

WHAT'S THIS...? THE COCK'S CROWED *THRICE*, AND THE GREAT WARRIOR LIES YET ABED?

I WAS JUST ABOUT TO RISE.

WERE YOU, INDEED.

AND YET THE WAY YOU CLASP YOUR PILLOW TO YOUR CHEEK SEEMS NOT TO BESPEAK FIERCE DETERMINATION.

THE PILLOW *TRICKED* ME INTO BELIEVING IT WAS A *SHIELDMAIDEN OF THE AESIR*.

I SEE NOW MY MISTAKE, AND WILL HAVE NO MORE OF IT.

HOW GULLIBLE YOU HEROES CAN BE...

...HERE, LET ME REMIND YOU OF THE TOUCH OF A *TRUE SHIELDMAIDEN*, SINCE IT SEEMS BUT A FEW HOURS HAVE SUFFICED FOR YOU TO *FORGET*.



MY OWN SWEET SIGURD...

...SIGURD...

...SIGURD...

...SIGURD,  
YOU GREAT  
SLUMBERING  
OAF.

**SIGURD!**

WH-WHO--

--HEIMDALL?

YES, HEIMDALL--  
HE WHOM YOU WERE  
MEANT TO MEET AT  
BREAKFAST NEAR AN  
HOUR AGONE.

I-I WAS  
DREAMING  
OF BRYNA  
AGAIN.


TCH. WHEN  
AREN'T YOU.

PULL  
YOURSELF  
TOGETHER,  
BROTHER.

THE COUNCIL  
CONVENES IN  
A MATTER OF  
MINUTES.

THE...  
COUNCIL?

BY THE HAPLESS  
HEAD OF MIMIR, I'D  
FORGOTTEN...



"...I'LL BE THERE POSTHASTE,  
HEIMDALL--SAVE ME A  
PLACE AT THE FRONT!"

...CAN BE NO  
SECRET AS TO WHY  
I HAVE CALLED THE  
*AESIR* TO COUNCIL  
AFTER SO LONG A  
SPELL OF SILENCE.

FOR WE  
ARE BUT FEW  
IN NUMBER, AND  
RUMOR IS EVER  
FLEET OF  
FOOT...





THAT IS AN ADMIRABLE INTENT, SIGURD...



...BUT WE MUST NOT ALLOW OUR ZEAL TO OUTFRIN OUR GOOD SENSE.

FOR THE SCOUTS ALSO REPORT THAT, AS THE LETHAL MISTS HAVE THINNED, IT HAS BECOME POSSIBLE TO LOOK *BEYOND* THEM, AND TO ESPY UNSETTLING SIGHTS...

...STRANGE SUMMITS AND SEAS... BIZARRE BUILDINGS AND BEASTS...

...THAT HERETOFORE WERE NEVER KNOWN IN ANY OF VALHALLA'S ENVIRONS.



B



LET US CONTINUE TO OBSERVE, AND DETERMINE WHAT FORCES ARE AT WORK IN YONDER REALMS *BEFORE* WE VENTURE INTO THEIR MIDST IN FULL CRY.

YOU SPEAK WISELY AS EVER, BALDUUR...

...AND YET, HOW ONE'S LIMBS CHAFE AFTER BEING SO LONG BENUMBED BY THE ENDLESS, UNVARYING ROUTINE OF THE EVERYDAY.



WE AESIR--

EH?

FORGIVE THIS INTRUSION ON YOUR WORTHY ASSEMBLY, NOBLE SIRS.

I AM **TAHMINA**, A PRINCESS OF PARDESU.

I COME BEFORE YOU IN HUMBLE SUPPLICATION. I COME MOST ABJECTLY TO BEG YOUR *HELP*.




*SPEAK, PRINCESS; YOU MAY BE ASSURED OF A FAIR HEARING.*

WHAT YOU SEE BEFORE YOU IS NOT MYSELF, BUT A MYSTIC PROJECTION WHICH I HAVE WITH GREAT EFFORT CONJURED FORTH AND SENT OUT INTO THE WORLD...

\*...MY MORTAL BODY IS HELD HOSTAGE BY A **COMPLICITY OF DRAGONS**, WHOSE MEMBERSHIP HAS LAID WASTE TO MY NATIVE LAND.

"MY FATHER, THE **KING**, DELIVERED ME INTO THEIR HANDS AS A MEANS OF SECURING RELIEF FROM THEIR TERROR...

"...BUT THEY **BETRAYED** HIM. THEY CONFINED ME TO A PRISON CELL, BURIED IT BENEATH THE SANDS, AND RESUMED THEIR **DESOLATION** OF OUR REALM."



PRINCESS! AMONG THESE DRAGONS, IS THERE BY CHANCE ONE KNOWN AS...

...NAGAR?

YES. HE IS THEIR SUPREME AUTHORITY, THE MOST THOROUGHLY WICKED OF THEIR NUMBER...



...AND MY CHIEF TORMENTOR.

DO YOU HEAR THIS, BROTHER AESIR?

NAGAR, THE VERY WORM WHO TOOK MY BELOVED BRYNA FROM ME, IS NOW DISCOVERED TO US!




PRINCESS, BE EASY IN YOUR MIND.

I WILL COME TO YOUR RESCUE.

I WILL AVENGE YOUR WRONGS, AND FREE YOUR LAND FROM FURTHER RAVAGEMENT.

I AM MOST GRATEFUL, VALIANT SIR...

...BUT I MUST IMPRESS UPON YOU THE FEARSOME NATURE OF THESE BEASTS. YOUR TASK WILL NOT BE AN EASY ONE.



PERHAPS YOU WILL INVEST MORE CONFIDENCE IN ME WHEN MY NAME IS KNOWN TO YOU...

...FOR I AM CALLED SIGURD DRAGONSBANE.

AND I ASSURE YOU, I HAVE EARNED THE APPELLATION...





"...AS IT WAS I WHO SLEW THE DRAGON *FAFNIR*, MOST DREADFUL OF ALL HIS KIND, AND BROTHER TO THAT *NAGAR* WHO NOW OPPRESSES YOU.


"MY VICTORY HAS RESOUNDED IN LEGEND EVER SINCE, AND WILL DO SO *DOUBLY* WHEN I HAVE ADDED THIS NEXT TRIUMPH TO ITS TEXT."




IF YOU  
THINK ONCE MORE  
TO HOARD ALL GLORY  
FOR YOURSELF,  
BROTHER, THINK  
AGAIN.

FOR NOBLE  
HEIMDALL WILL  
BE AT YOUR SIDE,  
AND MATCH YOU  
KILL FOR KILL.

AS WILL  
YOUR LOYAL  
COMPATRIOT,  
HONIR...



...FOR IF  
THERE IS INDEED  
A COMPLICITY  
OF DRAGONS, THEN  
THERE WILL BE MORE  
THAN SUFFICIENT  
TO EARN US ALL  
RENOWN.



O, HOW  
THE DAMSELS WILL  
SWOON WHEN I  
TELL THEM OF MY  
DERRING-DO!

AND SO...!  
AND SO!




YOU  
ARE INDEED  
FORTUNE'S  
FAVORED, MY  
FRIENDS.


YOU HAVE  
NO SOONER DESIRED  
UNIMPEACHABLE CAUSE  
FOR ADVENTURING, THEN  
ONE MANIFESTS ITSELF  
BEFORE YOU.



AND  
YET...I THINK I,  
TOO, SHALL JOIN  
YOUR PARTY.



WHO KNOWS,  
BUT THAT YOU EAGER  
STALWARTS WILL NEED  
BALDUUR'S COOLER  
HEAD AMONG YOU...



SIGURD,  
OUR *KITH* AND *KIN*  
COME TO BID US  
GODSPEED. WILL YOU  
NOT FAVOR THEM  
WITH A MOMENT'S  
ADIEU?

I HAVE SLEPT  
NARY A WINK,  
HEIMDALL, AND IT  
WAS *NOT* FROM  
EAGERNESS FOR  
ONE MORE CIVIC  
GATHERING.


I HAVE LOOKED  
ON NAUGHT BUT THESE  
SAME FACES FOR MORE  
YEARS THAN I CARE TO  
COUNT, AND NOW HAVE  
EYES *ONLY* FOR THE  
OPEN ROAD...

...*HO*, YOUR  
HIGHNESS! LEAD US  
WHERE YOU WILL, AND AT  
WHAT *VELOCITY* YOU  
WILL. WE CAN RIDE AS  
SWIFT AS THE WINDS,  
IF YOU WISH IT.

YOU MAY  
DO SO, WORTHY  
SIGURD, BUT I  
MAY NOT.



MY SPEED  
MUST MATCH  
THAT OF A CLOUD  
STEERING ACROSS  
THE SKY, LEST I  
BE *SCATTERED*  
LIKE A MORNING  
MIST.



SPEAKING OF  
MISTS, *YONDER*  
LIE THOSE WHICH  
FOR MANY A YEAR  
HAVE KEPT US FROM  
VENTURING FARTHER  
THAN THIS SPINE  
OF HILLS.

IT IS AS THE  
SCOUTS REPORTED:  
THE MISTS ARE NOW SO  
REDUCED THAT THEY NO  
LONGER FULLY CLOAK  
WHAT LIES *BEYOND*  
THEM.

WHAT  
SAY YOU, FELLOWS?  
SHALL WE *BRAVE*  
THEM AT LAST?



NEED YOU ASK?

HAVE A CARE... FOR IT WAS BUT MERE DAYS PAST, THAT TO ENTER THESE VERY MISTS WAS TO SUFFER A GASPING, CHOKING DEATH.

WE KNOW NOT WHAT ILL EFFECTS THEY MIGHT YET INFLECT EVEN IN THIS DILUTED STATE.



THEY...STING SOMEWHAT...LIKE HOT ASH FALLING UPON MY CHEEK.

BUT THAT IS MERE DISCOMFORT, NOTHING MORE.

WAIT...THERE IS ANOTHER, UNFORESEEN PHENOMENON. NOTE HOW THE MISTS SHIMMER AND COALESCE...



...INTO FANTASTICAL APPARITIONS.

I WONDER WHAT THEY PORTEND?

PERHAPS THEY ARE BUT VISIONS... FANCIES OF OUR OWN IMAGINING.

PAY THEM NO HEED, MY NOBLE LORDS...