

) Praxix, cast Wind

Praxix reached into his cloak and brought forth some air essence. As he tossed it into the air, a great wind came up, almost knocking us off our feet. When the wind subsided, Bergon quite reasonably asked, "What was that for?"

"What, the wind?" Praxix replied. "Oh! Just testing, just testing."

"Actually," Praxix revealed, "I do not have magical essences in any vast supply. These experiments may, one day, prove costly, but for now they seem harmless enough."

) Praxix, cast Elevation

Perhaps as a joke, Praxix took some air essence and earth essence out of his cloak, mixed them in his hand, and flung them at Bergon.

He scowled as he rose into the air, then (a long minute later) he slowly fell back to earth, amid a chorus of laughter from the rest of the party. "Works like it should!" Praxix said, proudly. "Do not be cross! We may have need for such things!"

) change name

) start

Our journey started on a day bright and clear, and we made quick progress down the gently winding road that leads south, past the boundaries of our valley.

The air was warm, but the cool north wind at our backs reminded us that winter was near. It seemed that we had only just started out when we arrived at the outpost town of Lavos, shortly past noon.

So this was Lavos! We stood in front of an old wooden storefront, that of a provisioner. Farther down the road, the Lands End tavern beckoned us with the promise of food and drink.

) enter

We entered the provisioner's shop, and introduced ourselves to the proprietor, a portly man named Webba. "Look around, look around!" he said, proudly, though (if the truth be told) there was not much to be proud of. Still, this would be our last chance to provision ourselves before moving south to whatever lay beyond.

Scanning the shelves, filled mostly with foodstuffs, we could not fail to notice an unusual map tacked to the wall behind the counter.

) Praxix, examine map

*Pay attn to
magic!!*

Praxix expressed a keen interest in the map, and Webba obliged him by taking the old parchment from the wall and, not letting it out of his grasp, holding it up before the Wizard. The map was old and worn, and of a land unknown to us. Suddenly looking grave, Webba asked, "So you're going on... to the Outlands?"

) Praxix, reply

Praxix started to tell of our quest, and Webba shook his head, resigned to having lost a good customer. "This map will not help you. I sell this item to 'tourists' - those curious enough to visit, but not enough to go on!" He laughed heartily, and told of the peculiar man who offered him the map in exchange for a few worthless trinkets. Of course, the map appeared equally worthless, though he thought it amusing, especially the faintly flickering, oddly shaped runes that appeared on it. He ran his finger across the map, as if to show us the originals, but none were even vaguely flickering, and he soon gave up.

"The old man looked harmless enough," the shopkeeper continued, "so I bought it. But the map seemed awfully plain, if you know what I mean, so I added some runes of my own - thought it looked more official that way! But, if I were trying to find my way somewhere, I would sooner trust my brother's blind mule than this map!"

) Praxix, examine food

Praxix, who was by no means an expert on fine foods, browsed through the food selection, though he could not find anything that he particularly liked.

"Perhaps we should buy some of these things," he said, turning in my general direction. I agreed to take a look around, though we were not short of supplies.

) David, buy map

Not knowing if it would ever be of use to us, we nevertheless decided to buy the strange map.

"Rivers, forests, and mountains," Esher said sourly, glancing at the map as I stowed it away in my pack, "Why, this place could be anywhere!"

"Yes," answered Praxix, "and I fear that is precisely where we are headed."

) David, buy food

I selected the most appetizing of the dry foodstuffs and placed them in my pack; at least we wouldn't be worrying about food for a few weeks, which was longer than we hoped to be gone.

) exit

Leaving Webba's, we returned to the road. Ahead of us was the Lands End tavern, and the raucous sounds of music and laughter could be heard even from where we stood.

) proceed

We walked down the dusty road, stopping at the door of the tavern. As we stood there, an unsavory looking man, approaching from the far end of town, brushed past us and entered.

) enter

Perhaps for refreshment, perhaps for news from abroad, or perhaps just to relax once more before moving on, we entered the Lands End tavern. People of all kinds were there, mostly talking to (or shouting at) each other in small groups. Our entrance caused something of a stir, with most everyone stopping to take note.

) Esher, look around

It took Esher just a few moments to become restless, and he soon slipped away from us to mingle with the crowd.

"Who knows?" he said, all but disappearing into the tavern's smoke-filled air, "I may even learn something useful."

) Praxix, examine customers

Praxix motioned toward a particularly dark corner of the tavern, where Esher was now conversing with someone whose face was obscured in shadow.

"Perhaps we shall learn something of value from our friend Esher," he said.

) David, buy drinks

Stepping up to the bar, we ordered ourselves a few tankards of ale. Though bitter by our standards, it was nevertheless refreshing, and we passed some time there with idle talk about the journey that was to come.

) exit

On our way out, Esher rejoined us, telling of an intriguing conversation he had just had with one of the locals. Before he could go on, the unsavory man we had seen before stepped outside and pushed his way into our midst. Bergon, flushed with anger, grabbed his sword, but Esher held him back. "This is the man I was telling you about," he said with no particular enthusiasm.

"I am called Minar, and I have travelled often in the Outlands. You are in great danger, whether you know it or not. If you will have me, I offer you my services." Minar's eyes flickered with a disturbing light, but saying nothing, we awaited the decision of Bergon.

) Bergon, accept

Bergon appeared troubled, but agreed to Minar's request. "It is against the wishes of our Elders, yet we know little of the world that lies beyond Lavos. We shall take the stranger!"

) proceed

It was mid-afternoon when we left Lavos, heading south. The road, which soon narrowed to a simple foot path, wound its way down into a deep canyon, surrounded by sheer walls. After a short time, we found ourselves at a fork in the path, the left branch leading east along the foothills and the right one continuing down the valley to the south. Both appeared desolate and poorly traveled. I wondered which path Garlimon's party had taken, and how near they had come to reaching Astrix. And then, a cold, bone-dry wind arose from the north, filling me with dread.

) Minar, scout

Bergon asked Minar to scout out the paths before us, but Minar, sensing an insult, was initially disinclined to do so.

"I have no need to scout these paths," he said harshly, "for I have travelled them many times. If we seek the Sunrise Mountain, our best path is to the left."

But then, Minar's voice softened. "However, these are dangerous times, and we may have been followed." And with that, he quietly disappeared down the lefthand path. When he returned, he shook his head knowingly.

"It is as I feared. Not long after I left, I discovered this." He held up a shredded piece of clothing, similar to our own, stained heavily with dried blood. "There is more - there are fresh tracks in the ground - three or four, I would say. No doubt they are bandits, and they lie in wait for us. Also, sunset is near. We must hope to do better down the other path."

) left

Although Minar had cautioned us against taking this route, Bergon chose to proceed east through the foothills. The sun was already low in the sky, and after an hour's march, we stopped for the night.

Not a minute after locating a campsite, we were suddenly attacked by a small gang of bandits.

Having been warned of our danger, we reacted quickly and surely. I had never been in battle before, but it was clear that Bergon was our strongest fighter, wielding a heavy broadsword. Esher, surprisingly, was also a good fighter, and he easily handled the sword thrusts of his opponent. Praxix and I, however, were new to this sort of thing, and were satisfied with merely staving off injury.

) Minar, flank

We almost didn't notice that Minar had quietly slipped away, snaking his way through the brush to take up a position behind that of the bandits.

) combat

Just then, a previously unseen attacker approached Esher from behind with a large club. Not a moment before he would have been hit, a sword ripped through the attacker's chest. Placing his foot on the attacker's back, Minar kicked the mortally wounded attacker to the ground and smiled. Clearly, Minar had done this sort of thing before, and what's more, he seemed to enjoy it. But the grotesque look on his victim's face filled me with dread and revulsion.

The battle was going well; Bergon, Esher, and Minar were making some deadly hits with their weapons, and the bandits appeared weaker in their resolve to fight, taking ever more to the defensive.

The bandits, finding the fight more than they had bargained for, retreated out of sight.

It was now late, so we set up camp, taking turns on guard through the night. Later, I dreamed that we stood on a high precipice, far above the clouds; storms surrounded us, and violent gusts of wind nearly swept us off our feet and down into a dark abyss. And then, the wind changed, and a gentle breeze blew, and we were carried off that precipice. But we were not afraid as we glided and soared through the ocean of still, clear air.

When morning came, misty and still, we packed silently and prepared to move onward. But the dream stayed with me, and in later days I would think of it often, sensing in it a foreshadowing of things to come - but when, or in what manner, I could not know.

) Minar, scout

Minar was sent out to explore the area around us. What he found brought little cheer.

"A rock cairn," he said, leading us to a shaded spot beneath a grove of stately oaks, "I am certain this was not here last summer, when I camped in this same spot."

Minar's words were ominous - whatever was buried here had not lain long in the earth. Fearful over what we might find, we decided to dig up whatever remains lay there. It was not long before we found what we were after - three sets of human remains, their bodies mangled and bloodied, yet covered with their own cloaks.

"Garlimon's party!" cried Bergon. "But there are only three, not four...."

"And that is but part of the mystery," replied Praxix, "Who, I wonder, took the time to bury them? Surely not the assassins that tortured and killed them."

) Esher, examine bodies

Esher examined the bodies carefully. "They were killed with sharp objects of some kind - swords and knives, I would guess. Whatever weapons they may have carried are gone - in fact, only

their cloaks remain. I'd be willing to bet that they were waylaid and robbed."

) Praxix, examine bodies

Praxix examined the bodies, discovering two small pouches of powders hidden within a seam of one of the cloaks that had been used as a burial shroud. "Fire essence," he beamed, opening the first and holding it up for my inspection. "Or I'm an apprentice food merchant!" And then, examining the second pouch, he found a far smaller amount of a different powder. He dipped a finger into the powder, and touched it to his lips. "And this would be water essence, though barely enough for a single spell. And yet, all such powders are nigh impossible to obtain these days, and much can be done with them."

) Praxix, examine cairn

At Bergon's request, Praxix looked over the cairn. "The cairn was made by our people and not by the locals from Lavos," he said.

) Praxix, examine pouch

The key to Praxix' wizardly powers lay within the badly worn, brown leather pouch that he carried inside his cloak. This pouch contained his entire stock of magical essences, with whose help it was possible to conjure up a variety of magical spells. But these essences were in very limited supply, and one cannot be too harsh on Praxix for the frequency with which he would assess the quantities of those in his possession.

He did so now, taking out his pouch and finding a very small amount of water essence (enough for one spell), a small amount of fire essence (enough for two spells), a large amount of air essence (enough for seven or eight spells), and a very large amount of earth essence (enough for nearly ten spells).

) proceed

Getting an early start, we continued along the canyon floor as the eastern mountains were backlit by the rising sun. Our morning's march ended at a point where a narrow path rose along switchbacks to the crest of the mountain range that lay to our south.

) Minar, scout

Minar scouted out the climbing path, and reported that it wound its way out of sight, high in the mountains.

"The shortest path to the Sunrise Mountain lies ahead, unless, of course, you feel the urge to explore the high country," he said.

) climb

Opting for the high road, we started to climb into the southern mountains. The path was narrow, and frequently choked with low brush, making progress slow. By midday however, we had climbed

more than half of the distance to the ridge which hung above us. It took the rest of the afternoon, but we finally arrived at the ridge. We were all tired after our day of climbing, and so we camped there for the night.

When we awoke, we headed east along the ridge, coming finally to a high plain, thousands of feet above the valley below. Gentle, rolling hills, covered in pines and firs surrounded us; but most impressive, a large, glistening lake spread out a few thousand paces ahead.

) Esher, examine lake

Sunlight danced on the surface of the lake that lay before us. It was large, perhaps three miles across, and its waters were a brilliant blue. Much of the shoreline was rocky, but below us lay a sandy beach. The lake sat in a bowl in the mountains, fed by alpine streams, most of which had run dry in the summer's heat. But Esher pointed out one, directly between ourselves and the lake, that still flowed.

) Minar, scout

Minar went on ahead, climbing a nearby ridge in hopes of getting a better view. He returned, bringing strange news. "There is smoke rising up from behind the ridge. I thought perhaps it was a fire, but the plume of smoke is small and localized, as if it were coming from a hearth or campfire. And that in itself is odd, for nobody lives up here, at least not that I have ever come across."

) Praxix, tell legend Magic

I have always been curious about the workings of magic, and I took this opportunity to ask Praxix about it.

"Well, well," he replied, "that would be a long tale indeed."

Then, smiling, he took out his pouch of magical powders and held them before my eyes. Each of the four was a different color, and each glowed faintly, almost imperceptibly.

"There are four magical essences," he began, "and I suppose you could say that they represent the four elemental substances of our world: earth, air, fire, and water. The Wizards have long understood the nature of the essences and how two essences could be combined to produce effects that are now called 'magic.' Sometimes, in fact, we add just a pinch of a third essence to make a spell even more powerful.

"The Wizards, with the help of the Dwarves, mined the few places where pure essences could be found; few of these places are now known, and none by me. Much lore and learning has been lost, and I am but a distant relative of the Wizards of old; but the spells I know are useful enough and I hope they will serve us well."

"Here," he said, placing a mixture of air and earth essences in my hand, "Place some of this on your cloak."

I did so, and soon I began to rise gently into the air. A short moment later, I descended to the solid ground. "Good lad!" he said, "Perhaps, someday, you shall be an apprentice Wizard yourself! But for now, get some water and clean off your hands!"

I could not imagine what Praxix meant until I looked down at my fingers and saw they were covered with a burnt, coarse pale yellow residue; it took a good deal of scrubbing, but I finally did remove the essences. And that was my first lesson in magic!

) follow smoke

We followed Minar to the crest of the rise, where we could see smoke rising from behind a smaller hill that lay in front of us.

It was a short walk to the next hill; before us sat a ramshackle hut, its battered door flapping slowly in the breeze. It was hard to believe that one could live in such a place, but the column of smoke rising from the chimney convinced us otherwise. "The hut was not here last year," he said, "I am at a loss to understand it."

"Most peculiar!" said Praxix. "Whom do you suppose would choose to live here?"

) Praxix, examine hut

The hut was small, made of rough-hewn logs. The thatched roof was so haphazardly constructed that it would hardly keep out the wind, no less the rain. It was difficult to believe that someone would choose to live here, but the evidence clearly pointed in that direction.

"It would take a good deal of magic to fix this place up," Praxix said. "Shall we take a closer look?"

) knock

With Bergon in the lead, we approached the hut. But even as his raised hand came down upon that rickety door, it appeared to open of its own volition. We entered slowly; the hut was dark and smelled of incense. In the far corner, one eye gone, the other opaque with cataracts, an old man stared at us.

I say old, though the many lines on his face were more like the scars earned in battle than the wrinkles gathered over the long years. We stood motionless, as though afraid to speak or perhaps unsure of what to say. The silence was broken as the old man stood, toppling his stool, and took a few hobbling steps toward Bergon.

Then, staring straight into Bergon's eyes, he said, "You come from the far plains of Lavos, and you seek a great Wizard." Raising a deformed finger, he hissed accusingly, "It is in your eyes!"

) Bergon, tell truth

"We have journeyed from Lavos, as you say; we seek the Wizard Astrix, to seek his aid."

"Fools! There is no Wizard, there is only the Enemy - and he is strong - too strong for the likes of you!"

"And how do you know this?" Bergon demanded.

The hermit retreated to his stool, and sat again in the corner. "I know nothing!" he said, and sighed deeply.

) Minar, look around

Minar, meanwhile, had been discreetly eyeing the hut when he caught a glimpse of a broadsword lying behind the door. He picked it up, and, still unseen, showed it to Bergon, who turned his back to examine it.

"A fine weapon!" Bergon said, unsheathing the sword and holding it out toward the hermit. "The finest of its kind; forged at Hervish, judging by its style, and fashioned by a great craftsman." We thought it odd for Bergon to be ranting on about this undistinguished looking weapon, but we were wholly unprepared for what followed.

"Garlimon," Bergon said warmly, and reached out for the hermit.

But the hermit spurned Bergon's hand. "Yes. Garlimon. What of it?" he scowled, "You seek Astrix; I sought him also. And I see you've gotten further than I - so far!" He lifted his cane, and waved it at us menacingly. "You are in great danger - all of you! You will die at His hand! You will all die!"

Garlimon was mad! He stumbled backward, clutching a rotting table, and stared wildly at us. "Leave me!" he demanded. "Leave this place at once!"

) exit

We shuffled out of the hut, and Garlimon hobbled to the door as we made our way back to our path. "Begone!" he cried, and threw a small leather bag at our feet. "Perhaps this will help you where you are going!" He started to cackle madly, and began to chant in a sing-song fashion. "The water that heals, the fire reveals, the earth..." He was babbling incoherently now, and soon slammed the door behind us. Curious as to what we had been given, I bent down and picked up the bag.

"He was a great man; the misfortunes of his party are a heavy load to bear," Bergon said, and we made our way in silence to the high plain.

) Praxix, examine bag

Praxix took the bag, opened it, and reached inside. Nodding his head knowingly, he pulled five smaller packets from the bag, and said, "Magical powders. Garlimon was quite resourceful to have salvaged these from the carnage of his party. Perhaps it is the reason he has survived this long." And then, examining the contents of each packet, he continued. "The four basic essences are here: air, earth, fire, and water - of course, there's not much of any of them here. But this fifth powder..." His voice

trailed off as he gazed intently at the blue-green powder, then turned his eyes back toward the hermit's hut. "I have never seen this before. Ah, well! Perhaps Astrix will know it." And with that, he placed the powders among his own.

) Praxix, tell legend Wizards

Out of curiosity, I asked Praxix about other Wizards like himself.

"Don't tell me there are more like him!" Esher said, wincing. Praxix did not acknowledge Esher's words, but simply started his story.

"Like me...", Praxix said, thoughtfully. "Yes, I suppose there are more like me. But there are few like the Wizards of old, a race whose bloodline ran pure for three long ages, and whose like shall not be seen again. For they have gone, I do not know where; all, it is said, but Astrix, who lives alone atop the Sunrise Mountain."

"Oh, we have learned from the ancient texts, and understand the essence of many things. Enough, anyway, to start a fire or a rainstorm; or shake the earth and cause the winds to blow. But much is forgotten, or lost..." His voice faded to a hollow whisper and his face became dark and clouded.

But his visage soon brightened, and his voice took on a cheerier tone. "We shall learn much if we can find Astrix," he said, "and there is great hope in that!"

) proceed

Descending from the high plain, we headed toward the near shore of the lake. Nearing the halfway point, we stopped at a wide stream whose waters careened down the slope and into the lake below. The sky was dark, and a storm threatened.

"Look!" Praxix cried, pointing toward the lowering clouds. For a long time we saw nothing, but soon a great, white bird emerged from the cloud base and soared overhead in graceful spirals.

"I have seen nothing like it," Bergon said, as the bird disappeared into the eastern sky.

) Esher, examine stream

Esher bent down and ran his fingers through the icy mountain waters. He was just about to stand when his eye caught a glimpse of a shiny golden object sitting in the stream bed. Rolling up his sleeve, he reached down for it, but failed to come up with anything.

"I would swear it was gold," Esher said, as he stared intently into the waters. "Now that would be something of value!"

"It is possible," Bergon replied, thoughtfully, "that there is gold in these mountain waters, but I should think not."

The dark clouds lowered as they rolled in from the north. The

winds started to howl; it would not be long before the rains came.

) find gold

We each scanned the stream for gold, with little luck. The clouds, dark and heavy, began to rain down upon us. "Look!" said Bergon, pointing at the chain lightning off to the north. Seconds later, the earth shook with the roar of thunder. "It is not far now," he added, as his eyes drifted to the blackening sky.

) find gold

Runoff from the nearby hills was forming into numerous streams, each coursing into the main channel in which we searched in vain for gold. Crash! A tree nearby cracked in two by a stroke of lightning. Rain was falling now in buckets, and Bergon screamed for us to take cover. As I turned upstream, a great torrent of water was heading right at me!

) Praxix, cast Elevation

at Tag

Fortunately, Praxix had the presence of mind to cast his levitate spell upon me, so that the torrent that approached washed harmlessly beneath me, preventing an almost certain loss of our possessions, no less my life. The others fared less well, having been knocked quite a ways downstream before they regained their footing.

Strangely, Praxix returned to the swollen stream, and pulled up a few peculiar golden stones.

"After all that, you of all people are looking for gold!" Bergon huffed.

"Not gold, Bergon," he said, rubbing the golden veneer off of the stone. "Water essence, though not altogether much, I'm afraid. I suspect that's what caught our eye in the first place." Soon, Praxix had finished isolating the water essence from its golden facade, and had placed it safely away in his pouch. Having had the good fortune to have found some magical essence, we continued alongside the stream until we came to the shore of the lake.

The sun was high in the sky; no sign, not even the rainbow, remained as testament to the deluge we had just witnessed. It had been a while since our last meal, and talk soon turned to lunch. Bergon strode to the shore of the glistening lake and eyed it hungrily.

"Have I ever told you about my fishing days at Lendros?" he said. Nobody responded to this informal banter, but Bergon persisted.

"Fow would everyone feel about some fresh lake trout?" he asked.

"Oh, my, yes; that would hit the spot!" he replied, playfully.

Then, taking the slightest murmur from the group as a mandate,

he dove into the icy clear waters.

He surfaced soon thereafter; though out of breath, he gasped something about our upcoming feast. Seeing how weakened Bergon had become, Minar pulled him from the lake and dove in to catch our lunch himself. But he did not surface, and, after a few agonizingly long minutes, our concern turned to alarm.

) Esher, scout at David

Frantically, Esher scouted the area along the shore looking for any sign of Minar. He returned frustrated, having found no sign of our missing friend.

) proceed

Having little alternative, we packed our things and moved along the shore, coming to a narrow cave through which a warm spring emptied into the lake.

) Esher, scout

Esher went ahead, but returned before long, telling us that the cave was too dark to explore without additional light.

) Praxix, cast Glow on staff

Praxix now withdrew some earth and fire essences and cast them at his staff, causing it to glow with a brilliant red light. "A good thing we found fire essence," Praxix said, blankly. "I only hope I didn't use too much."

"Some Wizard!" replied Esher. "Heaven help us!"

) enter cave on staff

Following the side of the warm spring into the cave, we passed through caverns whose water-polished walls gave testimony to the torrents that had flowed through these chambers many long years ago.

) proceed

A narrow path now led beside the gently flowing spring, and this we followed until we came upon a deep, warm pool whose crystal clarity was a revelation to behold.

) Esher, scout

Esher tried to find another path through the cave, but failed. "This is as far as it goes," he said.

) Esher, examine pool

Each of us was mesmerized by this lovely pool, whose depth appeared infinite. Esher picked up a rock lying nearby and tossed it into the water; we watched it as it fell and when it finally disappeared from sight, we were watching still.

) enter pool

It was the consensus that we search the depths of the pool in search of whatever lay below. I volunteered, giving my pack to Praxix for safe keeping. Then, taking a deep breath, I plunged into the warming waters.

I descended along the rock formations which bounded the pool, admiring the flowing forms that the water had created through the long ages. And then, a knot formed in my stomach. For the walls surrounding me were now smooth, like polished glass. I shuddered, thinking of what might lie beyond.

I had just about reached the limit of my descent, when I came to the end of the tube as it opened out into what I could only imagine was the greater part of the lake. I had to think fast: no matter which choice I made, I would have to surface at once!

) David, examine tube

Having little time, I nonetheless examined the tube. It was smooth to the touch, and of a material completely foreign to me. Here, at the bottom, it was only four feet across, making it difficult to maneuver.

) leave tube

Now I am not a cowardly person, yet I was sorely tempted to rise back to the surface. But some inner reserve of strength guided my actions; I pulled myself through the lip of the tube, then rose steadily toward the unknown.

Within moments, I had arrived at the surface, pulling myself out of another, larger pool and onto a sandy area. Exhausted, yet exhilarated, I rose to my feet and found myself standing in a wide chamber cut from the surrounding rock; a finely carved archway led into a dimly glowing passage. On the archway were runes quite unlike any I had ever seen before.

Still somewhat lightheaded from my time underwater, I walked into the passage, which soon widened into a grander chamber adorned with colorful banners. This would be the land of the Nymphs, if my book of legends was to be believed. And there, to my surprise, was Minar, lying on a bed of straw and covered in a heavy woolen blanket.

And as I approached my sleeping friend, I could hear someone approach from another corridor nearby.

) David, hide

With some hesitation, I decided to wait outside of the chamber until I could see who was coming. And then it came, whatever creature it was that inhabited these halls. It moved slowly, but gracefully, to Minar's side, as if checking on his health. Relieved, I was about to greet this unknown being, when I noticed the ropes which bound together Minar's hands and feet! A moment later, the being glided out of the room, and I again reentered.

) David, examine Minar

At first, Minar appeared unnaturally still, perhaps dead. But the blanket which covered him heaved slowly with his breath, and for this, I was greatly relieved. Fortunately, it was a simple matter to remove his bonds. Bringing him back to consciousness would be another thing entirely, and it was likely that the creature that bound him would return before long.

But this problem was soon solved of itself, for Minar slowly started to wake. He was too weak to be moved, so I calmed him the best I could by urging him to rest.

) narrow path

The narrow path snaked through the rock until it ended blindly at a very small, rounded chamber, in the middle of which lay a large stone cover. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) David, pick up cover

The cover was quite heavy, but I did manage to move it aside, revealing a dark pool of water, about three feet across.

) back

I could discern no purpose to this place, so I returned to the chamber outside. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) wide path

With a good deal of apprehension, I ventured through the doorway and into a hallway which came to a large, empty chamber, with an ornate doorway to the right and a simpler one to the left, from which a nasty smell emanated. Ahead, another passage led into the distance. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) left

The lefthand path led to a good-sized chamber in the middle of which sat a large pool. A frightful smell emanated from the pool's depths, though I could not see just what it was that caused it. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) David, pick up torch

Not knowing which chambers might be unlighted, I thought it best to take one of the torches. It's light was bright but cold, and its flame gave off little heat.

) back

With the torch now in my possession, I returned to the chamber outside. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) right

The ornate path led to a beautifully appointed chamber in which hundreds of jewels and other age-old relics were kept. One, however, stood out from among the others. It was a simple amulet with a large blue stone which shone with a light of another world. I stood transfixed before it, not knowing whether I dare take it for my own. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) David, examine blue amulet

I took a moment to admire the amulet. It was a small, golden orb, and in its center lay a clear stone whose color was like that of the deep oceans. Surrounding the stone were many hundreds of small, white diamonds, woven into an intricate pattern of great beauty.

) David, pick up blue amulet

Unsure of the wisdom of my intentions, I nonetheless grasped the amulet and took it from atop its pedestal. To my surprise, no alarms rang and no guards charged into the chamber. I held firmly on to the amulet, and planned my escape.

) proceed

At the far end of the treasury, a narrow path led a short way, ending at a simple, rounded chamber, in the middle of which lay a large stone cover. It was odd that such a nondescript chamber would be placed adjacent to the rather opulent treasury, and I could only guess at its purpose.

) David, examine cover

The cover itself was made of stone, and appeared quite heavy.

) David, pick up cover

The cover was indeed heavy, but I did manage to move it aside, revealing a dark pool of water, about three feet across. I held my torch up to its surface, but nothing was revealed.

) David, drop blue amulet

On a hunch, I dropped the amulet into the pool and watched it sink rapidly into the dark waters.

) junction

Having nothing further to do here, I passed through the treasury and back out into the hallway beyond. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) smelly pool

Holding my nose to avoid becoming sick, I moved gingerly toward the smelly pit and was soon staring into its murky depths. A single torch, mounted alongside the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) dive

As I dove into the water, I was filled with amazement that the torch I was carrying had not been extinguished. If anything, it appeared to glow more brightly, and the flame became warmer. Soon, I had reached the bottom of the pool, which was covered with every sort of putrifying debris you can imagine, and some that you probably couldn't. Decaying debris lowered the visibility considerably, making it difficult to gauge anything much about the pool itself. But then, at the bottom of the pool, in the midst of the unspeakable filth, I caught a glimpse of the the amulet I had taken from the treasury.

) David, pick up blue amulet

Reaching down through the muck, I grabbed onto the blue amulet and held it firmly in my hand.

) surface

In just a few moments, I had returned to the surface.

) back

With the amulet in hand, I made a hasty return to the chamber in which I had left Minar. Thankfully, he was conscious. Torches, mounted on either side of the entrance, cast cold, flickering shadows on the stone walls.

) back to cave

Now conscious and regaining his strength, I managed to help Minar back to the pool. As much as I would have preferred to take the torch along, I simply could not handle both it and Minar. Holding my friend firmly, we dove into the warm waters, finally reaching the tube which led back to our party. After retelling the story of my adventures, we left the cave, returning to the shore of the lake.

) Praxix, tell legend Nymphs

Praxix, now in a garrulous mood, told the tale of the Nymphs. "Long ago, at the beginning of things, it is said that the Nymphs took to the waters, becoming, well, fish-like: able to remain submerged for extended periods, swimming silent and deep, hunting for their meals in the great lakes and oceans of the world. That any remain today is indeed a surprise, though perhaps not a happy one. It would appear that they are less than friendly now, but who is to be the judge in these difficult times?"

) proceed

We left the lake, climbing out of the valley and into the northeastern hills. Following a narrow path, we marched until, late in the afternoon, the path climbed steeply up a high ridge. We arrived as dusk approached and stood in awe of the world that surrounded us.

Looking back, we could follow the long canyon path back to the horizon, where I imagined I could see the fork just beyond Lavos. But the view ahead filled us with astonishment, for a vast forest stretched out before us, thick with pine, fir, and redwood. Beyond the forest, a wide river flowed from the north, disappearing into deep canyons to the south. And beyond the forest, the Sunrise Mountain, its jagged peak towering high above the surrounding mountains.

"Magnificent!" Praxix said. "We stand before the Old Forest!"

"I have heard many a tale of the Old Forest," I said with a smile, reminiscing of the fanciful tales oft told about the forest.

"I too have heard tales," Praxix replied, gravely. "But judging by the comical look on your face, I suspect we have not heard the same ones."

It was now dark and after a hearty meal we slept. I dreamed of the forest that night, of brightly colored birds, and of the beautiful Wood Elves from the stories of my childhood. The next day, we rose with the sun.

The morning was still and hazy, and we started toward the forest with great eagerness. Praxix spotted a wide path which headed due east toward the Sunrise Mountain, and we spent a glorious morning beneath tall trees and a blue sky. Around midday, we came to a small clearing, where we decided to stop for lunch.

The warm afternoon air lifted our hearts, and we were soon marching eastward again through the towering forest. Before long, we came upon the shore of a great river.

"We are nearly there," Praxix said, gazing ahead at the Sunset Mountain and the mysterious tower that stood precariously atop it.

) Minar, scout

Minar nimbly followed the river's edge out of sight. A minute later, he returned, reporting a large waterfall just downstream from where we stood.

) Praxix, tell legend Elves

Praxix took a moment to speak of the Elves. "The Elves are among the four races which first populated the lands. Preferring to live among the verdant forests, they were known in the ancient tongue as El-fen, meaning 'from the forest.' It is said that they have lived so long with the trees that they have grown quite a bit alike. But few have survived the long years, and happy is the day we should meet them."

) Esher, examine river

Esher ripped a small branch from a nearby tree and cast it into the river. Within moments, it had been carried out of sight. "It is as I feared. The river flows with great speed. We will not survive the crossing!"

) upstream

Not knowing which way was best, we headed upstream along the shore to the furthest point easily accessible on foot. From here, the river appeared quieter than at the place we had started.

) upstream

Exploring the shore upstream of our position, we quickly found it too rocky for use as any sort of raft launching site, and it was decided to go no further.

) build raft

There was no suitable way of crossing the river on foot, so we determined to build a raft. After gathering some large branches, it was then a simple matter to lash them together with some of the rope we had been carrying. We then carved ourselves oars, and were soon ready to give the river crossing a try.

) launch raft

"This would seem as good a spot as any," Bergon said, indicating the spot where we would launch the raft.

This met with general approval, and, having boarded the raft, we used our crude oars to push ourselves out into the current.

) cross

Now that we were on the water, we started paddling across the river and were soon a third of the way to the far shore. The river was picking up speed, that was clear, and I was filled with foreboding about what lay beyond the curve ahead.

) cross

Without pausing a moment to rest, we continued paddling across the river and were soon about half of the way to the far shore. We were rushing downstream now, and a loud, roaring noise could be heard from around the curve ahead.

"Paddle harder!" Bergon implored, sensing the danger ahead.

) cross

We continued to paddle across the river and were soon two thirds of the way to the far shore. As our raft turned the corner to the right, we could see the reason for the quickening river: a large falls, and directly ahead of us! We had just moments to act!

) cross

The roar of the falls filled our ears. We frantically paddled across the river, and it seemed we must go over the falls. I closed my eyes, and a moment later the raft lurched forward as it struck some rocks not twenty paces from the falls. Bergon

swung himself off the raft, and pulled us ashore.

"That was enough excitement for a lifetime," I gasped, stumbling off the raft and onto the swaying earth.

Bergon laughed. "I don't know about a lifetime," he said, "but I suppose it will do for today!" It was, in fact, late in the day, so we camped for the night alongside the river, expecting this to be our last night before meeting the Wizard Astrix.

The next day, we started toward the mountains upon a well-travelled path. By mid-morning, having climbed well into the foothills of the Sunrise Mountain, we came to the first of what was destined to be many forks.

) Minar, scout

Minar went ahead to scout the various paths, and returned a short while later. "I have not been this far east in my travels," he said, "I sense great danger here; I wish we did not have to guess which path to take up the mountain."

"I fear that such a powerful Wizard as Astrix would try to defend himself against unwanted visitors," Praxix said, echoing Minar's concerns.

) Praxix, cast Glow *on Map*

I suppose it was only a hunch, but Praxix decided to cast his glow spell on the map that Webba had given us. Much to our surprise, a chain of runes began to glow, pointing the way to some unknown place.

"This solves the mystery of which runes were originally there," he said, proudly, "though it says nothing of who put it there, and why, though I would lay odds it was Astrix himself."

) Praxix, examine map *on map*

"Yes!" he said, knowingly. "There is the river we crossed with the forest behind it, and the mountains - here - lie ahead of us."

"And these runes here, the ones which are glowing faintly," Praxix began, "These mark the path we are to take." For six long hours, we continued to climb steeply up the side of the Sunrise Mountain, and thus we came to the high tower of Astrix, the Wizard. No sooner had we arrived, than the tower's massive oak door opened.

"I have been following your progress with great interest," the Wizard said, stroking his stringy gray beard. "You are a very resourceful group, that is certain!"

His voice then became dark. "The question is: Have you mettle enough to make siege on the Dread Lord himself?" And then, smiling, the darkness fell from his voice, and he answered his own question, "We shall see, I suppose; we shall see."

Leading us to his hearth, he sat us in a semi-circle around the

blazing fire and spoke. "There is a story I must tell, a story of Seven Stones. Created in a time lost to living memory, these Stones contained the very strength and essence of our world. Of the Seven, Four were entrusted to the races of men who could use them best: Elves, Dwarves, Nymphs, and Wizards."

"These are the Four: the Elf Stone, green as the forests of old, and the Dwarf Stone, brown as the caverns of Forn a-klamen; the Nymph Stone, blue as the deep waters of M'nera, and the Wizard Stone, red as the dark fire of Serdi."

"The four races are now sundered, and the Four have long been kept apart, but now, with the Dread Lord rearing his misshapen head in our lands, we must bring them together again. For with them, we can hope to find the Two, and then, finally, the One with whose help we can destroy all Evil."

"For it is told that having the Four, it is possible to find the Two; so, also, do the Two give witness to their master, the One that in elder days was called the Anvil!"

"Do they look anything like this?" I asked, sheepishly, holding up the blue amulet to Astrix' view.

"You are too modest," he said, grinning widely, "Yes, this is the Nymph Stone."

Astrix sat in deep thought, then spoke again. "I am certain the Dwarves who still walk the dark caverns can be of help to us. I know of a gate...", Astrix said, and he proceeded to tell us where we might find entrance to the Dwarves' kingdom.

We trekked for five days until we reached the spot Astrix had sent us to; ironically, we were not far from the fork at Lavos where we had started our journey.

) Minar, scout

Bergon sent Minar off to scout around the area, which he did. After an hour, though, he had not returned and Bergon was alarmed enough to set us out searching for him. We split up into two groups; Praxix and I went toward the hills, and the others followed the canyon floor. Before long, I found that I had wandered out of sight of Praxix.

) David, look around

Ambling aimlessly along the base of a rock cliff, something scurried by in the tall brush. When I looked, nothing was there, but my eye caught some strange lettering chiselled in the stone.

) David, look around

Having found these peculiar runes, I explored further in hopes of discovering more artifacts. But my search was fruitless, and I had soon wandered back to where I had started my explorations.

) David, get help

Unhappy at exploring alone, I called out, and Praxix, following

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the sound of my voice, appeared within moments. "Well, what now?" he began, but as if by instinct, his eyes slowly wandered to the runes that I had discovered.

Praxix then called for the others, who hurried to our side.

"The runes here are very old, and ancient languages are not my specialty. But the runes are Dwarvish, and long ago I learned some of their words. This first rune, 'Bern,' means a 'gate', and this second one, 'Lav,' refers to 'the plains'."

"The gate to the plains," I said, putting two and two together. "But from where?"

"That is a simple question," Praxix replied, "A more interesting one would be 'How shall we get it to open?'"

"Or better still, 'What do we do now?'" snarled Esher as, to everyone's surprise, a round gate appeared, yawning wide before us.

) Praxix, tell legend Gates

I asked Praxix about the gate leading to the caverns.

"It is said that the Dwarves built their Reth a-Zar, their Road Under the Mountains, many long ages ago. Four gates there were, each linking the Dwarves' kingdom with the lands above. If memory serves, they were the Bern i-Lav, gateway to the plains; Bern i-Fen, gateway to the forests; Bern i-Zar, gateway to the mountains; and Bern i-Lan, the Gate to Heaven."

) Praxix, tell legend Reth a-Zar

In a quiet moment, Praxix told us about the Dwarves.

"It is told that the Dwarves were one of the four races that first roamed the earth. Preferring cold stone to warm air and clear waters, they lived in caves, perfecting their stone-working skills. Before long, they had built enormous caves and labyrinths under the earth, connecting virtually all of our lands. In that time, our forefathers called them D'ru-ar-Fen, or Diggers-in-the-Earth."

Praxix paused for a moment and smiled, as though at some private joke. "Of course, nobody believes in the Dwarves anymore, except the few who claim to have seen them."

Asked about the meaning of Reth a-Zar, Praxix shook his head, ridding himself of the last shreds of disbelief. "Seemingly more far-fetched than the tale of the Dwarves is the tale of Reth a-Zar, the Road Under the Mountains, stretching from the plains of Lavos to the high forest at Zar a-Lan. I believe we are the first of our kind to witness this miracle in many a long age!"

) enter

Slowly and cautiously, we passed through the gate and into the darkness. As if on some malicious cue, the gate crashed shut behind us.

We were fortunate indeed that Praxix had magically caused his staff to glow, for the cavern itself was black as pitch.

) proceed

Unsure of where this passage would lead, we slowly made our way through the darkness.

As we slowly made our way down the forbidding passageway, Bergon signalled us to stop.

"Do you hear that?" he asked, indicating some faint sound from the gloom that lay before us.

) stand

As we stood our ground, it seemed that sounds could be heard behind us as well as in front of us.

"They come from both sides. We are trapped!" said Bergon, verbalizing that which we had long since feared. Each of us reached for his weapon, knowing battle to be near at hand.

) stand

Our assailants had finally arrived; Dwarves they were, and heavily armed. We joined in a tight circle, weapons drawn, and waited for the onslaught. But they did not attack; rather, their leader, somewhat taller and having about him an air of superiority, strode forward.

"What business have you here in Reth a-Zar?" he demanded. "Come, speak quickly, for we have no patience with strangers!"

) parley

Bergon sheathed his sword, and took a few small steps toward the Dwarf leader.

) Bergon, tell truth

"We have journeyed here from the Sunrise Tower of Astrix, the Wizard. He believes we may benefit in our struggle with the Dread Lord by exploring these caverns. We have faced many dangers on our journey, and just now one of our party has disappeared near the gate at Bern i-Lav."

There was a murmur in the ranks of the Dwarves, and their leader at last held out a bloodied garment that belonged to Minar. "We found this a short while ago. If your friend has been taken by Orcs, your best hope is that he is dead!" He paused for a long moment.

"I do not know what purpose Astrix has in mind, but I grant you this option," Agrith said. "Continue freely through these halls with our chosen escort, or leave at once! Choose now!"

) Bergon, accept

Bergon replied, "You are most gracious, Agrith, and we would be foolish indeed to decline your offer." Agrith bowed slightly, then motioned to one of his men, who stepped forward. "This is Hurth, one of my sons. He shall be your guide through Reth a-Zar!"

Agrith handed Hurth a flaming torch to help guide our way, and then the two Dwarves embraced in their fashion. With a motion of his arm, Agrith signalled the others to follow, and quietly he led them away into the gloom of the cavern's depths.

) proceed

Hurth led us down the passage, and we soon came to a wide arch leading to an impressive stone staircase. "These stairs lead up to the High Gate and the Tower of the Sunset," he said.

) Hurth, tell story Caverns

In a quiet moment, I asked Hurth about this place, the home of the Dwarves.

"We Dwarves have lived in these halls for all of history," he replied. "But now, the caverns, especially the deeper ones, have been largely overrun by orcs and things more evil yet. We do what we can to keep the orcs at bay, but we now live only in the higher levels, in forgotten caverns that remain unknown to our enemies. And yet, we know that this sanctuary will be discovered in time. There is great beauty to be found in these halls, but I regret that I cannot take you there. Perhaps in happier times it shall be possible.

) Hurth, tell story Orcs

I asked Hurth about the Orcs, and he told us this story. "There are many names for these evil denizens of the earth - goblins, grues, orcs; perhaps you have heard one of them. They have lived in the earth many ages, and it is said they worked hand in hand with our forefathers when these caves were first built.

"But they were twisted and warped with the passing ages, much as we have been saddened by them. There was no problem at first, for the orcs had moved to the deeper caverns where we have long feared to go. But now they become more brazen, and attack our people unprovoked, seemingly only for amusement. We have sought to destroy them, but our ranks are small. We grow weaker by the day, and the orcs grow stronger."

) Hurth, tell story Sun Towers

When asked about the Tower of the Sunset, Hurth told of the Dwarves' building of two great towers on opposite sides of the Hedras River. One, the Sunset Tower, was the pride of the Dwarves; the other, the Sunrise Tower was the last home of the Wizards, of whom only Astrix remains.

) Hurth, tell story Elves

I asked Hurth whether he knew of the legendary Elves of the Old Forest, and smiled broadly.

"I have not thought of the Elves in many years," he said. "We - the Dwarves, I mean - have always considered the Elves a kindred race. But it seems the years have turned them inward, and now they venture little outside their own lands, suspicious of all who come near. Indeed, I have not seen them since I was a child."

"I remember, as a boy, Agrith taking me before the throne of the Elvish leader, N'dar. The friendship of the two was, and is, very close, yet Elvish introductions were quite formal, so Agrith taught me the Elvish words of greeting.

"Hurth-la," I sputtered, "Av-Agrith," which means 'Hurth is here, the son of Agrith.'

"Well, N'dar laughed aloud, and my face turned a very bright crimson. Then N'dar said, 'Va'len, b'ran!', 'Come, friend!' and led us to a great feast. I shall not forget that day. I wonder what has become of N'dar, and of all Elves. Perhaps Agrith knows, for the Elves still count him among their few non-Elvish friends."

) Hurth, tell story Gates

Hurth was asked by Praxix about the true story of the Dwarf Gates. Hurth replied eagerly, pleased to give us a taste of Dwarvish history.

"Our fathers built four gates, each leading to one of the outposts of the world. The Bern i-Lav, where you entered, was our link to the plains of Lavos. The Bern i-Fen, at the opposite end of the Long Road, leads to the forests of the Elves. And the Bern i-Zar leads upwards to the high mountains of Thur."

"And what of the fourth gate?" Bergon asked.

"Of the fourth gate, the Bern i-Lan," Hurth replied gravely, "it is not spoken. Perhaps it no longer exists; this is what we Dwarves fear most."

) Praxix, tell legend Bern i-Lan

Bergon looked to Praxix, and asked the question that was on our minds ever since Hurth had first mentioned it. "What do you know about the Bern i-Lan?"

Praxix replied, "The legend says that the Bern i-Lan is the gateway through which the Dwarves might someday leave this world for a better one. The Dwarves are immortal; yet deep in their hearts they yearn to leave this world for the world of their fathers, who had known the way and are long since gone."

Hurth lowered his head and wept.

) up

We climbed for hours as we made our way up the gently winding stair, then paused for refreshment. It seemed the stairs would go on forever, but Hurth reassured us, saying, "We are now at

*David-la b'ran-Hurth
(David, friend of Hurth)*

(proceed → line)

the half-way point to the High Gate and the Tower of the Sunset!"

Hurth was right: a few hours later, we arrived at a junction of two stairways. "The stair to the left leads to the Tower of the Sunset; the stair to the right leads to the High Gate," Hurth said. "If we intend to reach the Tower, we should start now. It is a much longer climb."

) left

The left stair rose in tighter and tighter spirals, the air thinning as we went. Not long before we had hoped to reach the top, the stairs had crumbled and an abyss, perhaps ten paces wide, yawned before us. Beyond that, the stairs continued their seemingly endless climb.

) Hurth, scout

Hurth suggested trying to scout out an alternative way up the stairs, but this was felt to be fruitless.

) cross

Bergon, being the most powerful member of the group, thought he might try jumping across the gap, then use the rope to bring the rest of us along.

For once, Esher's pessimism was hard to fault. "You can't get a running start; the footing's no good; and the stairs at the other end appear to turn a corner. Otherwise, you've got a fine idea." Bergon reluctantly agreed.

) Praxix, cast Elevation *at Hurth*

Praxix, on his own, decided to try a little magic to get us across. Pulling some earth and air essences from his concealed pouch, Praxix mixed them, then cast the mixture onto Hurth.

"Hey, wait a minute!" he said as he rose ten feet into the air before us.

) Praxix, cast Wind *at Hurth*

"Do not be alarmed, Hurth!" Praxix said, as he wiped the coarse pale yellow residue from his hands, and measured out some additional air essence. "It will just be a moment." And then, casting the powder at our floating friend, a great wind came up and carried him across the abyss. We tossed Hurth our rope, and we were soon ready to cross to the far side of the chasm. There was only one problem: since we could find no good anchor for our rope on either side of the abyss, we had to consider how we were to return once we got across. Since Praxix had some air essence in his pouch, it would be possible to use his wind spell to fling one of our party across the chasm on the way down. On the other hand, we could just as easily leave one of our party behind, and avoid using magic altogether.

) Bergon, leave esher

Preferring to preserve Praxix' supply of magical essences, we decided to leave Esher behind while we explored the far side of the chasm. It was just a matter of moments until the rest of us made the crossing.

) up

We continued climbing up the narrow stairs, and finally climbed through the heavy oak door which led into the Sunset Tower.

The view was magnificent! The sun was just setting, and the western sky was ablaze with colors reflected by the high wispy clouds at the horizon. To the east, far-off and shrouded in cloud, stood this mighty tower's twin: the Sunrise Tower, home of Astrix.

"Our fathers would come to this place to meditate at day's end and pray for the day when we should leave this world," Hurth said. "Only Agrith comes here now, and far less often than in the past. Now that the stair is broken, he may never come again. The world is changing; even this strong tower will not survive what is to come!"

) Hurth, look around

Hurth searched the tower, finding what appeared to be a spyglass of some kind. It was old and delicately crafted, but many of its lenses were broken, making it more a thing of beauty than an object to be used.

"It is a work of art," Praxix said, "far more valuable than it would appear. Such handiworks are rare these days; it is a shame that we cannot put it to good use."

) David, pick up spyglass

Although wiser minds than I had concluded that the spyglass was unfit for use, I was nonetheless taken by its beauty, and quietly placed it in my pack. I do not think the others noticed, or, if they did, they said nothing.

) down

It was getting late, so we started down the stairs, coming quickly to the chasm, where Esher was waiting impatiently.

We were all very tired now from our arduous climb, so we decided to spend the night there on the landing, and in fact did not arise until the next afternoon. It was nearly time for dinner when we started down the stairs.

) down

Unsure of whether we had seen all there was to see in the lower parts of the caverns, we determined to return to the bottom of the stairs and continue our explorations.

) up

We climbed for hours as we made our way up the gently winding

stair, then paused for refreshment. It seemed the stairs would go on forever, but Hurth reassured us, saying, "We are now at the half-way point to the High Gate and the Tower of the Sunset!"

Hurth was right: a few hours later, we arrived at a junction of two stairways. "The stair to the left leads to the Tower of the Sunset; the stair to the right leads to the High Gate," Hurth said. "If we intend to reach the Tower, we should start now. It is a much longer climb."

) right

After another long climb, the stairs ended blindly. "We have come to the Bern i-Zar," Hurth said, motioning to the blank wall that stood before us.

"It figures," I blurted out; Hurth laughed gently, then spoke the word of command that opened the gate.

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