

27<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the year 137



erein is detailed the odyssey of his Majesty Lord British as recorded by Remoh, scribe to the court of Lord British. With us on this journey into the uncharted Underworld venture the knights Arionis, Meridin, Geraci, Shaana, Noin, and Roin.

Day 1

**A**t dawn, we set off on our skiff down the River Maelstrom, east of Spiritwood. Before the falls, we pause to remember the brave men who discovered this entrance into the Underworld. Then we cast off and repeat their plunge into the lightless underground waterway. We land our boat on the western shore of a great lake. The cavern's low ceiling hangs close over us and the humidity is oppressive.

Arionis and Geraci erect a wooden sign commemorating our expedition. The rest of us repair the damage to our skiff inflicted by the subterranean rapids that carried us here.

We embark again, following a navigable stream south. After a short distance, a tributary branches off to the east, but we continue south. The cavern walls now tower above us, dimly reflecting our torchlight.

The current grows stronger and the crashing sound of tortured water steadily increases. Abruptly, the river turns a sharp bend. The roar grows painfully loud as our skiff careens down a great fall. A storage cask breaks loose and knocks Meridin out of the boat during our fall. The skiff lands flooded, but miraculously upright. We drag the unconscious Meridin back into the boat and retrieve the cask. He revives as we row west, past a southern tributary.

The river slows as we arrive at another fork. We continue north, hugging the water-hewn stone wall on our right. As the river swings back to the southwest, we hear the sound of approaching waterfalls. Quickly we land the boat on the southern shore. Geraci sets off to explore a promising passage through the rocks to the southeast. On returning, she reports that the natural fissure slopes downward steeply, but rejoins the river beyond the treacherous falls. We portage our skiff around the falls with little difficulty and are once again on our way. While the day wanes thousands of feet above us, the river empties into a calm lake, stretching out beyond our sight into the murky gloom. We row south by southeast, following the shore.

A muffled scream, a heavy splash are our first omens of danger. We all stare at the stern where, moments before, the raven haired knight Shaana sat. Meridin quickly intones two words of magic, and the lake around us explodes in light, blinding us momentarily. We see a hideous ebony creature, twice as large as our skiff with Shaana clutched in one of its slimy tentacles. Already dozens of yards away, it is retreating ten paces further with every heartbeat.

Lord British strides to the stern and stretches his arms toward the receding monstrosity. In a voice as clear as crystal, in a tone as urgent as the wind, he speaks seven words. We do not comprehend their meaning, but we witness their impact. The squid creature pulls up suddenly. A wrenching noise tears through the dank air. A large wave passes under our boat. The squid creature has been vanquished. The light from Meridin's spell fades, and new torches are lit to replace those dropped in panic. Shaana, dragged from the water, now sleeps at her place upon the boat's stern. Our king rests also, deep in the meditation of the virtues. We row on.

Eventually, at the southern shore of the lake, we follow the westernmost of two identical-looking streams. We explore several land passages along the way, but they all prove to be dead ends. The river turns north, flows on a while, and then perversely turns south. Our first day's journey ends at this juncture.

## Day 2

**W**e waken to a morning as dark as the blackest of nights. Our campfire is a damp mound of cold ashes. The underground river has risen in the night, soaking the meager supply of dry wood we brought with us.

Setting out upon the waters again, we row south. Scarcely an hour passes before we come upon another waterfall, one with no opportunities for portaging around. From the beach, however, we can see the river resuming only a few yards beyond the falls. With few options, we brace ourselves and steer over the falls. As soon as we are righted, though, the coursing water turns abruptly and we plunge down another fall. Shaken and bruised, the group has barely enough time to secure a firm grip on the boat before we plunge down a third cascade.

After a brief respite, we pass over a fourth, though smaller falls. Finally, we pass into a small, tranquil lake. We land on the south shore and examine the area. Though a large fissure in the cliff walls provides a land exit to the south, no navigable waterway leaves the cavern. There is no choice: we shoulder our remaining provisions and continue on foot through the fissure. The rough ride over the falls has eliminated

another option: if we ever return Britannia, it will not be by retracing our steps.

The path leaving the cavern is at first swampy and tedious to walk upon, but the way becomes easier as we leave the lake behind. Soon the path curves north again and we come upon a great cavern with an uneven rock ceiling many stories high. We are now walking on yellow grass-like growth.

A movement by his feet causes Arionis to halt. Before we can draw our weapons, a great leathery tentacle as thick as a man's leg coils around Arionis then starts dragging him into its underground lair. Noin drives his deadly main gauche into the tentacle. Thick green fluid streams from the severed tentacle as it falls away. As Arionis stumbles to his feet, he quickly shouts a warning. Noin turns to sever a second tentacle just before it ensnares him. Movement in the grass from which we have just come indicates more tentacled monstrosities approaching. We flee together to the north side of the cavern, slipping between rocks into a passage leading away to the east. Before long the passage turns and we head south again.

At the end of the passage, we find ourselves in a massive cavern. The walls and ceiling extend beyond the glow of our torches. We wait in vain for our echoes to return. It is difficult to fathom a cavern so large it stifles echoes. We turn to the right, hugging the southern wall. The stench of a stagnant river fills the air. As we walk, the mud gives way to sand. When we have left the river miles behind us, we encamp.

### Day 3

**A** shriek of pain awakens us after only a few hours of sleep. Meridin utters an oath followed by two eerie sounds, and a grisly scene is revealed. The knight Geraci is standing unsteadily, slicing her dagger at six great worms that swarm around her, rearing up to strike, while deftly evading her dagger. Her left arm is held against her chest, in an attempt to staunch the flow of blood from a gaping wound.

Lord British raises his staff and utters an incantation. A deep chill descends momentarily, then the six worms forget their prey and assault each other with unreasoned fury. Meridin magically draws out the worms' poisonous venom. We quickly bind Geraci's arm, gather our gear, and resume our journey eastward along the southern wall. Only two worms remain writhing in combat as we depart.

After the wall finally curves to the north, we take a passage out of the cavern to the northeast. The trail is rocky, and wide enough for three to walk abreast. The twins, Noin and Roin, bringing up the rear, are the first to notice the large, winged creature

with matted, brown fur and sharp, unsheathed talons. When we stop to look now ever, it flies off. Half an hour, later, we notice two of these creatures, but both fly off again as we turn. An hour later, three of these ugly creatures approach, flying closer than the previous forays dared, before veering off. We quicken our pace.

The passage empties into a large grassy area with a high, earthen ceiling. As we stop to rest, a deafening crescendo of screeches heralds the invasion of a dozen winged monsters. The avian terrors attack in force. Armour and skin is ripped from our backs. Our swords swing, our daggers fly, but to no avail. Only two winged monsters are wounded then finished. The remaining ten circle us furiously as Lord British shouts out words of mystic command. Four more attackers are destroyed, but many more of our party have fallen.

As I fight, I see Meridin from the corner of my eye. He crawls out of the fray and raises his arms. Before he falls, he gasps four words. A great flame breaks out between his outstretched arms and surges forward. One by one, the last of the nightmarish creatures is consumed with flame. The largest bat spirals to the ground. Its burning carcass crashes next to Meridin's corpse — a memorial fire to our great archmage.

## Day 4

**T**oday, the three of us remaining buried the valiant knights Arionis, Meridin, Geraci, Noin, and Roin, here upon the underground battlefield where they fell. Tomorrow we shall seek our way back to our own world; our disastrous quest here is finished.

## Day 5

**T**he wraiths came this morning. There were three of them. They walked through the stone. Their blackness was deeper than the shadows from which they emerged. Advancing towards Lord British, they ignored Shaana and myself. Lord British held their gazes, murmuring words of life, healing, and protection. Still they advanced. One raised its hand, pointing at our lord. Then a silver bolt struck our immortal king and he fell to the stony earth.

Shaana was frozen, transfixed. I stumbled forward, but when I touched that cloak, I shrank back. Foreboding washed over me. They took our lord with them. I was powerless to stop them. I am afraid we all are.