhaps this idea is not clear, so in an effort to clarify, I will restate the question and ask of the Magic Eight Ball, "Will I get a university deferent and waiver?"

The answer comes back simple enough:

Probably not.

Odds say no.

Don't count on it.

Try again later.

Or more accurately (and explicitly) if you ask real nice, submit your work, and beat the odds, the positive responses you might end up with are:

AI Studies

Matrix Simulations

Robot Controls

Proxy Development, and/or

Object Recognition (i.e. Targeting Acquisition)

All followed by a great big ACCEPTED stamp.

Whereas I think the ((most feared)) negative responses are self explanatory:

Deferment Denied

Report to your nearest recruiting station for commencement of:

Infantry Studies, and/or
Field Munitions Training

Good luck!

And as always, make the most of your time here.

Or, perhaps you would like to reconsider, swear off violence, and put in a waiver for a Conscientious Objector's Exclusion -- but then you know, we have ways of... um... making sure you're being honest with both yourself and (((perhaps much more importantly))) with us...

(Probably not the best ending there ever was, but then, that's why we've got 10+ clicks of -- Bonus Material.)

--- HARD BREAK ---

--- END PART 3 ---

-- COLLAPSE POSSIBILITIES --

-- RUN M.O.M. --

(And then, of course, we go back and edit out all of the exceptions M.O.M. has pulled up until none remain.)

P1 = 15.8 clicks in 5 days = 3.2 clicks/day

P2 = 50.7 clicks in 20 days = 2.5 clicks/day

P3 = 120.5 clicks in 52 days = 2.3 clicks/day

(I think I've delivered the 100 clicks I promised and then some.)

(Oddly even though my output at the end was at 70% of what it was at the beginning (pretty typical for me), I feel good about it all. Keep in mind 77 days (probably averaging 4+ hours a day) means I'm 308 hours into the project with several hundred more to go on editing and so forth (if I want to bring it up to a saleable level).)

((--List of MM/M.O.M. exceptions (not explicitly resolved elsewhere) and their cure--))

Problem: G'narsh kills Grandpa Willie in cold blood.

Cure: Point out, a) G'narsh was acting within the tradition of his clan, and b) the elves gave him all honors due a hero (which just so happens to include forgiveness for past wrongs.

Note: It's weak and it's cheesy, and it took a bit of doing, but eventually, I got M.O.M. to accept this line of reasoning... something about him paying dearly during all those -- unseen -- years, during the -- Wandering G'narsh Saga. I'm sure if you dig down deep enough into the code you can see his loss, payment, and retribution. After all, if becoming a born again disciple of -- Grandpa Willie Zen Master Extraordinaire -- doesn't clear the slate, what's the point?

Problem: When the caches are cleared and the disc is reloaded from scratch, the above solution still does not seem to satisfy M.O.M.'s vengeful heart.

Cure: When Art pulls out at the lecture hall, the dream collapses and all within it die. It is the final retribution, the final accounting, and all is over in a fiery ball of hellfire and damnation (((hence the G'narsh Ray's graphics on the final pull-out/credit roll))).

Note: And then we reboot, and forget about all this, because Fr@ck that! G'narsh is a good guy. But you do what you have to to appease M.O.M.'s vindictive spirit (even if that means

discounting your actions after the partition break is over to soften things up).

Afterthought: It is perhaps unfortunate that M.O.M. does not care how many innocents suffer, so long as all who are guilty pay for their crimes.

((--Editing History--))

First (cursory) walkthrough was done at T + 4 months, which took 5 days to complete.

Second (cursory) walkthrough was done at T + 6 months, which took 30 days to complete, give or take.

Between the two walkthroughs, I've got a list of 200-odd line item edits and flow issues that need resolution. Some of these will take but a moment or two, while others may require complete rethinking of entire sequences. We'll see. The most troubling sections occur immediately following (and for the next 20-odd clicks or so thereafter) the moment I learned I was no longer in the running of the competition.

Also note: one of the reasons to do two separate walkthroughs and to wait so much time in between them is to let the dream gel, let your mind forget any preconceived ideas you may have held regarding the material, and to allow your reactions to exist independently each time you do a walkthrough. No doubt, at this stage the dream still needs help, but it is possible that some of the weak points were specific to me -- in the moment -- as apposed to anything internal to the dream.

I expect we'll touch base again after this spot item edit process is over.

Two weeks to complete preliminary line item edits. Now it is time to move on to the more subtle issues of flow and cognitive stability.

After the preliminary edits we are at:

P1 = 16.4 clicks (net add of .6 clicks or 3.8%)

P2 = 51.9 clicks (net add of 1.2 clicks or 2.4%)
P3 = 124.6 clicks (net add of 4.1 clicks or 3.4%)

From here I will be doing a comprehensive line by line debugging to insure compatibility (and sell-ability). I won't actually do very much of this per day, probably only 1.5 clicks worth, because this is so mind-numbingly boring. We are talking code level work here. Anyhow, 30-60 minutes a day, and no doubt I will be making one final entry here in 4+ months... at which time I expect to be happy enough (or sick enough) of the project to begin my marketing efforts.

Four months later and I don't even want to be bothered spinning out a few final lines of commentary.

I found +/- 5,500 notable code line changes, which if you do the math, comes down to roughly 25 per click. I've still got 50 or so troubling spots where the dream tends to snag and hover for no apparent reason, but sometimes these spots sort themselves out, or become easier to debug after they've grown cold.

Anyhow, that's it for the editing commentary. Once those final few snags are fixed (and that in itself may take a month (((already has)))), I'll play the dream through a few more times, tag the best bits, and make a demo real, which I'll include in the -- Bonus Material -- along with everything else I've previously mentioned.

Then I'll send G'narsh: TML around to a few friends for commentary, let Melissa see it and get her feedback, and from there it's straight to the big-time, and the end aisle display.

Wish me luck...

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

(a work of fiction)

by

Kevin Stillwater

P3-E

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

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G'narsh - P3-E