

# Legend of Zagor

Written by Christopher Griffith

*Based on the Fighting Fantasy gamebook Legend of Zagor by Ian Livingstone*

*and © Ian Livingstone*

The travel is tough. Amarillia's beautiful landscape was laid waste five years ago by the Bone Demon's armies, Zombies and Orcs infesting unspoilt plains before War Dragons swept through after them slaying thousands of men, Dwarfs, Elves and Centaurs. King Kraal finally defeated the menace, imprisoning the Demon in the Casket of Souls, flinging its evil back from whence it had arisen, the smoking, churning Bottomless Pit in barren expanse of the Plains of Peril. Yet other danger remains, for Zombies and worse still stalk the land and there are few warriors left to fight them.

I am Sallazar, a master of magic, operating with guile and stealth where others employ brute strength and I have no idea why I have been summoned here, to Sanctuary, by the boy-king Irian. Inexperienced in the arts of his position, I hear his court is riven by petty squabbles amongst scheming advisers. This is the Cauldron, furthest island of Icecap range, and I am fatigued beyond measure by my journey especially so when I step through a town whose inhabitants bolt doors and shutter windows against me. Hoping I receive better hospitality at the king's court I am satisfied in that measure when ushered swiftly into audience with him, but I am startled by his appearance. This boy-king is now at full stature, physically strong, his manner assured. 'Greetings,' he says with voice commanding. I kneel before his throne. 'Oh, do please stand up. I already have all the grovellers I need here in Sanctuary. I can scarcely do with another one. Come.' He rises and walks from the throne room.

Somewhat startled by his informality I get to my feet and follow him as he marches down a narrow corridor ending at his personal chambers within. He strides across to a table picking up a black cloth embroidered with golden runes to reveal a large chunk of blue-white crystal beneath. 'Look,' he says gently polishing it. The crystal hums slightly and a ghostly scene appears in midst of the room, a white-haired old man sitting in the most cluttered study I have ever seen, papers, crystal balls, bundles of bats' wings, bottles of herbs and a jumble of other articles scattered all over the floors and walls.

Irritated by the intrusion, he looks up at us both, snapping 'Eh? What is it?'

'Gereth,' the king apologises, 'the hero I spoke of is here. Relate once again what you told me.' He pauses. 'Perhaps you have learnt even more?'

For long moments the old man is silent, studying me. 'Well,' he sighs at last, 'I suppose you've told him about the Demon Throne, explained the laws of Fractured Resonance and...'

'Time grows so short,' Irian says gently, 'you can explain much better than I.'

The ghostly apparition flutters, his expression faintly disapproving. 'Very well. I take it that at least you know of King Kraal and his defeat of the Bone Demon?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Banished to the Bottomless Pit on those Plains of Peril?'

'Indeed.'

'And the Demon's imprisonment there in the Casket of Souls?'

'That also.'

'Well, when the casket was made magic was woven into it to ensure the Demon's banishment to the outer planes.'

'I see.'

'But as that magic allowed the Demon to be drawn out from your world, its resonance permitted other malign creatures to enter yours in turn.' I am silent. He adjusts the slightly ridiculous lenses perched on his nose. 'I'm rather afraid,' he says in a schoolmasterish tone, 'that one such servant of darkness has done just that. His name is Zagor and he is a great wizard, one of the most powerful my world has ever seen. Twice we have believed him slain, but twice he has managed to resurrect himself.' He swallows. 'When he was drawn into your world, his being became fused with the trapped Demon, and now a demonic form of the sorcerer grows in strength and malice.' I remain quiet. 'Zagor entered your world where the Casket of Souls was taken after the Demon was banished.'

'Castle Argent?'

'Inside which the Grand Wizards of your world conjured the Great Fire Wall.' He leans forward. 'This time, it's not enough just to kill Zagor. His body has to be destroyed, burned to a crisp in the Heartfires below the castle.'

'I thought all this mere fable,' murmurs the king sadly, 'until my own spies verified the truth. Tell him of its flux, Gereth.'

The old man's eyes brighten. 'Ah yes, the castle. It's changing form, metamorphosing, drawing Zagor's old magic and servants into it, strengthening him as he grows in menace. Not all of that magic may be dark or evil and you may certainly be able to find good there too.'

'Why do you suppose I will help?'

'Brave adventurer,' Irian beseeches me, 'my own sorcerers give all they can to preserve the Fire Wall guarding the kingdom but I need one who can fight with hands as well as magic. My loyal knights and the few nobles I can trust have more work than they can perform simply preventing this land from tearing itself apart. Go to Castle Argent, destroy the wizard-fiend who comes to ravish our world, return to me with his cinders and I will raise your rank to that of your namesake.'

'Grand Wizard of Amarillia?' I beam. 'I accept, your highness.'

The ghostly scene begins to fade and tremble. 'Not yet!' snaps the old man in annoyance. 'I should tell you that one of the mightiest and most dangerous of the Demon's War Dragons, one which escaped destruction in the final battle ten years ago, is orchestrating the flux within the castle. It has learnt something of the ways of magic, seeking revenge for its defeat by allying

with Zagor to wreak havoc on Amarillia.’ Faint white sparks crackle at the edge of the crystal. ‘Perhaps, in its madness, it thinks of him as the Demon it once served. Which of course Zagor is, in part.’ The crystal explodes into a thousand fragments, King Irian and I looking down stunned at the smoking remains of the table upon which it stood. A sense of evil and menace hangs in the air around us.

‘A ship is readied for you,’ the boy-king whispers through the gloom. ‘It will carry you westwards to the coastline of Tower Island.’ He puts his hand on my shoulder. ‘Destroy the wizard-fiend who comes to ravish our land. Return to me after carrying out deeds worthy of the knighthood I shall then grant you!’ He shakes my hand and leaves the room. With the weight of a world’s fate resting on my shoulders – or so it feels – I cannot refuse the quest.

The *Glory of Amarillia* is a fully armed war-galley. Captain Carannus sniffs at the bitterly cold air. ‘There’s a fair northerly,’ he snorts, ‘but we should get to the Icecap Islands without fog hampering us.’ He breaks into a grin. ‘Unless any monsters of the deep bother us instead.’ The great vessel skirts the warm Stream of Zephyrs and after some days turns south-west past the coast of the Frozen Lands, but on the margins of the warm sea flows as we head for Tower Island itself fog does indeed begin to appear. Shortly after dawn when I am stretching my legs on deck there is a sudden churning of the seas to starboard. I ready myself to cast but just as I am looking over the side of the ship something large swoops down from the skies above knocking me to the deck with its claws. It is a great white reptile, many metres long with ragged-edged, horny claws, a great mouth and a spiny, barbed tail. I look up to see the Fog Wyvern preparing to attack but now I can cast against it, the captain and crew rushing to help me dispatch the creature so its carcass soon lies on the wooden planks of the vessel. ‘That’s no natural monster,’ the captain grimaces, ‘I know these Wyverns, and that tail’s malformed. Look at that crooked jaw too, and the way the bones of the spine are protruding through its back. There’s bad magic at work here.’ He turns to help his men throw the body overboard.

After several more days at sea the *Glory of Amarillia* comes within five kilometres of Tower Island itself. Even at this distance I can see the great towered mass of Castle Argent rising into the leaden skies just beyond the shoreline. The vessel can go no further in the shallow waters so I thank the crew for bringing me to this point and stow my belongings in the stout rowing boat that has been lowered into the bay. Carannus shakes my hand firmly. ‘We head for the River Gold to meet, hopefully, my own people who remain in the lands upstream.’ His expression hardens. ‘We will come back for you when the moon is new. If you are not waiting, we will come once more when it is so again.’ He smiles. ‘We hope for your safe return. And news of a triumph.’ With that I board the boat and row for shore, soon standing upon the shoreline of Tower Island. Before me, a long straight stone road leads up to the gates of Castle Argent itself but on either side of it are many ruined buildings razed by Orcs and Zombies in the war against the Bone Demon. Sifting through the rubble to the west I find a ten metre length of rope and an empty glass bottle. As I make my way back to the main road, I hear sudden movement to my side as three Orcs jump out from behind a crumbling stone wall to confront me. Their armour is ragged

but their axes are sharp, and one of them is mutated, his limbs and shoulders bristling with raw power. Even he though is no match for my magic as I snatch his axe through the air and bury it in his chest when he comes running for it, the other two prey to my staff with which I batter them to their demise.

Soon I am heading towards the ruins on the other side of town, stumbling across a small stone well which strangely has no mechanism for drawing water nor indeed a bucket with which to do so. I dimly remember hearing of a Well of Visions outside Castle Argent so I take a Gold Piece and pitch it into the darkness hearing the plop and a seething and boiling which causes me to look down as the water grows placid again, the face of an old woman shining up at me placing a thought in my mind, 'Beware the traitor-wizard Remstar, beyond the Heartfire.' Then she is gone. And I head for Castle Argent.

The stone-built mass stands before me, its great iron-shod gates lying at the end of the road which then angle down into the earth so that anyone entering the castle must first negotiate its subterranean chambers. I look above ground but the walls of the castle are far too high for me to climb. There is a central keep, east and west wings diverging from it, and furthest from where I am stands the northernmost Great Tower rising to a spire among swooping seagulls. At its highest point sits the throne room, surely where the monster Zagor grows in evil might? With renewed resolve I cast an Open Spell on the gates in front of me, walking in to find myself in the great entrance hall of the castle. Pennants and shields once flanking the long walls have either been defaced or broken and flung to the stony floor and wall-torches burn dimly providing low light enough for me to see another pair of doors ahead. I push them open to find myself in a huge chamber, clearly a Feast Hall as around the huge dining table sit skeletons in the rags of what was once finery. There is an odd, disturbing atmosphere as though something of their spirit still remains here so I concentrate my magical energy causing the hall to shimmer and the skeleton at head of table to stiffen in his chair. 'Who are you?' he growls.

'Who are you?'

'A courtier of King Kraal's. Now who are you?'

'The wizard Sallazar, come to seek Zagor.'

'To seek,' he lingers, 'or to destroy?'

'Can you help me?'

'The great Orc chieftain Thulu holds court above us. He guards a powerful, magical sword. It will help you in your quest.'

'Are dangers as great on this level?'

'The dungeon-prison. There is a very strong Golem guard there. Amongst his charges, lost magic which may be of considerable interest to you.'

My spell is fading, the skeleton slumping in his chair.

'Three-Eyes Haag.'

'What is that?'

‘A crazy old merchant who’s survived all these years in the castle by boarding himself up. He’ll have equipment, and magic, for sale.’ Hardly moving now. ‘Beware Grool, Keeper of the...’ He returns to inanimate state.

I move through to the kitchen where a great hearth sits in the north wall with hobs and pots and roasting spits, though its fire is long extinguished. I find and take an empty glass bottle, opening a door on the west wall to see a small, narrow passageway from which a couple of tiny box rooms stand, and some large larder cupboards. Sacks of mouldy flour, rotted cereals, smashed ceramic pots and decayed food greet my search but also some wax-sealed jars of preserved fruits and garva. I am just thinking of the fresh air of Crab Island from where this highly nutritious root vegetable springs when I hear a snuffling, squelching sound behind me. I spin round, appalled and disgusted at what I see, a white lizard-like creature two metres long with leprous purple-ringed yellow blotches all over its skin. It has been stitched together from body-parts of various creatures and I am repulsed even further when I see its all too human hand-like front paws. The Corpse Lizard hisses and spits a gobbet of filthy yellow phlegm at me, a faceful of filth that leaves me choking and sick and so furious I cast paralysis on it straightaway. There is a slime trail behind it which I am interested to track, heading north from the kitchens then east in a straight line to the end of the passage, stopping at the wall. There must be a secret door somewhere, there, and behind it a set of chiselled stone steps leading down, ending at a landing with single door opposite.

On it, there is a glowing pattern of magical runes, a warning I see to keep out. There is Dark Elf element in their design and I am warier still because they don’t look like standard wizard’s runes. Intrigued, I study them further to notice strange twist, a trap laid against magical entry. Whoever is behind the door is scared of wizards in particular, so I must enter! There is a vast jumble of furnishings and bric-a-brac but it is the walls that are most visible, inscribed with all manner of magical symbols and signs wholly protective in nature. The occupant of this room is clearly terrified of magical attack by a wizard. And there he is, a cowering emaciated Dark Elf with a thin dagger in one hand and a small trail of fine ash drifting from the other as he prepares to cast a spell at me. He is in no mood to parley, and so I do exactly that introducing myself to say that I am not the wizard intending him harm. It doesn’t work. He screams at me to get out, edging round the room to get his back against the safety of a solid wall, and that’s when I attack thwarting the Fireball spell he flings from the ash at me and casting my own magic to blunt and ruin his dagger. In no time at all he is dead by my sorcery of suffocation, the Magic Ring he wore upon his finger on mine instead, his diary open to reveal the part he has played in necromantic magic, creating and animating mutated monsters with reference to a ‘silver room’ where these experiments have been conducted. The fellow even served the very Bone Demon whose army decimated Castle Argent, and then here it is, his mortal fear of a ghostly wizard Remstar said to be ‘beyond the Hearthfires’.

With this information I retrace my steps back up through the secret door returning along the passageway and then heading deeper into the heart of Castle Argent. I come across a door whose lock has been smashed, pushing it open slowly to find myself in what must once have been a

great library, but the beautiful leather-bound books and illuminated manuscripts have all been destroyed, placed in a now cold bonfire of bookcases; a few of these still stand however, empty and forlorn against the walls with one ever so slightly out of alignment. I push at its edge and it rotates revealing a secret passageway which runs a long way eastwards then turns north, ending at a door, plain, creaky and slightly warped. Opening it, I come face to face with three starving, ragged and very young men who immediately back away from me, heavy knives in their hands. 'I mean you no harm,' I say, taking in the darkness of their surroundings. 'Why ever do you hide here?'

One of them steps forward. 'Cohsturre. He's a merchant,' he explains, 'we buy food from him in return for stolen goods. I can lead you to him.'

'Why would you do that?'

He turns to his friends. 'I may be able to get extra food and equipment for us. With the wizard's help.'

They nod imperceptibly.

'Follow me,' he says, 'he will have wares for you too.'

My instinct is to trust the youngster so we are soon back at the passageway heading up the opposite path to arrive at a door which has Orcish graffiti daubed in blood round its frame. A once pleasant guest-chamber has been vandalised, soiled with blood and filth. Amongst the wreckage lie a couple of broken skeletons the size of Dwarfs. My companion spies a leather pouch on one of them pulling from it a shrivelled piece of parchment which he unfolds then hands to me:

*We come to reclaim Stonehammer, mighty weapon crafted centuries past by the Granitesmiths of Grundia snatched by the Hellhorn Champion who cowers with it now in Castle Argent. If we perish in our quest, complete it for us*

'Do you know of this Stonehammer?' I ask my companion.

'No, but the Hellhorn Champion is a mighty foe.'

We move on to the door at the end of the passage. There is a faded brass plaque upon it which reads, 'Please knock before entering'. Below this is a brass door-knocker fashioned in the shape of a Pegasus' head, with a lucky horseshoe nailed underneath.

My companion stays my arm. 'I advise you to knock.'

I do so.

'Yes, yes,' an irritated voice snaps, 'come in!'

The room is a veritable treasure-trove filled with armour, food, weapons and more. In front of it all stands a scowling man wearing a blue tunic and brown skull-cap, an eyeglass drooping from a strap which circles his forehead. He looks past me to my companion. 'Oh, you again. What do you want to try and pinch now?'

'Show him your slate, Cohsturre. The wizard has wealth.'

'You could have told him my name. How else am I called?'

‘Why,’ I say happily, ‘that excellent merchant of repute, Three-Eyes Haag.’

He breaks into a warm smile. ‘My fame is known, then? Do they still speak of me in far Cabaal?’

‘You are as well thought of there as ever you were, maybe more now.’

‘How?’ he snaps again. I have been stuck here for an age.’ He rummages round and pulls out a list of items for sale, noting my expression when I seem to take little interest in them. ‘I also have a limited supply of extra special, but expensive, magical items,’ he says reaching behind him. ‘You can summon a genie from this bottle, for just one use during combat. It will use magic to paralyse your enemy allowing you to overcome him automatically. 10 Gold Pieces.’ I pull the money from my robes and he hands me the bottle. The thief wants me to spend more and I smile when I see him rifling a couple of items whilst he is assuring Cohsturre he will spread news of the merchant’s repute further round Castle Argent.

We return to the passageway, heading south then west to a door on the left hand side bearing simple magical rune. Once again the room has been looted, furniture and paintings smashed up, graffiti scrawled all over the place but for a door opposite upon which a network of magical lines resembling a spider’s web has been drawn, set within a circle then a triangle. The web is a locking element, the circle a protective symbol, the triangle a magical trap. A powerful wizard has inscribed this but not any greater than me. I smash on the door stepping aside as the circle detonates, the triangle glowing brilliant orange and flames showering out into the room beside me. As though in defensive reflex, the web then spreads across the door but I cast and am soon inside the wizard’s chamber. Slightly disappointed with the booty I find, I am however impressed with a glowing blue mirror amongst the clutter which turns out to be a teleporting portal. I sigh. I hate teleporting. You never know where you’re going to end up when you subject yourself to it and anyway there are other rooms on this floor of the castle I want to explore. Spiriting myself away from danger is not why I came to Castle Argent.

We leave, entering the next door on the left to find an indoor garden holding rare and exotic plants, riots of flowers and lemon-scented grass borders, to the south a small fountain with water still trickling from its intricately carved head. As we make for it there is a rustle from the tree branches to our right and a flock of bats fly out first circling above then approaching our level; with blood-red glowing eyes, razor-sharp canine teeth and metre-wide wingspans these are Horned Vampire Bats! The Thief makes quick work of them though, pinpoint accuracy with his throwing daggers and bow and arrow stolen from Cohsturre, impaling the three of them so they fall to the ground lifeless, and we approach the fountain, its waters clear and pure from which we drink. I fill my glass bottles and as we turn to leave suddenly the fountain’s waters run dry. On the door opposite are signs portraying Shandalla, Amarillian goddess of healing, mercy and kindness. We enter the once ornate and decorated temple, now defaced as so much of the castle. In the gloom I can just make out two figures standing on a dais behind the altar. They aren’t moving but they do hold long, cruelly barbed halberds and as we approach them slowly the stench of death grows strong. ‘Zombies,’ whispers my companion taking his bow and priming an arrow. He fires at one of the undead guardians who looks down at the wound inflicted then

unfurls into life. The Thief moves forward but I check him. ‘Careful,’ I warn, pointing to the strange copper circlets round their heads, ‘these are Crown Zombies.’

‘So let’s dethrone them.’ He pulls out his sword, rushes forward and in one movement swings round to take the head off the first zombie. Raising my staff I send the second sprawling back, a sudden rumpus sounding from behind the doors they have been guarding, Orcish voices raised in alarm over the cry of a man’s terrified voice calling for help. We push through to see the Orcs, two of them clad in part-armour with weapons readied, one turning to face us whilst the other leers over the cowering body of a terrified wizard in white robes lying prone on the floor. The thief takes care of that advancing whilst I rush to the aid of the wizard using my staff to slam the Orc back against the wall where he perishes on force of impact.

‘Thank you,’ says the wizard. ‘Thank you so much.’ He places his hand on my arm and I immediately feel rejuvenated from my battle-fatigue.

‘Who are you?’

‘A healer, imprisoned and forced to use my curative arts on these foul beasts whenever they suffered injuries. Come here. How do you both feel?’

‘You have some power.’

‘I am nothing beside my old mentor, the great healer Zuqurulm, in far greater strait than I. He is captive on the next floor above, taken by the Orc chieftain Thulu who is protected by great guard of mutant Orcs and Crown Zombies mightier than those outside these doors. If you destroy them all, Zuqurulm will certainly help you in your onward venture.’

‘Will you come with us, to heal us on the way?’

‘No. I want to leave this dreadful place, help the wretched souls on Tower Island still menaced by the Orcs.’

‘I’m leaving too,’ says the thief. ‘I’m already beyond the limits I set myself.’

‘Then return and bring back your friends. I cannot take this Thulu and his band by myself.’

‘You can if you drink this.’ He hands me a bottle. ‘It’s a Potion of Invisibility. My gift to you, from that Orc I just slew.’ He puts his shoulder under the wizard’s arm. ‘Come on, old man, I’ll show you the way out from this accursed place. Farewell, Sallazar, I invoke Shandalla to protect you.’

‘As do I,’ coughs the wizard. ‘May your kindness in releasing me be met with mercy and continued healing.’

I feel a glow suffuse me again, returning to the passageway where it turns north. As I stride past bare stone walls with irregularly placed dimly burning torches and approach the first door in the wall a shadowy hand suddenly reaches from the gloom and chills me with its dark touch, but the ambush by this Skulking Shade falls short for the healer’s power thwarts its malignity, the featureless vaguely human shape dissipating back into the darkness from which it crawled out at me.

Ahead, there is a door with grille set into it, stairs beyond descending into the dank, fetid depths of the dungeons which clearly comprise the castle’s jail. I climb down carefully towards a seemingly endless passage stretching ahead of me entering the first door on my right, the jailer’s

restroom where a huge stone statue stands guard crafted in the shape of a demon with stony wings, huge horns, clubbed hands and a network of spikes on its head running down along its neck and spine. The Giant Stone Golem reaches forward to grasp me but I am too quick, slamming the door in its face and locking it with a Fastening spell. I move to the next door inscribed above with the word 'Mungus', opening it upon a half-Ogre of a man well over two metres tall and nearly as broad hefting a huge maul in his shovel-sized hands. He comes for me so I slam the door in his face though my spell is not strong enough and he crashes through easily, chasing me along the passage towards another door which I gulp to see is sturdily constructed of iron shod darkwood with heavy lock. I stand in front of it and duck to one side as he moves forward and batters the thing to pieces with his maul leading us through to a new cell-block which ends with a door different from the rest; a black wrought-iron image of a Dragon sealed into the hard, varnished wood of its surface receives the same treatment from this huge thug and his hammer. Inside, scores and scores of huge yellowed bones are strewn all over the place, beginning to move together jerkily at first then forming the spine and limbs of a creature rising slowly on all fours. Mungus, completely unfazed carries on swinging his weapon to kill the Skeletal Dragon, its bones smashing into smithereens and now remaining inert. I notice a slim wand on the floor, grabbing it before the foul guard can turn again, and with a smooth wave of my new possession I manage to root him to the spot so he is quite unable to lift the maul or even move his position.

I retrace my steps back up the stairs and away from the jail to the main passageway, peering along a tunnel lit by the dim glow of distant flames. After some fifty metres I come to a great chasm which drops into fiery depths below. This must be the Heartfires. A Jump spell sees me safely across the six metre wide gap into a cavern which seems to be enclosed until I find a passageway hidden behind a large boulder. There is a faint gleam of gold ahead towards which I move soon coming across a shallow pool of milky water. This could well be Castle Argent's famous Pool of Gold. I'll not disturb it. I do not wish to profane a part of the castle as yet unspoilt by the Zagor-Demon.

Retracing my steps I enter another cavern which again glows faintly but this from the crystalline walls and ceiling where sharp angular stalactites hang like chandeliers in the warm air. I note a distinctive aura of magic here confirmed when I move to enter and a blue triangle of glowing energy appears in mid-air to block me. As I dispel it there comes sudden scream from the back of the cavern where materialising before me is the ghostly form of a wizard, torment written large across his face and flickering flames dancing at his fingertips. He casts from his fiery hands but I deflect repelling the numb, chilling hands of this Wizard-Ghost, sending him back to the ether with the new wand I have acquired. There are two ornate and very unusual playing cards left behind him, their backs uppermost bearing strange elliptical design, a snake swallowing its own tail in red on a black background. I turn over the first to see the image of a silver dagger on its face. As I examine it more closely the second card turns over by itself, the horrific grinning face of the Zagor-Demon dripping with blood glaring at me with all its malignity of purpose. The eyes glow red and its face contorts into a murderous grimace as though the maniac himself is

struggling out of the card to attack me. I spin it over in my hand so that the silver dagger slams face down, screams sounding from it as I leave the weapon tearing into the Warlock making my way back over the chasm to the passageway and on to a further door I haven't opened just in front of the stairs leading back to the jail.

Ahead of me, across the room is a great spiralling stone stairway leading across a deep, fiery chasm up to a landing far above. At top, I open a door and stride across an empty chamber to another door in the far wall. Beyond that runs a junction of passages. I head west soon entering the legendary Hall of Heroes where portraits of all the greatest warriors and knights in Amarillia hang proudly. One in particular catches my eye, a plate mail-clad knight with flowing auburn hair and green eyes singlehandedly hewing down a group of Orcs whilst an airborne sword quite by itself flies about him striking at the enemy as well. A well-concealed sliding panel sits behind this painting which I open to see in cramped chamber behind a dark haired, middle-aged man sitting on a dilapidated bed with his head in his hands. He wears plate mail armour, carries a heavy broadsword in his left hand and a shield in the other. I note also the curiously ornate gold ring on his index finger just as he sits upright and yells at me to leave. But this is no Dark Elf terrified of wizards; this knight is terrified of his own surroundings.

'My name is Sallazar,' I declare, 'come to destroy the evil oppressing Castle Argent.'

He looks at me in despair. 'It is hopeless,' he mutters, 'the darkness is too great.'

'I have passed through the lower level,' I press, 'and here I stand before you, unharmed.'

'The evil there is as nothing next to that on this floor.'

'Tell me of yourself.'

He shrugs his shoulders. 'I am an Argent Knight, one of the last. My name is Sir Davian.'

'You have survived the cull, Sir Davian.'

'Only because I hide in this cell. It is all I can do now to keep the Orcs at bay. Death will come soon.' He breaks down in tears.

'Why do you ail so?'

'When the War Dragons assaulted the castle, one of them afflicted me with magical fear. I fled the battle, fainted in terror and found myself here. And here I stay, cowering for my life.'

'Who is the Knight with the magical flying sword?'

'My best friend,' he sighs, 'Sir Bettel. He was a mighty warrior and his sword would fly at his side, dancing in the air and slicing through Orcs thick and thin. He perished in the wars, but you may still find his rooms, the chambers of the Argent Knights.'

'Would you guide me there?'

He shrinks back. 'No, I shall never leave these chambers.'

I can see he is resolved to stay so I bid him goodbye heading north, west then north again towards two doors, the first showing an onyx patterned inlay bearing some odd magical runes. I open it to see a set of interlocking circles drawn on the floor. Within the central circle something is beginning to materialise, the already heady air now shimmering, its strange musky smell growing stronger as it forms into a whirlwind-like vortex several metres tall. I feel relieved for this is just an Air Elemental and its kind are not a threat to me. Sending it back through the

circles so that they dim as the light of magic sparks out of them, I search the room to find an ornate onyx staff with four symbols etched along its length – a lion, goblet, star and chevron. Happy with my acquisition, I leave to face the next door which has a great shield inlay upon it, design of old King Kraal himself. A barracks complex lies beyond, a network of small parade chambers and dormitories. At the end there are two doors, one blue one yellow. I push open the former to find myself in the Royal Statuary. Fiery blast-marks pepper the blue-flecked marbled walls whose recesses hold fractured statues shattered by magic but there is one still intact, several metres high, coming to life with threatening gesture as I move into the room. An expressionless warrior, the enormous statue holds a massive spiked stone club in one fist and a long, slender whip in the other. The Stone Colossus steps out from its housing and I step out of the room; some fights simply aren't worth the trouble. When I push open the yellow door I feel the same. Two magically animated suits of lacquered yellow plate mail armour carrying heavy pikes in their gauntleted hands come straight for me chasing me away and further down the barracks until they suddenly break off their pursuit and retire. And in a moment I know why for from the darkness a shambling, rotting corpse in rags suddenly lurches towards me, miasma of flies buzzing about its suppurating flesh. The Plague Bearer swipes at me but, thank Shandalla, misses.

Now I run, eager to be clear of the barracks and this part of the castle heading back to the central passage where I see a green door, opening it to enter upon a room of dead vegetation. Laughing to myself I quickly realise my folly for a huge shape comprised of vines suddenly rises from the half-rotten plant remains, its knobbed limbs twitching, reaching out for me. I turn to leave thinking I have the best of this Plant Golem but suddenly my leg is pulled back, bound by one of its vines. I manage to free myself but then my arm is wrapped up, and the other, the Golem hugging me tighter and tighter in its suffocating grasp. Struggling to free myself, I cannot believe my quest is going to end like this, constricted to expiration by a giant plant. Desperately, I call on Shandalla again and suddenly I am able to work myself loose running south then east then north panicked now by my almost untimely demise finding a door with axe-blows etched deep into the wood bursting through to find myself in a room littered with bones and small skeletons suspended from the oak ceiling beams. Dwarfish warriors who once served the king, shamefully hanged by the Orcish thugs who rampaged here. Something inside me hardens at such senseless brutality and my resolve to rid this place of all malignant creatures strengthens with measure. I search the rest of the room finding a panel in the east wall not quite flush with the main stonework, a secret door which I slide open to reveal small cramped chamber with foul and musty air and a one-way door in the north wall leading to what looks like it was once the king's art gallery, broken sculptures and shattered crystal lying everywhere. Paintings of Elven Masters of the King's Hunt have been sliced up with swords and the hall has been thoroughly vandalised by the Orcs who have daubed moustaches and beards on the paintings of the queens and princesses. A large portrait of an old grey-haired wizard is still intact in its frame at one end. As I look more closely at it the face changes swiftly and dramatically, his kindly features mutating

into the livid, red face of the Zagor-Demon. Its eyes meet mine and the visage breaks into a crooked grimace of hatred, a telepathic scream forming in my mind, 'You dare challenge me?' Enraged myself, I put my hand straight through his monstrous face feeling a catch behind which I pull to find myself at door leading back out onto the passageway. Moving through the next one I enter a ransacked room with another silvered door in the west wall. Standing in the middle of this room, carrying a sack, is a leather-clad Elf. He's tall and slim, and he reacts swiftly to my presence, drawing a long dagger dripping with an oily green liquid. He has a strange, crooked smile, and a livid red scar runs down the right side of his face. He is also wearing a plain grey cloak which shimmers oddly, and as I look at him it seems as if his body is swimming in and out of focus. He looks me up and down seeming not the least bit afraid of me. 'I am Elrael, Master Thief,' he says suddenly. This is one of my old haunts, Castle Argent. I've lifted more pleasing little items from round here than you could possibly count up. Not much left these days though, not with these stinking Orcs around. They've looted so much of the place, and vandalized the rest. This is probably my last visit. Time to teleport home, I reckon...that is, unless you'd be interested in buying a little something? Information, perhaps? Maybe some Orcbane?'

'How much for that?'

'Orcbane? 5 Gold pieces.' I hand him the money. 'Apply it to any edged weapon,' he advises, 'axe, sword or dagger before you fight Orcs, and when you strike the miserable creatures any damage done will be considerably increased. Now, anything else?' He shows me a list of items for sale. 'All an absolute bargain,' he continues, tossing his hair. 'My wives and children will surely starve to death if I'm forced to sell at these prices. By all the gods and goddesses, I'm too soft-hearted a soul, truly I am.'

'Can you tell me how I get into the Great Tower where Zagor lies?'

Elrael flinches at the mention of Zagor's name. 'I really wouldn't use the Z-word round here. Walls have ears, you know. More importantly, there are things that can creep out of walls if they hear that word.' I hand him another 5 Gold Pieces. 'Well,' he grins, 'to find you-know-who atop the Great Tower you've got to get past the Dragon Doors north of the Throne Room, along the Bronze Stride. And to do that, you have to have the Dragonbone Keys. There's one set in both the east and west wings. Grool has one set, for sure.' He rubs a magical ring on his left hand and simply vanishes! He must have teleported out of castle Argent with his booty, and my money. I open the door in the west wall on to a room littered with the preserved parts of mutant monsters and strange equipment. Palpable evil lingers in the air, a rhythmic slurping noise coming from under another door, this one in the south wall which I open carelessly. The monster I see before me must have been an Ogre once but its feet and hands have been enlarged greatly and its fingers and toes have long raking nails the size of daggers. Its belly is hugely distended and it appears to be blind, its puffy reddened face slouching above a band of livid purple stitching round its throat. Tentacles link its body to pulsating bellows, flasks and jars and the rise and fall of a great rubbery valve dripping with thick slime is what is making the ghastly noise in here. I feel almost sorry for this Mutant Chaos Ogre until it senses my presence and spits out a blob of corrosive acid at me. Stepping to one side I see no point in attacking something that cannot fight back even

though it is a hideously disgusting sight so I return to the passageway wondering just what kind of twisted lowlife would do that to a creature, even an Ogre.

Moving on, I enter the rooms of the Argent Knights, the elite defenders of the castle, again thoroughly pillaged by the Orcs. In one of the smallest chambers I find a concealed magical portal but I'm here to rid the whole castle of evil so I step away and search for Sir Bettel's room. These chambers have of course been ransacked also but to my surprise there is a shortsword lying on the table and three dead Orcs beside it on the floor, their bloodstains relatively fresh. 'Yes,' it says to me as I ponder the scene, 'I'm an Orc-slaying sword.' I jump back. 'Don't worry wizard, I can help you. My purpose is to kill Orcs, but I need magic to help me complete that task most effectively. What do you say?'

'Can you help me kill this Orc Chieftain, Thulu?'

'Of course.'

'Come on then.'

I take the sword. It's been a long time since I held one so I'm glad it can take care of itself. I head back to the passageway, the stink of Orcs very strong here. 'That's just the barracks,' says the sword. 'This way.'

We head along the passageway to the north coming upon a forbidding black door with wrought-iron decoration all over it. A racket of noise comes from within, creatures shouting wildly and discordant music braying forth. I look at the door to my left. 'Believe it or not, Sallazar, ahead is the better option. Hellhorns live in there, and I can't help you with them.'

'Ready?' I say, flinging the doors open on Pandemonium, the Throne Room filled mostly with drooling, mindless creatures slobbering and grimacing at one another. But some look capable and dangerous, none more so than the figure of Thulu, Great Chieftain of the Orcs sitting on his throne, a grotesquely misshapen crown half-covering his swollen head, ghastly bony protuberances thrusting out through its holes. Before I can react, Sir Bettel's sword has cut down the first two Orcs that attack before slashing to pieces the Great Orcs which follow. By now I am helping him, casting against Mutant Orcs and Great Crown Zombies, the monstrously bloated figure of Thulu the Chieftain rising angrily from his throne, howling in fury and whirling his mighty axe round uncontrollably. Frothing at the mouth and screaming abuse he attacks but I already have the Potion of Invisibility in hand throwing Orcbane at the sword and drinking until I see from Thulu's confusion that I have indeed become transparent. It is easy for me then to clatter him at will with my own and my onyx staff, casting freely whilst the sword in all its magic applies Orcbane to its blade and joins me in melee with this admittedly tough brute, the two of us wounding and hurting and swiping and slashing until he finally falls to his knees, then smashes down hard on his face to the floor just as the effects of Invisibility wear off and the last of Orcbane drips from the sword upon the dead chieftain. His pathetic, mindless minions cower together as I take the keys from Thulu's body and open the cell which lies behind the door to the west. On a bed of filthy straw, a red-eyed old man clad in once-white robes looks helplessly up at me, his expression turning to joy and delight when he sees that I am not one of Thulu's creatures. 'My friend,' he murmurs, 'you have freed me. How ever can I repay you?'

‘Zuqurulm, I...’

But he has shrunk back, terrified. ‘Only my acolyte knows my name. Where is he?’

‘Safe and well. I saved him too.’

He smiles again. ‘I had thought him long dead. My debt to you is doubled and you must have suffered much physical pain to reach so far into this terrible den of evil. Let me heal you. What is your name?’

‘Sallazar.’

‘Sallazar,’ he says, putting his hand on my arm, ‘I thank you for your bravery, and kindness.’

This time I feel beyond reinvigorated, even strengthened and advanced somehow by the power and properties of this wizard. And then he walks out to Thulu’s throne, opening a secret compartment in its base to retrieve a ring which he places on his finger, suddenly vanishing.

The sword and I look for him, but it is to no avail so reluctantly we leave moving north along a small corridor into the great castle passageway. There are doors ahead and to the east and west giving access to those wings. I choose the latter, heading for an unmarked door before which the sword stops me. ‘That’s Hellhorn stench, Sallazar.’

Resolved, I thrust the door open to walk in on a lair of looted treasure, befouled furnishings and décor, and gnawing on an Orc leg a three-metre-tall Hellhorn Champion rising up on its massively muscled legs, cracking its whip angrily at my intrusion. Opening an enormous mouth filled with discoloured yellowish teeth, the monster breathes a fetid cloud of filth as it prepares to assault me with a flurry of horn-butts and whip strikes. Nauseated and coughing hard, I nonetheless manage to raise my onyx staff, flowing chevrons bursting from it to fly at my foe as deadly magical arrowheads. He is too slow to react, impaled on a string of barbs, unable to use his whip but horn-butting at me instead. This is easy for me to evade and in moments I have taken his whip from him, gleefully striking it upon his flank, his chest, his mouth before snatching the Orc leg from his hand and jamming it as far down his throat as possible. He splutters, coughs hard, then chokes himself back against the wall, clutching at his windpipe as life starts to fade from him. The sword swipes his horns clean off and with one last strike his tail too, the beast emasculated as he takes his last breath. There is a bunch of Dragonbone keys here, though there is just one large master key.

Returning to the passageway, we reach a door bearing the image of a silver crown upon it opening quietly to gaze into a majestic and beautiful chamber. A huge circular table dominates the room with thrones seated all round it; there must be fifty or so. In the huge hole in the middle of the table is a crystalline dome from which faint green flow emanates. There is a glowing image of some object or other inside the dome but I cannot make out what it is from the doorway – not least because the twenty-metre-long dozing reptile curled round the tabletop is between us and the dome! This must be a young Dragon, I guess, but any Dragon is a formidable enemy. As I am deciding whether or not to tackle it, I suddenly hear an anguished roar from somewhere far, far off in the Great Tower. The Young War Dragon here stirs at what sounds like the noise a very, very angry Dragon might make so I decide now to leave it well alone aware I may have bigger fish to fry in this department soon.

The next door holds design of a plain, black shield and glowing sun etched upon it. Even against the symbol of the warm sun the black shield looks forbidding. As I push open the door I find a mighty enemy ready and waiting. Clad in black plate mail with the identical image of the sun on his breastplate, the massive warrior holds a huge battle axe in both hands, its blade fashioned in shape of a dragon, the keen-edge glistening in light from a roaring fire behind him. His horned helmet looks impenetrable but there is a gap in armour exposing his left arm, a small banner of what could be the Zagor-Demon hanging below that from his waist. The sword is quicker than any of us, slicing through beneath the shoulder to sever his arm completely so that unable to wield his weapon in just one hand he drops it to the floor. I use the whip to collect it from there, then push him back with my wand and onyx staff until the banner catches light from the fire, soon consuming him with flame. He thrashes and flails madly, his frenzy only adding fuel to his incineration and then he is simply ash on the floor, the fire still burning steadily. I frown. The furnace is giving forth no smoke. There is dust everywhere though, and trophies of the hunt crowd the walls, ceremonial robes and capes hanging on the pegs beside them. I really don't feel like taking anything from this place so I return to the long passageway of the west wing and head for the unmarked door to the north, near the exit from the west wing.

A gruesome trophy-room lies behind it, rows and rows of severed heads lining the walls. In this ghoulish auditorium one row of heads seems to have been exalted above the others since there are four of them individually mounted on wall-plaques with their names etched below. They are (or were): Chanquin the Court Jester, Field Marshal Rabellan, Count Reindrech of Cabaal and Dorrick the Castellan. As the only one without title, I decide to summon this latter. Tall and silent, his ghost stands solemnly before me. 'Who summons me?'

'The wizard Sallazar. What lies ahead, in the Great Tower?'

'Unspeakable evil. Beyond the Crystal Doors lies not only the monster who is taking demonic form even as we speak, but also a mighty War Dragon. To overcome one would be the stuff of legend. To slay both – it is hard to believe that even one such as yourself could accomplish such a thing.' He ponders for a moment. 'But, perhaps, the Orb of the Templar...that might help. Listen: next door to this place the Grand Templar of the Court prowls the shadows still. He is a mindless thing, his heart and will destroyed by fell magic, and he is very powerful. If you search behind the fireplace in his chambers you will find a secret compartment. Some power may still reside in the Orb. He always used it in battle to strengthen himself. That is all I can tell you.' The ghost fades slowly from view.

The fire is still roaring loudly when I return to the room but using my wand its magic soon comes under my control and in moments it burns low then evaporates completely. From a small compartment behind a secret panel I retrieve a very simple, sheer black orb, no bigger than a goose egg. Hoping Dorrick was right about its power, I head back to the main passageway and this time open doors to the east wing. Behind them is a very lengthy, wide passage along which I walk until I arrive in the middle, some fifty metres or so down. This part of the castle seems to have been used for War Dragon hatcheries, something of a Dragon Mausoleum, though there is a door at the far east end which seems separate from these others.

I open it to find myself standing in the circular ground-floor chamber of the east tower itself rising high above me; a set of stone steps leads up to a wooden platform on which I can see a huge wooden war machine pointing away from me, out through a portal at the top of the tower. In front of me looms a gigantic, one-eyed, mutant Ogre hefting a club that must be all of my size, and he growls hatefully as I enter. This must be Grool! I raise my onyx staff but the wily brute rubs a ring on his left hand and disappears only to reappear a split second later at the top of the tower standing on the wooden platform. Straining his muscles and sinews, the huge monster starts to wheel the ballista – a huge, spear-flinging device – around to face me. One strike from such a weapon would inflict enormous damage, perhaps even kill me outright, so I charge up the stone steps casting everything I can at him and just as he is in position I leap forward whipping at the ring on his finger. Suddenly he is down on the tower floor, I now on the platform behind the ballista firing the five-metre long spear at him. He tries to parry it with his club but the spear simply crashes straight through it and on into the very eye of the monster himself, killing him instantly. There is a set of Dragonbone keys here just as Elrael said, one huge one clearly the master key.

I take them and then return to the passageway leaving the east wing, drawn now to a door which has lacquered black surface with gold etching and detail. I push open to find myself in a bare antechamber. There is a door to my right, and before me a pair of crystalline doors with images of War Dragons engraved on them, bizarre locks with keyholes crafted in yellowed bone set into the crystal. I open the former into a small, bare chamber where a figure clad head to toe in lacquered black plate mail confronts me. 'Prepare to die,' he says emotionlessly as he hefts a great, two-handed sword to strike at me. I pull the Genie bottle from my backpack and release it upon the Dark Knight, wondering (as I butcher him with his own sword) whether he knew he was talking to himself just now

I slip the two long Dragonbone master-keys into the locks in the crystal doors and they open. In front of me a great wooden stairway rises in a graceful curve to an archway high above, appearing to have been crafted from the jawbone of some impossibly vast, reptilian monster, a deathly leprous yellow-white in colour, forbidding in its sheer size and grim appearance. I step forward, and as I do the doors behind me slam shut. A gloating, eerie laugh mocks me as it resonates around the high-vaulted chamber of the stairway; Zagor awaits me, and I will not return alive unless I have slain him! I stride forward grimly and begin my ascent of the stairway. Some minutes later, I throw open the great doors below the Jaw Archway and grit my teeth as I sense the treacherousness of what lies before me. A corridor stretches out some twelve metres into the distance and its walls are lined with skulls set into the stone, as though they were thrown into liquid which then congealed trapping them on its surface. The effect is deeply disturbing and as I edge forward towards a chamber I can see ahead I have to fight back a rising sense of panic. Clearly some magic here is affecting me, making me sweat and tremble with fear! I press on along this accursed corridor nearing the cavernous chamber ahead, swirling patterns of light flashing from it so I have to screw my eyes up in a squint to see what is inside.

What I behold when I enter almost defies belief; the sheer scale of it is gigantic, breath-taking. Hovering some twenty five metres above me is a giant stone platform, more or less square in shape with a cupola above it and arches on all sides sculpted in the shape of enormous dragon jaws. A turbulent vortex of air whirls below the platform drawing up dust and debris into a spinning cone which rises to the base of the platform. Trailing from it down to ground level are four rickety-looking rope-bridges and from the top of the cupola a beam of milky light ascends to the ceiling where a white arch almost out of my range of vision stands, close to the top of the tower. And then there is the War Dragon...reclining on the platform, the monster appears to be asleep. It must measure forty metres from snout to tail and I have no chance of killing it – stealth must prevail instead. I consider climbing one of the rope bridges but choose instead the swirling vortex, hoping to be carried up by its energy. That hope is realised too quickly as it drags me up at some speed until I reach the underside of the Dragon's platform, just managing to claw my way to its edge and clamber over the side. I am within feet of the huge wyrm whose fury and might decimated Castle Argent's defenders, and it is still asleep! But its tail is twitching, then flicking, then sweeping as I tiptoe past to avoid waking it up and somehow reach the white light beam leading to the Zagor-Demon himself. As I step in and am lifted upwards I don't even notice the War Dragon's raising one eyelid and then going back to sleep...

I step out on to a circular ledge where there is a door inscribed with a huge letter Z before me. I open it, entering the Throne Room itself. Such ineffable evil now sits on the great throne, atop wide, marbled steps where once the kings of Amarillia held court to the wise and great. Rotting rags of purple, black and white robes hang from his body, but the large Z emblazoned across his chest is clear enough. He looks like both the most evil man I have ever seen and a Demon at one and the same time! Stitches down both sides of his face stand out proud from his gloating, demonic skin as if they covered veins ready to burst. His body is strong, his skin scaly, but bones show beneath and on his left a skeletal arm lacking a hand is sunk into the metal and wood of the throne, a pulsing, purple radiance glowing round it. Zagor rises to his feet and I see that the monster is huge; he must stand four metres tall! He grips a powerful rune-etched staff and casts his arms out wide, grinning a ghastly, crooked leer of triumph – but as he does this, lacquered black and red cards drop from the folds of his robe! For a split second, his face seems to register concern. I grab one of them as it falls to the floor, showing picture of a Giant. As I gaze at it for just a moment, I feel something of the strength and might of giants flow into me.

The Zagor-Demon screams in fury from its fell throne. 'You dare stand before me? I have not been banished from my own world to be confronted by a wretch like you.'

He spits contempt and rage!

Now battle is truly joined.

Zagor stands at the head of the steps preparing to cast a deadly spell. I race towards him but as I climb I feel myself being magically slowed down. And then he summons one of his Demonic Servants, a wretched, gibbering thing that resembles nothing so much as a dwarf-sized toad with tentacles where its front limbs should be and a ragged, barbed and forked tongue hanging out of its crooked mouth. The thing lollops in front of me in attempt to attack but I have my eyes on its

master and with impatience cast this lackey over the edge of the very steps I am traversing with such difficulty. Desperately, it tries to hang on with both tentacles and tongue but soon its grip loosens and it tumbles away screaming to its demise. Magical forces whirl around even more menacingly in the Great Tower as Zagor hurls Thunderbolt at me but I am equal to its threat deflecting it with my wand so that it bounces back towards him and he is forced to take evasive action. Undeterred though, he casts Fireball in my direction though this time I use the onyx staff to absorb, concentrate and expel it back straight at him. Enraged by my counter-measures he prepares another spell, one I don't even see simply feeling its effects as the Life Drain saps my energy to near nothing. But I haven't come this far to fall at the last hurdle so I push on, and suddenly feel revived with the healing I have received in course of my adventure restoring my stamina even now against the Zagor-Demon's onslaught. Changing tack, the monster brandishes a dagger which is glistening and dripping with what can only be poison, though as he readies to throw it at me I pull out the Hellhorn whip and with good timing take the weapon right out from under the nose of the now ireful creature so that it lands near me. This time he hurtles towards me with taloned fist, staff outstretched and we clash with those weapons, each trying to drive back and destroy the other. But then suddenly my adversary goes into frenzy and soon berserk manages to get the upper hand slamming me to the floor in demonic rage. I flail helplessly and realise I am going to die when I see the dagger still shining with poison just out of my reach. Summoning all my energy I cast to bring it close, taking it in hand and with one almighty blow swiping away his left arm completely. The Zagor-Demon howls in pain, his stitches bursting, rags shredding, cards falling to the ground in droves and then the purple radiance lessens, weakens and dies, just as my opponent crashes head first from the steps down to the floor. A howling crescendo of magical force is whipped up inside the Throne Room rejuvenating me with its energy. I see a treasure chest behind his throne and open it to find a huge pile of gold coins, all with the Z symbol on one side and a likeness of Zagor's face on the other. I leave them where they lie, not wanting to return with anything associated with his infernal name. Shrieking howls of a magical gale are beginning to race around at the top of the Great Tower. I pick the Demon's body up, carrying it down the steps and through the arch to the beam of light which deposits us on the Dragon's stone platform. I start to climb down one of the rope-ladders hanging from the platform looking desperately all the while at the still-sleeping wyrm, but it doesn't move and I'm sure I see its mouth curl slightly at the edge as I leave its chamber with the Zagor-Demon across my back. As I move into the corridor, I hear it take flight and glancing back see the great beast head up the milky beam towards its master's chambers.

The crystal doors below the wooden stairway are sundered; I find that all doors open before me as the howl of chaotic magic swirls and screams around angrily. All is pandemonium. I feel as if I am moving in a dream, hardly aware any longer who I am or where exactly I am going, just guided onwards by intuition, willpower and sheer guts! I race through the carnage of Thulu's Throne Room and southwards towards the stone bridge, over it and on through the guardrooms on my way to the southern passageway, the scream of chaotic magic in Castle Argent becoming almost unbearable. Weird phantasms and illusions dance before my eyes; ducking and dodging

to avoid them, I fling open the door leading to the Heartfires and race to the edge dropping the body of the Zagor-Demon into its chasm, a terrible scream rising from the bottomless depths below. The fire burns with an unbearable heat and I stagger backwards, going eastwards along the passageway beyond the chasm and reeling out through the doors of Castle Argent. I really don't remember too much after that.

When I regain awareness, I feel a cool sea-breeze playing across my face. I cough and splutter as a draught of best Crab Island rum is poured down my throat. The smiling face of Captain Carannus, with just a hint of tears shining in his eyes, swims into focus above me. 'We had to deal with a few Orcs who seemed interested in running you through with their swords,' he says softly, 'but, well, that was the least we could do. Welcome back!' The sailors on the deck of the *Glory of Amarillia* give me a rousing cheer, and surely greater glory awaits me when I return to Sanctuary. Amarillia is still a troubled land with many evils – but now it has the chance of survival, thanks to me!