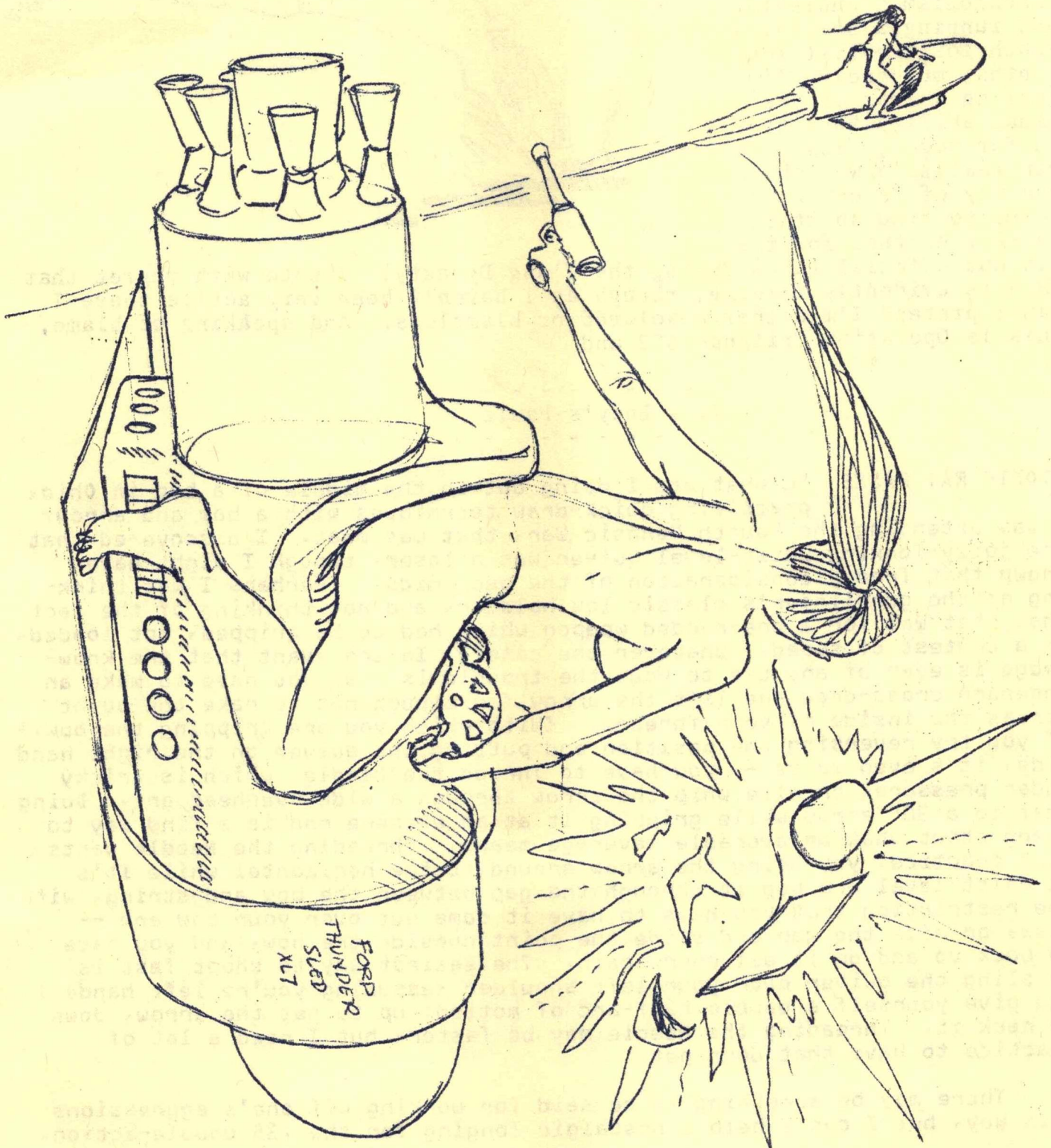


SPY RAY



Wilder

This is yet another ish of Spy Ray, bringing you quite a lot of blather generated under pressure. Between getting active in the Society for Creative Anachronism, fannishly, and running a seminar a month for the last four months, mundanely, I'm feeling a loss of the usual ability to natter on for pages, alas. Do you realize how much in the way of research it takes to find about the correct costume for the

various official ranks during the T'ang Dynasty? I note with regret that OMPA is evidently folding, though as I haven't been very active there I can't pretend I'm either desolated or blameless. And speaking of blame, this is Operation Crifanac 572 and



It's Eney's Fault

ATOMIC RAY PASSE So what was I doing out in the middle of a bog in Ohio, practicing quick-draw techniques with a bow and arrow? I was attending the Fourth Pennsic War, that was what. I discovered that the jazzy-looking waist-level quiver was a loser, though I might have known that from a consideration of the mechanics. {Perhaps I was thinking of the gunslinger's classic low holster, and not thinking of the fact that that was for a one-handed weapon which had to be gripped, not loaded, in a contest of speed. Whatever the case:} In the event that the knowledge is ever of any use to you, the trouble is that you have to make an underarm cross-draw and lift the arrow far enough not to rake the point across the inside of your forearm. {With which you are gripping the bow.} If you try reversing the position and putting the quiver on the right hand side, it's even worse -- you have to Thread the Needle, which is tricky under pressure, or else whip the arrow through a wide overhead arc. Doing that to a 30" arrow while gripping it at an extreme end is a find way to learn about what unfavorable leverage means. Threading the Needle wants much practice: you bring the arrow around to the horizontal while it's at waist level and pop it through the gap between the bow and string, with the restriction that you have to have it come out over your bow arm -- miss, or miss the gap and slide the point outside the bow, and you have to back up and do it all over again. The easiest way to shoot fast is to sling the quiver over your left shoulder {assuming you're left handed} and give yourself a double half-arc of motion: up to get the arrow, down to neck it. Threading the Needle may be faster, but I need a lot of practice to have that down pat.

There may be something to be said for working off one's aggressions this way, but I can't help a nostalgic longing for the .38 double-action.

The reason behind all this, if you didn't know, is that Combat Simulation archery involves shooting at three targets in twelve seconds: one at 35 yards, one at 25 yards, and one at 15 yards. It'd be about

that speed with which a formation of charging pikemen closed in on you. {Of course, the timing is done by beating a drum at the speed of a human heart...how else would you time something like that? I would bet that a charge of pikes was never timed with a stopwatch...} Targets change each four seconds, you see: you have four seconds to shoot at the most distant, then switch to middle range, then to the close-in one. Then you scamper back behind the protection of your own pikemen...err...well, that's what would have been done in practice. In reality, if that's the word I want, the targets are checked for hits at this point. Obviously, with a mass formation of archers loosing at their best speed, both accuracy and rapidity of fire are called for: the range isn't long enough to justify agonizing over the last second of arc, not on a man-sized target, and the time pressure calls for getting the shot off before the fourth second when your aim has to be re-done anyway.

I have a little idea for managing a less indirect contest between two groups of archers. At present the contest is one of scoring: the two Kingdoms each field a force -- as many as they can put into the line -- both shoot a round, and the greatest total of hits carries the day. {Of course it gives an advantage to the side with the greater number. How do you think wars work, anyway?} There is a little delicacy about setting them to shooting at each other, though in the West Kingdom they claim to have solutions to that. But after all, things wouldn't be realistic if we didn't have some way of scoring kills on appropriate individual opponents, would they? I ask you...



Unfortunately this time around the weather had different ideas. We were rained out -- at least, the missile contest was; pity, because the East had a good force, their siege engines were ingenious, and the competition was worth one War Point, which is just what the Middle Kingdom beat us by. Grump. Next year, maybe...

I say we were rained out, but I don't mean the war was. Despite

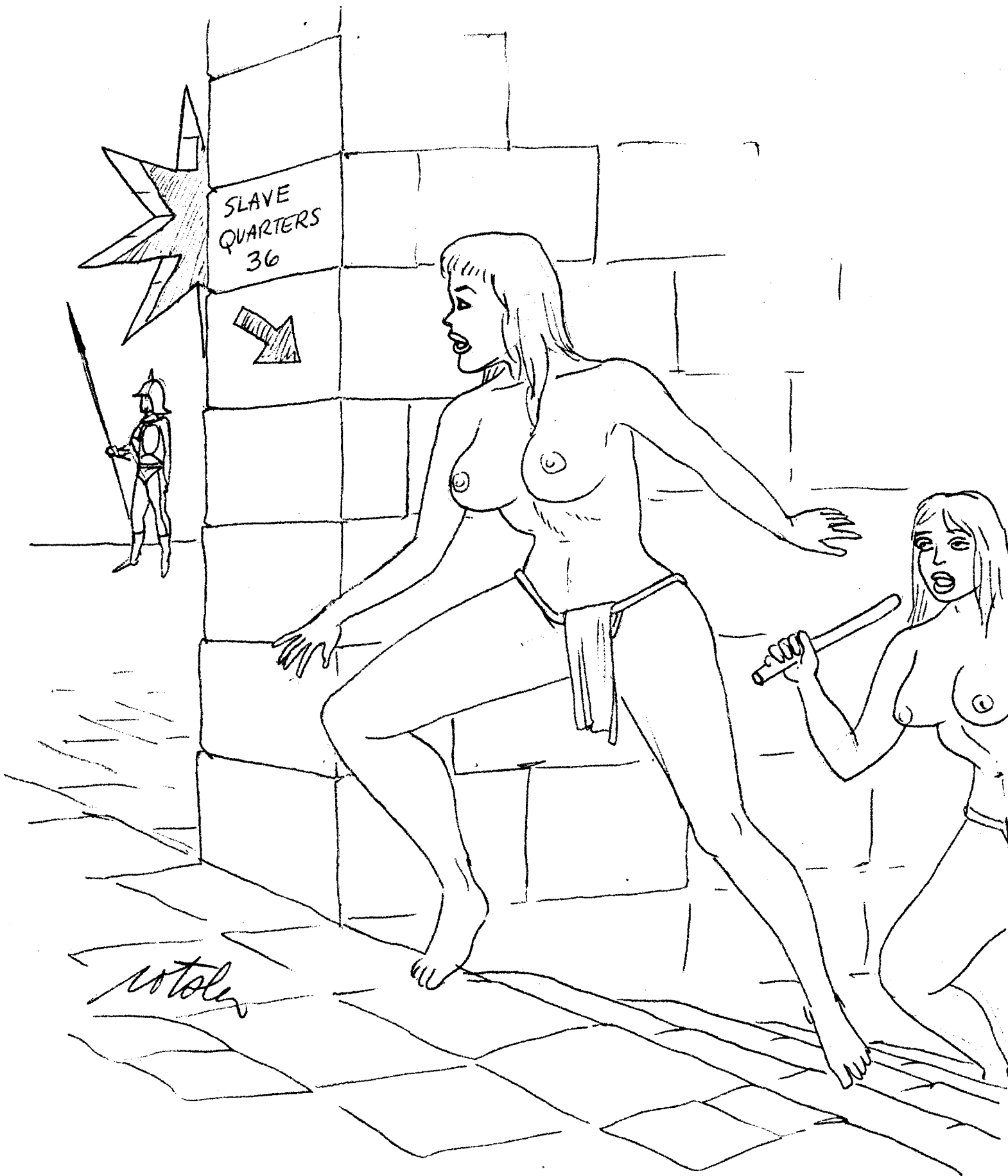
the fact that it started raining Friday about 8 PM and was still drizzling when my party left the War site about 7 PM Sunday, after several peaks during which a number of tents were blown down and one chap found out painfully, but nonfatally, that you mustn't hold metal tent-poles during a lighting storm -- after all that, and sometimes during it, there were various militant games. A formal fight in the woods, for one thing, with picked 30-man armies wading through the underbrush (and poison oak and hornets' nests, as it turned out). That was a Roman Standoff, with both sides losing one of their top fighters: the King of the Midrealm and the Tanist of the East. There was a general melee which the Middle Realm won, to nobody's surprise -- this was on their own home ground and they outnumbered us considerably. King Asbjørn of the East won the Royal Duel against King Rolac. In the Bout of Five ~~KKK~~ Champions, with special weapons rather than conventional sword&shield, the Middle won only two contests. Unfortunately two pair of contestants didn't show, so there were only three contests to win...

I was feeling thoroughly miserable for about 24 hours, until it became clear that my tent was, by golly, going to stand the weather -- I'd forgotten how much of a nasty pleasure it gives to see Mother Nature do her worst and fail. With shelter and even a tentfly to cover our cooking area we were a lot better off than many others and with our double-basket hibachi well above ground level could even call ourselves well off. By good luck none of us was a tyro at living outside or had health problems; otherwise things wouldn't have been so tolerable. (Truth to tell, for Effete Modern Civilians the Society members displayed remarkable firmness and good spirits: only one got a little fit of hysterics, and that when Karina Girdansky cheerfully announced that the tractor-driver was thinking of not getting anybody out for six hours so he could take part in the woods fight. Karina is a Sweet Kid, but sometimes she does defy sorrow a little too blithely.) We even had some of the neighbors over for supper and my first chicken-stew-from-scratch was a pronounced success. I wonder if I can get some baking done for the next contest? One of the Society members just published plans for making a bake oven out of a disposable Freon tank, and it would be kicky to have hot bread next time to supplement the *Yiddische penicillin*.

By Saturday afternoon I'd even cobbled together a little song to go with Lee Burwasser's ironic question: "Suppose everybody came and they didn't give a war?" We did it as a three-part round:

Very muddy, very muddy, Pennsic War, Pensic War! Come and drown
Very muddy, very muddy, Pennsic War,
Very muddy, Very
your foemen, Kings and knights and yeomen, in the mire, in the mire!
Pennsic War! Come and drown your foemen, Kings and knights and yeomen,
muddy, Pennsic War, Pennsic War! Come and drown your foemen, Kings and
in the mire, in the mire!
knights and yeomen, in the mire, in the mire!

If you think the mere idea of that is Bad, you should have seen Moira Maureen of Greenhill and Stierbjörg Wulfsdottir and myself getting Odd Looks even from the SCA people as we sang this while dancing around in a circle squeezing the air out of my tent, before we got things loaded on the wagon for the trip to Stierbjörg's family's home in Cleveland, late Sunday. The Society may be a little flakey, but Fandom can still claim pride of place.



SLAVE
QUARTERS
36

W. Tolson

ROUND AND ROUND FAR UNDERGROUND
BELOW, MY LAD!



I'm not sure how many of you have run across the game of Dungeons and Dragons, but that's another cause of my low activity level for the past half-year.

Those of you who know it may find this too simplified, but the others wouldn't understand it at all without some such outline, so:

The game involves sending parties of Characters -- who may be Fighting Men/Women, Magic-users, Clerics, and sometimes Thieves or Rangers -- into a...well, colloquially a Dungeon; it may be anything from the Pits beneath a Martian city through a literal prison-under-a-castle to open terrain (Wilderness, of course) to find treasure and fight off or with Monsters who may be Dragons indeed. They may also be: Brigands, gargoyles, vampires, ogres, balrogs, sphinxes...

The object is to gain wealth, which increases your ability to equip yourself, and gain experience points for fighting monsters and winning loot, which increases your strength and powers. It is, in fact, a blend of wargaming and Monopoly, with a strong flavoring of a potent mythic theme: the Harrowing of Hell. (I thought of that comparison before one of my Characters got into almost exactly that situation.)

The thing involves plotting and scheming, vastly attractive to all of us, and also -- not by necessity, but, given fans' interests, almost inevitably -- the development of suitable personalities for our Characters. Sometimes these even take off on their own; I'd thought that Kuei Yang would turn out to be a Greedy Banker type, very appropriate for a Dwarf or an industrious Chinese, and at the beginning of the first adventure he was trending that way. But then I played him alone a couple of times and in the last game he was galloping off across the landscape waving his +3 magical sword (which he had won by fighting single-handed against an Orc-captain three game levels above him) and bent on rescuing Sharyle of Vistol, one of my Clerics, who had gotten caught in a magical mirror. But let me tell you a couple of stories to give you an idea what it's like...

This is CONFERENCE CALL 31 and as I haven't yet inflicted any D&D stories on you what could be a better opportunity? I just took three of my characters on an Expedition last...uh, this morning, come to think of it. I suppose feeling fine after three hours' sleep is a touchstone proving faanishness. (In my racket we would say "an objectively verifiable indicator".) Operation Crifanac 560 and



It's Eney's Fault

THEY VISIT AND I VISIT: Lee Gold, Hilda Hannifen, and Ted Johnstone dropped by Washington in mid-June and so I finally got a chance to play *Dungeons & Dragons*. It was as interesting as they'd made it sound, too, even though Lee's *Dungeon*, Neocarn, is a toned-down version for novices.

Lee works to a rule of not over 10 per party, so each of us decided to take three apiece. Hilda's borrowed-from-Owen Magician, Fornholt, was leader of the party, accompanied by Deacon Bodeworthy and Icon, a mule who had recently turned out to be a were-human; Ted brought a dwarf fighter, Kondal, an elf-hobbit cross named Halver, and a cleric, the Reverend Dogbody Weems -- all experienced explorers, though Weems is too dumb to profit by it.

I'd worked up several characters in advance and after checking on how I'd done it (throwing for four personae, deleting the weakest, and Characterizing the other three) Lee accepted these rather than making up some from scratch. It appeared that some people had been making three throws and choosing the highest for the characteristic they wanted rather than, as was proper, throwing for features in a predetermined order. I misunderstood a number of things in the rules, but not THAT badly. From some reactions to blunders, though, I gather that D&D has progressed far enough to have some patterns for cheating and acting ignorant is one of these ploys, alas.

I was advised to take my two Fighters and one of either the clerics or magicians. Thus I started out with:

Iltar Yagellon, lawful novice human male fighter, 15-13-09-15-11-14
Kuei Yang, neutral novice dwarf male fighter, 12-14-07-16-08-13 but trading four of his Intelligence points for two more Strength points.

Tossing a die to select the third I lucked out with one I'd thought all along would be an interesting character:

Brilliant Jade, neutral novice fox-spirit female magician, 08-12-13-16-11-11 but trading, again, four Wisdom points to gain two more Intelligence points.

A fox-spirit, if you aren't that much into Chinese mythology, is a sort of negative lycanthrope: not a human who can take beast-form, but an animal who's

learned to take human form. The important differences are that Brilliant Jade is in her were-shape (and therefore magically charged) when she appears to be a pretty girl, with corresponding implications about her fighting techniques and reaction to magical detection and so forth.

TAJ gave me some expert advice and I wound up buying a heavy crossbow, case of bolts, and four silver quarrels for Kuei Yang simply because he had the most money in hand; then switched Brilliant Jade's one permitted spell from Read Languages to Charm Person, and bought her several throwing-daggers -- I had thought she could only use one thrust&cut weapon. After we'd started I thought of buying a short-bow for Yagellon, who has more dexterity than Kuei Yang, but this turned out to be illegitimate -- no purchases after leaving the Grey Goose Inn, where the expedition forms up. Mumble mumble monopolistic exploiters mutter grump free enterprise snort. But it turned out to be OK for Yagellon to buy the crossbow and quarrels from his companion and Kuei Yang added the loan of the silver bolts, which Yagellon couldn't afford to buy, for a purely nominal 50% per trip interest. None of my group had enchanted weapons; these aren't available over the counter and they couldn't afford 'em anyway.

Lee has several entrances to her dungeon and Fornholt opted for the escalator. (Never mind where the power comes from. Lee will have to tell you that herself.) No sooner had we gotten to the bottom than we encountered sixty cave-men, wearing sabretooth-tiger skins in evidence of their combat skills. Fornholt spoke them fair and they let us know that they Vanted To Be Alone, so we left them that way -- an excellent decision, since in addition to their numbers they later proved to be second-level creatures, with enchanted weapons and enchanted tiger-skins equivalent to armor -- they were being evicted from the first level because they'd become too powerful to live there. We proceeded east, dodging the odd monster, and found a room with six Brass Rats and a Typo, one of Lee's fannish monsters.

The Typo garbles speech and spells unpredictably, so we were only mildly surprised when Fornholt spoke to the Brass Rats and they began leaking milk all over the floor. Fornholt had tried to reinforce his friendly speech with a Control Mamma! spell and the Typo had made that Control Mammae.

"Shoot that deleted!" Fornholt exclaimed and those of us in the front rank loosed; Halver pinked it and Yagellon got a killing hit. This time the Control Mamma! spell worked and the Brass Rats offered us, to show their friendship, the answers to next week's Physics finals. Fornholt delicately asked for information of more immediate use and got a description of some of the neighborhood.

At this point Yagellon, being pretty bright for a fighter, asked whether the Rats were in their natural shape. Since it turned out we hadn't any Dispel Magic or Uncurse available I don't know what we'd have done if they had been under enchantment, but they weren't -- they were, as they put it, in as natural shape as college students ever got. Thanking them, the party left, started south and ran into a gang of ogres.

Fornholt promptly flung a Phantasmal Fireball into their midst and everybody else started throwing missiles, material or magical. [Yagellon got a good crossbow hit -- he's better than I thought -- but in the scramble which presently followed missed the chance to recover his silver quarrel -- out 5 gold pieces. Brilliant Jade threw a Charm Person only to find that Ogres, being larger than man-size, are immune to this spell.] The ogres were spooked by this attack and ran, with our party making warlike noises to keep them demoralized. That turned out to be bad judgement. The uproar we produced attracted a war-band of gnolls, about 100 of them.

"We're outclassed," decided Fornholt quickly. "Back through the Rat Room!" We popped into it, spiked the door closed, apologized to the Brass Rats, and kept going through the opposite door, which we also spiked. The room we found ourselves in appeared empty; Icon the mule used her animal senses to sniff and listen at the two doors which we located. Brilliant Jade tried to help by metamorphosing to use her fox-senses; being a natural fox, she only has to "turn off" her magic to resume that shape, but she was too excited to relax and therefore stayed human.

One door had knocking and a mumble of voices in Chaotic, so we took the other and found ourselves in a dark corridor -- one in which light was being suppressed magically. There was a steady thumping from ahead and we went toward it, as cautiously as you would expect when visibility had been cut to 5 yards, and soon found the noise was a gargoyle beating its head against a steel mirror.

We were now used enough to these collisions for everybody with magic weapons to open up at once. Yagellon got a beautiful hit with a silver quarrel from his heavy crossbow and was fantisted to find that nothing happened -- gargoyles are immune to nonmagical weapons, and silver is not only nonmagic but antimagic. Brilliant Jade threw a Charm Person, not realizing that gargoyles aren't "persons" in that sense. However, almost all the experienced members of the party scored and the thing fell dead before it got over being surprised.

We groped further down the hall until we heard an exclamation behind us and sensed a gang of kobolds, who had, I suppose, tripped in the dark over the dead gargoyle. Fornholt promptly set up a Magic wall across the corridor and we tried to get into some kind of order -- the corridor was too narrow for much maneuvering and the relatively weak Kuei Yang and Brilliant Jade were bringing up the rear. Before we could the Kobolds shrugged off the problem and took off to find another way to their goal, whatever that may have been. Unscrambling ourselves again we headed for the end of the tunnel, where a light was now seen.

We came out in a large room with a couple of obvious doors and a statue of a club-wielding cave-man. Nothing venture...Fornholt tried working the club like a control lever; the wall of the room slid back and revealed another room with a gang of alarmed ogres forming up to counterattack. He shut the door -- wall, I mean -- in time to keep them from getting into the room with us, but it seemed like a good idea to exit through a convenient door without much research.

Seems is about the word. We ran into the room from which the gargoyle had come earlier, and three of his brothers were still there. There was nothing for it but to have it out with them, so everybody with enchantments or magic weapons cut loose. Yagellon drew his sword and knelt out of the line of fire. Brilliant Jade, having been told by Icon that her attacks in were-form were intrinsically magical, ran to his aid and threw a silver-chased dagger but then found out that that wouldn't work -- the intrinsically magical attacks that Icon had meant would have to be with her natural person, not weapons. Making a few mental notes, she backed off, being too weak [S 08] to mix it bare-knuckles and smart enough [I 14] to realize the fact.

Meanwhile the gargoyles had closed in and hit Kondal, our point man. Yagellon felt too closely pressed to turn and run for it, though, having no magical equipment at all, he was combat ineffective here. Icon came up in her were-human form and both she and Yagellon got badly hurt mixing it with our foes before the gargoyles were finally killed.

We entered the room and spiked the door to take a breather while the senior cleric dosed people with Healing Potion and Icon did her Cure Wounds. Twenty-minute break, which Hilda used to call Owen and tell him how the game was going

and Parson Weems occupied by chopping up the gargoyles' dung-pile with a sword on the chance that there might be treasure inside. He found (a) one of the gargoyles had had intestinal parasites and (b) gargoyle excrement smells to high heaven -- badly enough to reduce him by three Charisma points. Then, still a little sore, we started again, passing through a couple of odd-shaped rooms with statues before --

Oops! Kondal flipped open a door and saw a Glorious Vision of Loveliness (according to Dwarvish aesthetics, anyway). He went all glassy-eyed and faunched into the room after her. Alarm and confusion. Yagellon, realizing that Kondal had been ensorcelled but assuming it was a targetted thing like Charm Person, started to move to get a shot at whatever was in the room. Fortunately our two Clerics counterattacked promptly and so forcefully that the Succubus escaped [through a dimension warp or whatever they use] before he could see her and be "caught" as well. Kondal was left gaping and feeling Deprived but with his life-energy intact.

Searching further we opened another room and found a Chaotic enchanted sword guarded by five spiders. Kuei Yang sniffed for poison -- his Swanson Power is to smell it with 50% probability -- but found none; they appeared to be five ordinary spiders. "About three feet across the legs?" asked Yagellon suspiciously. No, about three inches. They were visible against their white webs because they were jet black. "With little red hourglasses on their abdomens?" suggested Kuei Yang. No, grumped the Dungeonmaster, they have on their abdomens little yellow dots that spell out DICK ENEY IS PARANOID!

This cracked everybody up, though how our game-characters ever heard of Dick Eney is beyond me. Anyway, we shut and marked the room since nobody in our group had Fireballs or anything else that would destroy an enchanted sword. So try the next door...it opened on a band of Chaos Humans of all types with a bowl of silver pieces, wrangling over how to divide 500 evenly among nine individuals.

I had a brief fantasy of solving the riddle and seeing what reward we'd get, but, being a lawful party -- or rather, a party of individuals predominantly lawful -- we decided to jump them while they were surprised. Brilliant Jade threw Charm Person at one who was eligible and whose dagger showed him to be a Magician, but he proved able to resist; he threw something back but since she resisted too we don't know what it was. Several of them were wounded but Fornholt settled matters by hitting eight of the nine with Sleep -- the one who resisted that was the one whom Brilliant Jade had engaged, but he was taken out by missile fire before he could try anything else. Ensued an argument about what to do, while Parson Weems frisked them for treasure. They hadn't any, but the Clerics proved to have the brocaded gowns of high rank. (Filthy dirty, to be sure; Weems' charisma dropped to zero after he had handled a few of them.) Several of us were for cutting their throats, but Brilliant Jade -- partly shocked at this ruthlessness, but mostly faunching for a chance to work her spell -- argued for hitting a couple with Charm Person and then awakening them to ask questions. One of TAJ's characters then was granted an Insight: these people weren't originally Chaotics, they were the victims of the Succubus we'd just had a brush with, who had drained their life force and converted them to Chaos alignment. That settled it; Fornholt and Brilliant Jade hit the two clerics with Charm Person. To her disgust only Fornholt's worked, but it didn't matter much since, when awakened, the guy turned out to be confused to the point of amnesia. We had him tie up the other cleric -- still asleep -- and marked the room for future reference; if we find a suitably powerful Lawful Cleric in future we'll have him stop by and realign the others.

It was getting late, so, loading the sleeping Chaotic on Scotty the mule,

we started back toward the escalator. About halfway there we began to hear peculiar noises -- not exactly thumping, but bumping -- and listening at the next door heard some voices wrangling in Common but with Chaotic cusswords. The only other path we knew of lead through the Corridor of Dark and we decided to try this room...

Wow! The bumping had been five Second-Level Chaotic magicians playing catch with a fireball. But we were lucky in catching them dressed for sport -- in neat black-and-scarlet basketball uniforms -- and seeing them with a weapon to hand all of us cut loose with spells or missiles without more ado. Two of them fell at the first exchange and Fornholt promptly cast a Phantasm at these which made two of their companions "see" them spring up and attack the other Chaotics. The third was tougher and flung back a fireball which gave painful burns to Kondal, Yagellon, and Brilliant Jade before they realized that it, too, was a Phantasm; there was a brisk little melee then in which all three of the Chaos magic-users were killed, though not before one had hit several of us (including Kuei yang and Brilliant Jade) with a Sleep spell.

Icon did Healing on Brilliant Jade's burns, successfully -- Yagellon and Kondal had been Healed after the fight with the gargoyles and couldn't be magically treated again for a while. The dead magicians proved to have nothing of value on them, as we could have guessed from their being in playing costume, so we continued on to the escalator without any further difficulty, Brilliant Jade helping Yagellon along and grotching a good deal. After a sufficiency of this he asked what was eating her. It transpired that when the fight started she had thrown her Charm Person spell again. This time, finally, it took -- but a split-second later one of his crossbow-quarrels had zapped the Charmed magic-user. I'm afraid it may be several expeditions yet before Yagellon manages to find out as much about Oriental girls as he wants to...

At the top of the escalator we saw daylight, which made Kondal nervous since it should have been night-time. Fortunately our bad karma must have been used up by doing all this work for nothing more than some copper and silver pieces and three big onyxes: as we emerged a white-bearded gentleman in a prayer shawl, who was emitting the light, was just bidding goodbye to a couple of Golems. Being courteously spoken to he cheerfully Realigned the two accursed Clerics with a mere wave of his hand. (The wakeful one immediately began to blush like a stop-light as the memory of his actions while under Chaos influence came back.) We shook them down for a *pourboire* -- a 1000-GP check on a local bank -- and wended back to the Grey Goose Inn, coming out with 485-508 experience points each and 145 gold pieces. At least now Yagellon can pay Kuei Yang back for the silver quarrel he lost, and Brilliant Jade can have a craftsman make up an interesting little gadget she thought of during the fight with the gargoyles.

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"...With fifty per cent interest is ten more, making thirty," Yagellon was saying as he counted gold pieces out. "You really ought to get some kind of missile weapon too, brother; between your lack of one and our Manager's inexperience you were practically out of things."

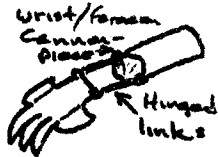
Kuei Yang swept the money into his wallet. "This inept person might be as dangerous to friends as foes with such a device, alas! But we also might give thought to a rule for selecting our targets, if we're all going to be shooting, so we won't...ah..."

The other two turned interesting shades of pink. "Yes, you eight-forgetter!" hissed Brilliant Jade to Yagellon. "That would be prudent for several reasons!"

His look of contrition changed to shocked surprise. The girl bit her lip and patted his sleeve. "No I wouldn't, either," she corrected herself. "But by Tao Chün's eyes, that made me mad!...*troi oi*, It Has Taken Place. Let's on to the next heading."

"Target distribution from the left, with priority for missile-users and spell-casters?" The others nodded acceptance of Yagellon's suggestion.

"Now, this is the device I thought of after that *rencountre* with the gargoyles," Brilliant Jade began, sketching with a piece of charcoal. "The cannon-piece fits over my lower forearm to brace the whole thing. Depending on the type of opponent I can slide my hand through the bridle-link either over or under the claws. Icon gave me the idea by mentioning that my nails --" she flourished them with a graceful hand-motion -- "might be my best weapon. With this I can strike at normal opponents with the metal talon, since it's in effect a three-bladed dagger. Then if necessary I can slip three fingers under the thing and use it on anything that needs to be hit by magical weaponry. My thumb and least finger grip the flanges for extra bracing in that case, and the metal backing acts as the body of a knife-blade of which my fingernails are the cutting edges. Also keeps me from breaking 'em," she added serenely.



"This individual lacking in wisdom is not competent to follow your respected argument", said Kuei Yang. "Mean you that this device will be an enchanted weapon?"

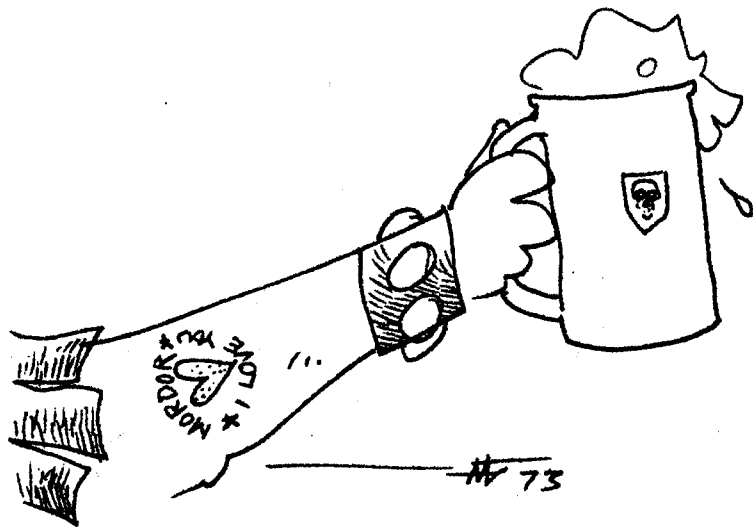
"Not exactly", she smiled. "When I'm in were-form, as I am now, in effect I am an enchanted weapon. Iltar, if you make that pun I will zap you." (Yagellon subsided, murmuring something that sounded like "Disclaimer!") "It appears that I have to use my, uh, natural weapons to have an effect on other magical creatures, but there's nothing wrong with artificial aids -- the others were using ordinary bows to shoot enchanted arrows, and this device only gives reinforcement to my hand and claws. Nails, I mean. ... Now, is there anything else we ought to settle before dinner?"

"One thing more," offered Kuei Yang after a moment's thought. "Next time, tell the chronicler to make up his Mind about that Use of Capital Letters. This person keeps getting a feeling that our Manager has secret Chaotic sympathies himself, some times..."

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Rereading, I realize I made one too many assumptions. If you don't already know D&D, you don't know that Characters are generated by throwing dice for their Requisites, and that's what the strings of numbers following the characters' names on the first page stand for. They represent, in sequence, Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Constitution (= resistance to hardship and disease), Dexterity, and Charisma (= ability to persuade and develop loyalty).

This is DEPTH PERCEPTION
 1, an intermittent D&D
 fanzine from Dick Eney
 at 6500 Ft. Hunt Rd.,
 Alexandria, Va. 22307.
 Some of the stuff in it
 is: expedition reports,
 drafts of new rules (I
 have a dilly cooked up
 for next time) and draft
 Monsters from hither and
 yon. I still haven't
 gotten far with a joint
 Dungeon design, but the
 accompanying City is
 coming along nicely. Operation Crifanac. 565 and



 It's Eney's Fault

ON THE ROAD TO ENDOR Sherna had been looking for a Dungeon in the New York area -- there don't seem to be any in New Jersey at all -- so she could get some experience before doing actual design work. (I mean ground-plan design; she has already got some splendid Monsters from Ireland and elsewhere.) The one she located nearest to Hackettstown was run by NYfan Steve Tihor. Steve runs his by Greyhawk rules rather than basic D&D, but the descriptions of Endor sounded very interesting...

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Neither Iltar Yagellon nor Brilliant Jade were experienced enough to be quite comfortable in the presence of total strangers Managed by a youngish group of fans we had never met, especially since they were letting us join an ongoing Expedition which had made several earlier trips. But everybody was friendly and Iltar was soon swapping lies with Varmint, a Fighter, and a higher-level Hobbit Thief whose name he didn't catch. There was also a Cleric and another Fighter who were a bit more reticent. Brilliant Jade hit it off immediately with a tall, good-looking young woman (*Sherna's Character*) and they fell to admiring one another's clothing with enthusiasm. As Magic-users both had to rely on leather, but the Chinese girl had made hers into a brigandine covered with scarlet silk, while her new acquaintance had form-fitting *cur-bouille* inset with enamel medallions. Before the Expedition arrangements began they had gotten to the friendly -- for Magic-users -- point of exchanging names: Chang Yü-ming, Brilliant Jade Chang, and Merlinden of the Sidhe.

While the Managers were filling out Character information sheets and rolling for supplementary qualities* Brilliant Jade introduced Iltar to Merlinden. It's no use worrying now whether she erred in praising her friend's beautiful armor or he in studying the details with such obvious admiration...for that matter, perhaps Merlinden was to blame for blushing with pleasure at all this attention. (It was her first Expedition and she was not only nervous about that but also upset over having to go as a Magic-user rather than a Fighter.)

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*Steve plays Luck, Greed, and Egotism as Requisites, too.

At any rate, there were two problems in the arrangements: the Second Level of Endor is about half water, and the party was rather large. For the first, we finally decided to take a breakdown four-person boat on a wheeled cart. (It proved less clumsy than we'd feared.) For the second, all the players were asked to limit themselves to one Character. Brilliant Jade mischievously offered to lower the primary Character count by hiring Iltar, on the grounds that she had a higher Egotism rating and more money than he did and besides it would be unseemly to do it the other way around. He was about to counter that he had a higher Charisma than *she* did when his internal alarm went off to warn him that this had better not be treated as a status conflict: he switched quickly to a burlesque argument over terms and they agreed, in good humor, on 50 gold pieces a month. ("Prorated!" he specified.)

Endor has a stairway entry; at the bottom we found ourselves in a room with several symbol-tagged doors. The others, working over a scheme they'd developed from their earlier experience, chose one marked with a flame-symbol and flung open the door on nine Orcs. We swarmed all over them and Iltar scragged one before a pair of survivors fled. Easy enough.

Now we three neophytes watched while the others worked with Tokens, an interesting invention of Steve's which are a sort of second cousin to amulets. Dropping a couple onto the flame-symbol we found inset in the floor made it light up with an eerie glow, but nothing more. Our Cleric (I think it was) then dropped a Key on the symbol. *Foomp!* A real flame sprang into existence above the inlaid one.

Varmint, feeling secure with his 39 Hit Points, jumped right through the flame and took 10 hits but got an Unlimited Wish in exchange. [He'd asked for the chance to win one beforehand, and had it all worked out.] The rest of us, more cautiously, worked around it along the wall -- it was hot, but bonfire-hot: the sort of thing we could get past if we didn't loiter and kept as far off as possible. The boat on its little two-wheel towcart barely made it. As soon as we got past we noticed the bubble floating down the hall toward us. Almost on us, in fact. The Hobbit popped it with a flung rock and, going forward stealthily, found a jewel on the floor where it had burst, which he automatically picked *ouch!* It was a Jewel of Brilliance, which flashed blinding light into his eyes (blinded 4 turns, then disturbed vision even longer). Being no quitter, he popped a pouch on his hand mitten fashion and felt around until he could pick it up and bag it that way.

Another door opened to show us another length of corridor, this one containing a chest. Too good to be true. No traps, but someone thought to test the 100 gold pieces inside with a Token and it disappeared. A false bottom revealed 9 GP which were real. Now we learned that this group practiced dividing loot after every encounter, with the general pool being left to build up until it could be shared out.

The door at the end of the corridor gave the sound of unintelligible voices, but there was no other exit, so we tried that. The reason the voices were unintelligible, it turned out, was that the seven Orcs playing cards there were at least two sheets in the wind's eye. We killed six before one managed to escape and found a poker[?] game had been in progress, with 50 GP in table stakes. This seemed suspiciously mundane. Could the Orcs' bottles be Potions? Yech! They weren't even White Mule. The Orcs had been playing some game with a pack of 16 cards...our Cleric caught on. That was the number of cards in a Magic Deck. He tapped it together, drew a card, and promptly dropped dead, with the Queen of Spades falling from his hand.

After a little haggling Varmint agreed, in return for the 50 GP in loot from this

incident, to jump through the flame and see if he could get another Wish. It worked; he took 3 HP, and got only a limited Wish, but that was enough to revive the victim.

Merlinden had wondered about the bubble before and was suspiciously watching the door at the inner end of the corridor. Sure enough, as Varmint jumped through the flame the door popped slightly open and a bubble came through. She pointed it out and Iltar got it neatly with a one-handed shot from the hip with his heavy crossbow, the full length of the corridor. He's a good shot, but that was pure luck. Still, Merlinden didn't know that and told him admiringly that even by Elven standards of marksmanship that was nicely done. He cheerfully thanked her as they searched for anything the bubble had left (it had been empty), and one word led to another. She explained that she was three-quarters Elvish, her grandfather having been a Super-Hero who visited one of the *Sidhe* mounds -- so that her role as a D&D character was partially inheritance. She had most of the Elves' sensory advantages and, with her background, naturally wasn't as uncomfortable underground as many Elves are. Some other characteristics he noted were a healthy and ready smile and a pleasant sturdy shape. By the Elven canon of beauty, of course, she was built like a lady wrestler, but for a female Fighter she was just right. It had, in fact, been her idea to work as a Fighter, she explained; having been raised in an elf-mound magic seemed rather workaday stuff...

Meanwhile, those of the party who were sticking to business had been proceeding. Our Cleric, being revived, had divided his 28 GP among us to make up for the loss of the 50 GP in Orc-loot. Brilliant Jade had offered Varmint a shot of the Healing Potion she'd borrowed from Kuei Yang, but he thought he'd pass it up until he was worse off -- this band certainly were comparatively indifferent to damage, relative to other D&Ders. We went back through a slice of corridor, a door, another slice of corridor, another door (the card-game room), another slice of corridor, another door.

Or...everybody there learned at least two new words in the next few moments, but the volume and imagination of the cussing reassured us; our point man had taken only 2 hit points from a 30-foot fall. While he liberated his emotions we probed and found that what looked like a solid floor was illusion. Well, what the hell: were't we going down anyway? Spike into the floor, loop of rope around it, and down we went. ("You never know when you'll need a bit of rope", Merlinden quoted cheerfully to the Hobbit.) The boat wasn't too hard to handle. There was a stream immediately ahead of us and we were starting toward it when five armored warriors marched around the corner. They answered a greeting but then Iltar asked their alignment, which wasn't good judgement because they instantly drew steel and came at us. Well, that wasn't such good judgement either: Iltar had his heavy crossbow lined on the point man and let him have it right through the breastplate at spitball range, dropped the bow and lugged out. In the same moment the room was lit up by a snowflake-white flare as the Hobbit, cupping his hands around the thing to shield us from it, triggered the Jewel of Brilliance against them. Unfortunately only one was blinded; at a guess the others were ducking their heads or flinching from the crossbow-shot instinctively.

That made it three on three. Iltar, with two pretty girls to Impress, was ego-tripping to some effect; sword to sword he took on a Fifth-level Fighter in plate and killed his man with only a few scratches for himself, and finished matters by punching out the blinded one (who was slashing wildly at random) with the crossbow.

The other Fighters had gotten their men, too, but with more trouble. Brilliant Jade now insisted on Varmint taking a slug of Healing Potion, curing 7 points on

him. Meanwhile the rest of us searched the bodies and found 278 GP, a black key, a scroll, and a codex plus five nonaligned daggers. (Brilliant Jade nobbled two well-balanced ones for throwing.)

Iltar wanted to leave the codex closed until it could be divined, but the Hobbit boldly started to read it. The first four leaves were 500-GP bearer drafts on the Bank of Endor, then orders to a detachment of guards to secure "the treasure island" followed, and then a map.

That was too good to pass up. We ferried over the stream in the boat, carrying the engraved breastplate of the leader of the fighters we'd just mopped up. It had a conspicuous "K" rune, so nobody was eager to try actually wearing the thing, but for a while it magically opened doors for us while we followed orders. The way began to get more difficult after a while and we reached a flight of stairs which didn't show on the map. Varmint took the precaution of having us rope ourselves together before we went up and, sure enough, the landing at the top was an illusion, but the rope prevented a fall. The steps on the other side were solid, according to a probe with a pole. Merlinden, with Elven speed and agility, got a running start by bounding up the stairs on our side and vaulted the ten-foot gap. Iltar let out a cheer before he noticed Brilliant Jade's expression...

We rigged a ropewalk bridge and crossed, then paused to examine the codex for clues to these stairs...had we gone through a teleport without noticing? There had been a stream without side walkways underneath, but we didn't examine it. Carefully copying the map, we turned further, extracted a 10,000-GP bank draft, and found that, sure enough, the pages couldn't be turned back, so we decided not to fool with it any more for a while. It hadn't been a teleport problem, apparently, for we found another door at an indicated place. Evidently there were tricks known only to the Chaotic guards involved in the stair trap. The door, however, opened all right for the breastplate plus the black key and we found the edge of a lake as the map had indicated.

There were several islands visible further out in the water, so we set up the boat and started a wolf-sheep-and-cabbage shuffle to see who would go. Iltar stayed behind the first time, since his heavy crossbow could give covering fire as far as the nearest island at need. Naturally, what happened was that two Wraiths attacked the shore party. Naturally, because with no magic weapons Iltar was helpless against Undead and the enchanted arms, as being the most potent, had gone with the boat party. Our Cleric, however, called on his Power full blast and turned both away. Meanwhile the boat party had stepped ashore on the smaller or the near islands and flushed a Rust Monster. They had the wit to throw daggers for it to chew on while they pushed off -- Rust Monsters can't swim, a good thing to know -- but there was nothing to be seen on the island so, in several trips, we went over to the larger one.

Here Brilliant Jade insisted on another slug of healing potion for Varmint, since we were on the Second level and there was a large building before us of ominous appearance. It did another 7 points of cure; Cerridwen the Chemist obviously knows her stuff.

We entered and crept around stealthily, finding nothing of importance outside a large central room in which some unpleasantly ecclesiastical-sounding chanting was going on. Let's try that. Our Hobbit stealthily managed a peek and saw a group of three Chaotic clerics, all rather well dressed. This was getting heavy; if one of them was an Evil High Priest he might have the Finger of Death and be able to abolish the lot of us. But we certainly weren't going to slink

off without trying conclusions with them.

This time, remembering his accidental shooting of a Magic-user who had just been charmed (during his last trip) Iltar set up a distribution of fire rule: all the fighters to shoot the central figure, presumably the leader and most likely to resist a spell; our Cleric to throw his powerful Hold Person at the Priest on the left, which as everybody knows is the position of honor among Chaotics; and Brilliant Jade to hit the other with her Charm Person. Merlinden, puzzled by this fancy organization, asked why; he blushed but only explained that it was due to an unfortunate earlier experience. He didn't look around when Brilliant Jade stifled a giggle, which was a pity; the look she gave him would have been worth +2 morale.

The idea worked perfectly; we crept up, bounced them, and got all three on the first melee round while they were surprised: killed the Evil High Priest (for he had indeed been one) and Held or Charmed the other two. Iltar's pride at the success of his tactics was a little moderated by the fact that he had been paying so much attention to the rest that he missed his own shot, and at close range at that.

The Evil High Priest had a small pouch of dust and a Book. Searching the others we found one Scarab of uncertain properties...

Damn, this was a bad place for Undead! Two Shadows came swooping at us and we dropped everything to fight them off, commanding the Evil Priests to use their spells as well as our own magic weapons. Both of them had Magic Missile and among us we killed both Shadows; Brilliant Jade had hesitated a second about forcing her Evil Priest to use his spell, but then realized that if we burned out a couple of Chaotics it was small loss.

Then our Cleric slumped to the floor and one of the Evil Priests registered astonishment and began to build a spell. Varmint jumped forward and stamped on something and yelled an alarm. We had to kill the Evil Priest; our Cleric, who had been Holding him, had tried to sneak a look at the Evil High Priest's book and instantly died. (Varmint had set his foot on the book as it fell, before it could flop open.)

Tapping and poking we found a few odds and ends and a couple of secret doors in a pillar. Our Hobbit, feeling he had to do his bit since he'd only spied on the Priests, opened these with his Thievish skills and turned pale. Inside was a Level IX Spirit Naga, sleeping.

He volunteered to go in and kill it, using his Gem of Brilliance and stealth powers. It was as daft a ploy as I've heard of -- and Hobbits are supposed to be so level headed, too -- but despite all any of us could say he went in, closed the door, and started to do his thing. Merlinden perceived the Naga's life-force suddenly start dropping in great swoops and flicker out. We opened the door and found that he'd actually gotten away with it: blinded the thing successfully with the Jewel (good thing for him, since Spirit Nagas have some nasty things they can do with their Gaze) and then hacked through its neck. He'd been battered black and blue as the monster whipped around inside the room, but nothing worse than the odd broken bone here and there. We gave him a subdued but hearty cheer and a slug of Healing Potion which restored even that damage. Recovering the bottle, Brilliant Jade briefly looked startled and shook it. No slosh. Kuei Yang hadn't told us* that he'd used one of the four doses on himself in an earlier adventure.

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*Nothing sneaky; he'd simply forgotten.

The Naga's eyes were gems worth 500 GP each, and the room contained a chest with 19,000 silver pieces. A secret panel concealed 3 phials of potions: Fire Resistance, Heroism, and Giant Strength, or so their labels said. Also two scrolls, or maps, which the two Magic-users drew lots for: Brilliant Jade, while Iltar winced silently, risked a look at hers and found it was a Level VII Limited Wish with one shot.

We took a rest while solving the problem of divvying up the silver: not financially, but as packloads. We hadn't had to worry previously, but this was too much to assume that somebody had slipped it in a pocket. Before too long we began to feel curious, somewhat uncanny, sensations and then realized that we were getting some odd things happening to our senses; hearing bass and treble noises not quite at the edge of detection and seeing funny effects in our visual fields, as if objects were either surrounded by polychrome auras or going a washed-out pastel. That's a disquieting thing to have happen in a Chaos temple, but the others knew what was taking place. Our Experience Points were beginning to catch up with us* and our nervous inputs and apperceptions were having trouble keeping in sync.

By the time we started back Brilliant Jade had recollected her studies of the Sleep spell, which was lucky; a Carrion Crawler came up on us from behind and she zapped it with that. Up and down and through more corridors until the Evil Priest, whom we had waiking point, blundered into a Gelatinous Cube. The others knew just what to do: set it afire. Gelatinous Cubes must be heavily nitrated, because this one didn't use up our oxygen. Brilliant Jade started to keel over and Merlinden caught her, panicking a little, but it was nothing really serious; she hadn't seen what was going on at the front of the column and almost held on to the Charm Person link too long. Meanwhile, Iltar remembered that we'd been interrupted by the attack of the Shadows before frisking this Priest, back at the temple; he proved to have had a sealed Magic Deck. As the two girls came by Iltar handed this treasure to Brilliant Jade so matter-of-factly that she took it before recalling that she was working on a Mad.

We'd done well enough by this time to ease off on the pugnacity a good deal; paid some grey-clad Clerics for peace with the 500-GP bank drafts which we couldn't use (the Bank was on a lower level than we cared to tackle); passed two plate-clad Fighters with a calm advice that we wouldn't bother them if they didn't bother us... At the rope back up there was an Ogre -- waiting, curious, but not in ambush; Merlinden, who had been regenerating her Sleep spell, used it again and dropped him.

We tried the we'll-be-peaceful-if-you-will routine on a group of four Gnolls, who answered "Duhhh...??" So the Fighters kept the drop on them while everybody else filed past, but there were no accidents. In the Hall of Fire Varmint, with a resigned expression, jumped through the flame again, got another limited Wish, but this time lucked out -- no damage. He revived our Cleric, which was good; in the next room we flushed a Wraith, whom the Cleric promptly shooed off with his special Powers and a complacent smile.

Back on the surface again we split up the undistributed wealth and tallied Experience Points for the record. Our Hobbit took off to see if he could get the local bank to discount the 10,000-GP draft on the Bank of Endor. We all got, from the rest of the stuff, 46 GP and 2714 silvers -- there was some complicated reckoning involved for our Cleric, who didn't get anything won while he was dead. The figuring on the magical loot was so difficult that those who

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*Steve plays that a period of meditation and rest allows characters to assimilate Experience and rise a level while still in the Dungeon.

could use the things agreed to share them out, one each, as far as they went, Merlinden getting the Fire Resistance potion which was truly what it claimed to be. I lost track of the bag of dust (Powder of Appearance, for revealing invisible objects) and the Giant Strength potion, but the Heroism turned out to be mislabeled. It was Super-Heroism. Brilliant Jade was granted her claim for the Limited Wish scroll, since she'd taken the risk of reading it...

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"So far the Experience Points are..." God read off the others' tallies, mostly in the 2000+ range, and finally reached my Characters:

"You two get 2704 points and 1098 points, respectively." Brilliant Jade cut off a most un-Confucian squeal of joy. Yagellon managed a smile.

"Oh, Iltar! You just missed...wait, God, there's a greater point difference than there should be in our scores. Bethink you of all the fighting he did."

"Remember you Charmed that Evil Priest, who was three Levels higher than you." God paused uncomfortably. "Besides, since he was your employee, he only gets fifty percent normal Experience Points."

For half a breath Brilliant Jade's mouth froze in a Greek O of shock. "But Iltar was playing as a free Character all along --!"

"You didn't need to give him commands once you'd agreed to hire him. Fifty gold pieces a month. 'Four horses cannot overtake a word once spoken.'"

Using a Chinese proverb as a silencer was almost pushing things too far, even for God. For an instant the pale corona of a spell buildup flickered around the girl's head.

"*Da khong, Yü-ming!*" cried Iltar.

She stopped and closed her eyes. "It...isn't...*f-fair* for you to m-miss gaining a Level because I tried to play a witless joke..."

Merlinden started to put an arm around her; Iltar made a short but urgent negative sign. His lips moved silently. Now the elf-maiden had adjusted to her own higher Level she was not surprised to understand as clearly as speech: *Don't! She's not a Touching Person!*

"It was an innocent jest that went sour", he said aloud. "Such things happen, among friends."

Brilliant Jade's features became tranquil. Merlinden, puzzled, glanced at Iltar but only found that he was uncertain too. So quickly even they could not be sure of it, exultation had seemed to flash across the Chinese girl's face.

"Such things happen and sometimes destroy friendship", Brilliant Jade said with a rueful look. "If you can forgive this unworthy person, gallant friend, it is more than I merit. But let me, at least, not deprive you of your just dues." Not bothering to look to see how God took this dig, she counted out twelve and a half gold pieces before turning a level gaze toward Heaven.

"It seems but just that Iltar should get EP credit for these..."

God looked pained. "All right, paying him makes him a free agent again, so that's twelve point five Experience Points. That's not enough to get him up a Level."

"And he should get the Kill bonus for the Monsters he actually engaged --"

"No! Those bonuses were counted in with his total before the division."

"Speaking of divisions," Varmint interrupted impatiently, "is our Hobbit going to rip us off for that draft on the Bank of Endor, or are we going to find out how much he discounted it for?"

God had glanced at him as he spoke and now froze on point for an instant. We heard a rattle of Celestial dice and our Hobbit Thief popped back into existence, lugging a substantial sack.

"They offered to cash it at 25% but I talked them up to 28% so we could make an even split", he explained cheerfully.

Varmint did a beautiful double take and began to make choking noises. The Hobbit looked blank. "Have I missed something?"

Merlinden's laugh was as hearty as her smile. "Four hundred each; excellent bargaining!" she exclaimed with innocent enthusiasm. The Hobbit wriggled with embarrassed pleasure. (Merlinden hadn't believed what she'd read about the sensitivity of his race to Elvish praise.)

"Not divided by six", said God stubbornly.

"This humble person ventures to remind You that the Viscount Yagellon has been pronounced a free agent. 'Four...'" (No, that's too gross, she thought.) "It is proverbially hard to overtake words which have been uttered."

Our Cleric looked a little horrified, either at the quibble or at Brilliant Jade's bandying words with God, but He noticed that the rest were trying not to snicker.

"'Go, argue with a woman!' Four hundred points all around, then. Puts him just over into Level II."

Brilliant Jade reached up to adjust the curls at her temple. By chance there was an immediate burst of activity: Varmint and the other Fighter pounded Iltar on the back in congratulation while Merlinden demanded the Cleric's opinion whether her Hobbit friend hadn't been thoughtful as well as businesslike. Clerics, it turns out, react quite as favorably as Hobbits do to Elven-speech.

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The only things still to be apportioned were the two Magic Decks. Since the Cleric was expected to go along on future Expeditions with the rest, we agreed to let him hold the partially-used Deck for the general benefit. Brilliant Jade couldn't do that, since she wouldn't be in the area that often, so she used up her loan from Kuei Yang buying up everybody else's claim to the sealed Deck -- 200 GP each, which is a bargain price if you don't stop to think that there's an excellent chance of a messy death going along with the use of the thing. She was working up her nerve to check the Deck out when Iltar broke his resolution not to be Protective and begged her to for god's sake use the balance of *his* loan to get it appraised. That cost 700 GP, but it turned out to be a Deck of Many Things. Of course, she is in debt over her pointy ears now, for 1400 GP at 50% per expedition interest, and only has 22.9 GP in ready cash. We'll have to see, next time, what happens when the Deck of Many Things is put to use. Anyone want a draw at 5,000 GP a time? How about 10,000 GP with a guarantee that Brilliant Jade will use her Limited Wish to revive you if it's something fatal?

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Note that the character of God is purely fictitious, to help with the dramatic requirements.