


A CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURE

in the World of
KATHERINE KURTZ'S
DERYNI

DERYNI CHALLENGE

by
Stephen
Billias




US/56421-9 ★ \$3.50
CAN/56422-7 ★ \$4.50

EVIL STALKS THE ELEVEN KINGDOMS

Gwynedd is in turmoil, rife with bandits, assassins and the tyranny of corrupt petty rulers, while civil war threatens the kingdom. And in the far north, a mad self-proclaimed messiah—a heretic priest secure in an impregnable fortress—has raised an army of fanatics. Their goal: exterminate the superhuman Deryni.

Lord James Drummond, Camber of Culdi's grandnephew, must stop the renegades. But he is alone, outnumbered, beset by foes. The fanatics possess the magic to counter and nullify Drummond's Deryni powers . . .

And the mad heretic can perform miracles. Evil miracles . . .

CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURES are authorized interactive novels compatible for use with any role-playing game. Constructed by the masters of modern gaming, CROSSROADS™ feature complete rules; *full use* of gaming values—strength, intelligence, wisdom/luck, constitution, dexterity, charisma, and hit points; and multiple pathways for each option; for the most complete experience in gaming books, as fully realized, motivated heroes quest through the most famous worlds of fantasy!

**All-new. With an introduction
by
Katherine Kurtz**

ENTER THE ADVENTURE!

TOR'S CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURE SERIES

Dragonharper, based on Anne McCaffrey's *Pern Storm of Dust*, based on David Drake's *The Dragon Lord*

Revolt on Majipoor, based on Robert Silverberg's *Majipoor*

The Witchfires of Leth, based on C. J. Cherryh's *Morgaine*

Prospero's Isle, based on L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt's *The Incomplete Enchanter*

Dzurlord, based on Steven Brust's *Jherég*

A Warlock's Blade, based on Christopher Stasheff's *Gramarye*

Encyclopedia of Xanth, based on Piers Anthony's *Xanth*

Warhorn, based on Lynn Abbey's *Rifkind*

Deryni Challenge, based on Katherine Kurtz's *Deryni*

A CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURE

in the World of
**KATHERINE KURTZ'S
DERYNI**

DERYNI CHALLENGE

by
**Stephen
Billias**



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

DERYNI CHALLENGE

Copyright © 1988 by Bill Fawcett and Associates

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form.

Crossroads and the Crossroads Logo are a trademark of Bill Fawcett used with permission.

Crossroads Game/novels are published by TOR Books by arrangement with Bill Fawcett.

The names, places, and descriptions and other plot elements used in this game are derived from works copyrighted by and trademarked by Katherine Kurtz. These are used under license and may not be used or reused without Katherine Kurtz's permission.

First Printing: April 1988

A TOR Book

Published by Tom Doherty Associates, Inc.
49 West 24th Street
New York, NY 10010

Cover art by David Cherry

ISBN: 0-812-56421-9
CAN NO.: 0-812-56422-7

Printed in the United States of America

for the late great
Peter Abbott
who would have enjoyed this

INTRODUCTION

MEET GEORDIE DRUMMOND. He's young, head-strong, impulsive, and part Deryni. He is also a distant kinsman of the great Camber MacRorie himself, in those dangerous, unsettled days immediately after the restoration of King Cinhil Haldane. As the news of King Imre's downfall filtered fitfully outward from Valoret with the season's first heavy snows, early in 905, confusion and uncertainty spread too, for no one knew what to expect of a former priest now crowned king; and it was said that Cinhil Haldane had not even *wanted* to be king!

Camber and his immediate family made it their business to remedy *that*—his priest-son Joram, his daughter Evaine and her Healer-husband Rhys. The four spent most of that winter and early spring in Valoret, easing the reluctant King Cinhil into the patterns of kingship, reassuring him and his pregnant young queen, and guiding his selection of the council lords who would assist in the governing of his newly restored realm. Very occasionally, Camber made the half-day journey to

his own favorite country seat of Caerrorie, northeast of the city, to administer his own lands and attend to family business—for the Earl of Culdi was head of the influential MacRorie clan, whose predecessors had helped set the first Festils on the throne of Gwynedd nearly a century before and had called a halt when the last Festillic scion proved unworthy of his crown. Family had always been important to the MacRories, and family continued to be a major factor even when the fragile new royal family of Gwynedd fell under their guidance and protection.

One of the items of MacRorie family business in that first winter season of King Cinhil's reign is young Geordie Drummond. Though Geordie sometimes calls Camber "Uncle" for convenience, their actual familial connection is very tenuous, indeed, by any but the very extended reckoning of highland kinship. In fact, it is James Drummond who is Geordie's uncle—Jamie Drummond, who will marry the widow of the slain Cathan MacRorie, Camber's eldest son, in the summer of 906. Jamie and his brother Henry, Geordie's father, are grandsons of Camber's Uncle James Drummond, the younger of his mother's two brothers. (John, the elder brother, carried the senior Drummond line, which still thrives in the borders of the Purple March.) A thread of Deryni blood has always

run through the Drummond line, but it was Geordie's father who injected new Deryni vigor into the current generation by taking a wife from the small and tightly-knit McBain clan—folk known for generations to carry the "Second Sight." In a word, the McBains are Deryni; and Geordie Drummond, the son of Lydia McBain and Henry Drummond, has the potential to be quite a formidable Deryni in his own right.

This is not to say that Geordie necessarily knows what to do with his magical birthright. Not only the actual mastery of power but the mature judgment to use that power wisely must be learned by any young Deryni coming into adulthood—in addition to all the other attributes of judgment, discretion, temperance, forbearance, compassion, loyalty, and the myriad additional lessons of maturity. Geordie's fledgling talents must be challenged and tempered if he is to become a man worthy of the proud lineage he carries.

All of which makes Geordie quite an interesting chap. Like most young men of his age and rank, he's been trained from childhood in courtly manners and the appropriate arts of war. He's a keen horseman and swordsman, and usually can handle himself in a brawl. He was probably fostered to the household of his great uncle, Lord John Drummond, when he was about six, and also trained under Cathan

for a time. Because, as a younger son, he stands to inherit nothing but his Drummond name unless two much-loved brothers should predecease him, his parents sent him to a monastic school for a few years as he entered puberty, in hopes that a career in the Church might appeal to him—a traditional niche for landless younger sons of the gentry.

But even the pious Lydia Drummond soon had to admit that her youngest was not cut out for the religious life—though Geordie's monastic stint did reveal a hitherto unsuspected aptitude for booklearning and a scholar's craving and respect for the written word—an interest he indulges whenever possible, and which will stand him in good stead as he faces the challenge Camber is about to set for him.

What else does he have to offer? Most of the traditional attributes of youth, for better or for worse. He's brave but impetuous, savvy when it comes to theoretical knowledge but a little naive in the ways of the real world—a good man to have at your back in time of trouble but (as was said of Lord Mountbatten in our own century) a man very likely to get you *into* it!

So let us return now to those dark, wintry days just after the turning of Anno Domini nine hundred five. Cathan MacRorie has lain cold in his grave at Caerrorie for more than a year, Imre is but a few weeks dead, and it will

be several months before Camber MacRorie, the seventh Earl of Culdi, is "slain" in a clearing at Iomaire and takes on a dead bishop's identity. Certainly, no one even dreams that in little more than a year, Camber will be canonized and revered as a saint.

For now, however, when Camber is not keeping a balky king in line, his concern, as ever, is for his family—*all* of his family: a role in which young Geordie Drummond is not at all eager to face him. . . .

—Katherine Kurtz
Holybrooke Hall
Co. Wicklow, Ireland

INTRODUCTION AND RULES TO CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURES by Bill Fawcett

FOR THE MANY of us who have enjoyed the stories upon which this adventure is based, it may seem a bit strange to find an introduction this long at the start of a book. What you are holding is both a game and an adventure. Have you ever read a book and then told yourself you would have been able to think more clearly or seen a way out of the hero's dilemma? In a Crossroads™ adventure you have the opportunity to do just that. *You* make the key decisions. By means of a few easily followed steps you are able to see the results of your choices.

A Crossroads™ adventure is as much fun to read as it is to play. It is more than just a game or a book. It is a chance to enjoy once more a familiar and treasured story. The excitement

of adventuring in a beloved universe is neatly blended into a story which stands well on its own merit, a story in which you will encounter many familiar characters and places and discover more than a few new ones as well. Each adventure is a thrilling tale, with the extra suspense and satisfaction of knowing that you will succeed or fail by your own endeavors.

THE ADVENTURE

Throughout the story you will have the opportunity to make decisions. Each of these decisions will affect whether the hero succeeds in the quest, or even survives. In some cases you will actually be fighting battles; other times you will use your knowledge and instincts to choose the best path to follow. In many cases there will be clues in the story or illustrations.

A Crossroads™ adventure is divided into sections. The length of a section may be a few lines or many pages. The section numbers are shown at the top of a page to make it easier for you to follow. Each section ends when you must make a decision, or fight. The next section you turn to will show the results of your decision. At least one six-sided die and a pencil are needed to “play” this book.

The words "six-sided dice" are often abbreviated as "D6." If more than one is needed, a number will precede the term. "Roll three six-sided dice" will be written as "Roll 3 D6." Virtually all the die rolls in these rules do involve rolling three six-sided dice (or rolling one six-sided die three times) and totaling what is rolled.

If you are an experienced role-play gamer, you may also wish to convert the values given in this novel to those you can use with any fantasy role-playing game you are now playing with. All of the adventures have been constructed so that they also can be easily adapted in this manner. The values for the hero may transfer directly. While fantasy games are much more complicated, doing this will allow you to be the Game Master for other players. Important values for the hero's opponents will be given to aid you in this conversion and to give those playing by the Crossroads™ rules a better idea of what they are facing.

THE HERO

Seven values are used to describe the hero in gaming terms. These are strength, intelligence, wisdom/luck, constitution, dexterity, charisma, and hit points. These values mea-

sure all of a character's abilities. At the end of these rules is a record sheet. On it are given all of the values for the hero of this adventure and any equipment or supplies they begin the adventure with. While you adventure, this record can be used to keep track of damage received and any new equipment or magical items acquired. You may find it advisable to make a photocopy of that page. Permission to do so, for your own use only, is given by the publisher of this game/novel. You may wish to consult this record sheet as we discuss what each of the values represents.

STRENGTH

This is the measure of how physically powerful your hero is. It compares the hero to others in how much the character can lift, how hard he can punch, and just how brawny he is. The strongest a normal human can be is to have a strength value of 18. The weakest a child would have is a 3. Here is a table giving comparable strengths:

Strength	Example
3	A 5-year-old child
6	An elderly man
8	Out of shape and over 40
10	An average 20-year-old man

10 DERYNI CHALLENGE

- 13 In good shape and works out
- 15 A top athlete or football
running back
- 17 Changes auto tires without a
jack
- 18 Arm wrestles Arnold
Schwarzenegger and wins

A Tolkien-style troll, being magical, might have a strength of 19 or 20. A full-grown elephant has a strenght of 23. A fifty-foot dragon would have a strength of 30.

INTELLIGENCE

Being intelligent is not just a measure of native brain power. It is also an indication of the ability to use that intelligence. The value for intelligence also measures how aware the character is, and so how likely they are to notice a subtle clue. Intelligence can be used to measure how resistant a mind is to hypnosis or mental attack. A really sharp baboon would have an intelligence of 3. Most humans (we all know exceptions) begin at about 5. The highest value possible is an 18. Here is a table of relative intelligence:

Intelligence	Example
3	My dog

5	Lassie
6	Curly (the third Stooge)
8	Somewhat slow
10	Average person
13	College professor/good quarterback
15	Indiana Jones/Carl Sagan
17	Doc Savage/Mr. Spock
18	Leonardo dá Vinci (Isaac Asimov?)

Brainiac of comic-book fame would have a value of 21.

WISDOM/LUCK

Wisdom is the ability to make correct judgments, often with less than complete facts. Wisdom is knowing what to do and when to do it. Attacking, when running will earn you a spear in the back, is the best part of wisdom. Being in the right place at the right time can be called luck or wisdom. Not being discovered when hiding can be luck, if it is because you knew enough to not hide in the poison oak, wisdom is also a factor. Activities which are based more on instinct, the intuitive leap, than analysis are decided by wisdom.

In many ways both wisdom and luck are further connected, especially as wisdom also

measures how friendly the ruling powers of the universe (not the author, the fates) are to the hero. A hero may be favored by fate or luck because he is reverent or for no discernible reason at all. This will give them a high wisdom value. Everyone knows those "lucky" individuals who can fall in the mud and find a gold coin. Here is a table measuring relative wisdom/luck:

Wisdom	Example
Under 3	Cursed or totally unthinking
5	Never plans, just reacts
7	Some cunning, "street smarts"
9	Average thinking person
11	Skillful planner, good gambler
13	Successful businessman/Lee Iacocca
15	Captain Kirk (wisdom)/Conan (luck)
17	Sherlock Holmes (wisdom)/ Luke Skywalker (luck)
18	Lazarus Long

CONSTITUTION

The more you can endure, the higher your constitution. If you have a high constitution you are better able to survive physical dam-

age, emotional stress, and poisons. The higher your value for constitution, the longer you are able to continue functioning in a difficult situation. A character with a high constitution can run farther (though not necessarily faster) or hang by one hand longer than the average person. A high constitution means you also have more stamina, and recover more quickly from injuries. A comparison of values for constitution:

Constitution	Example
3	A terminal invalid
6	A 10-year-old child
8	Your stereotyped "98-pound weakling"
10	Average person
14	Olympic athlete/Sam Spade
16	Marathon runner/Rocky
18	Rasputin/Batman

A whale would have a constitution of 20. Superman's must be about 50.

DEXTERITY

The value for dexterity measures not only how fast a character can move, but how well-coordinated those movements are. A sur-

geon, a pianist, and a juggler all need a high value for dexterity. If you have a high value for dexterity you can react quickly (though not necessarily correctly), duck well, and perform sleight-of-hand magic (if you are bright enough to learn how). Conversely, a low dexterity means you react slowly and drop things frequently. All other things being equal, the character with the highest dexterity will have the advantage of the first attack in a combat. Here are some comparative examples of dexterity:

Dexterity	Example
3 or less	Complete klutz
5	Inspector Clousseau
6	Can walk and chew gum, most of the time
8	Barney Fife
10	Average person
13	Good fencer/Walter Payton
15	Brain surgeon/Houdini
16	Flying Karamazov Brothers
17	Movie ninja/Cyrano de Bergerac
18	Bruce Lee

Batman, Robin, Daredevil and The Shadow all have a dexterity of 19. At a dexterity of 20 you don't even see the man move before he

has taken your wallet and underwear and has left the room (the Waco Kid).

CHARISMA

Charisma is more than just good looks, though they certainly don't hurt. It is a measure of how persuasive a hero is and how willing others are to do what he wants. You can have average looks yet be very persuasive, and have a high charisma. If your value for charisma is high, you are better able to talk yourself out of trouble or obtain information from a stranger. If your charisma is low, you may be ignored or even mocked, even when you are right. A high charisma value is vital to entertainers of any sort, and leaders. A different type of charisma is just as important to spies. In the final measure a high value for charisma means people will react to you in the way you desire. Here are some comparative values for charisma:

Charisma	Example
3	Hunchback of Notre Dame
5	An ugly used-car salesman
7	Richard Nixon today
10	Average person
12	Team coach

14	Magnum, P.I.
16	Henry Kissinger/Jim DiGriz
18	Dr. Who/Prof. Harold Hill (Centauri)

HIT POINTS

Hit points represent the total amount of damage a hero can take before he is killed or knocked out. You can receive damage from being wounded in a battle, through starvation, or even through a mental attack. Hit points measure more than just how many times the hero can be battered over the head before he is knocked out. They also represent the ability to keep striving toward a goal. A poorly paid mercenary may have only a few hit points, even though he is a hulking brute of a man, because the first time he receives even a slight wound he will withdraw from the fight. A blacksmith's apprentice who won't accept defeat will have a higher number of hit points.

A character's hit points can be lost through a wound to a specific part of the body or through general damage to the body itself. This general damage can be caused by a poison, a bad fall, or even exhaustion and starvation. Pushing your body too far beyond its limits may result in a successful action at

the price of the loss of a few hit points. All these losses are treated in the same manner.

Hit points lost are subtracted from the total on the hero's record sheet. When a hero has lost all of his hit points, then that character has failed. When this happens you will be told to which section to turn. Here you will often find a description of the failure and its consequences for the hero.

The hit points for the opponents the hero meets in combat are given in the adventure. You should keep track of these hit points on a piece of scrap paper. When a monster or opponent has lost all of their hit points, they have lost the fight. If a character is fighting more than one opponent, then you should keep track of each of their hit points. Each will continue to fight until it has 0 hit points. When everyone on one side of the battle has no hit points left, the combat is over.

Even the best played character can lose all of his hit points when you roll too many bad dice during a combat. If the hero loses all of his hit points, the adventure may have ended in failure. You will be told so in the next section you are instructed to turn to. In this case you can turn back to the first section and begin again. This time you will have the advantage of having learned some of the hazards the hero will face.

TAKING CHANCES

There will be occasions where you will have to decide whether the hero should attempt to perform some action which involves risk. This might be to climb a steep cliff, jump a pit, or juggle three daggers. There will be other cases where it might benefit the hero to notice something subtle or remember an ancient ballad perfectly. In all of these cases you will be asked to roll three six-sided dice (3 D6) and compare the total of all three dice to the hero's value for the appropriate ability.

For example, if the hero is attempting to juggle three balls, then for him to do so successfully you would have to roll a total equal to or less than the hero's value for dexterity. If your total was less than this dexterity value, then you would be directed to a section describing how the balls looked as they were skillfully juggled. If you rolled a higher value than that for dexterity, then you would be told to read a section which describes the embarrassment of dropping the balls, and being laughed at by the audience.

Where the decision is a judgment call, such as whether to take the left or right staircase, it is left entirely to you. Somewhere in the adventure or in the original novels there will be some piece of information which would

indicate that the left staircase leads to a trap and the right to your goal. No die roll will be needed for a judgment decision.

In all cases you will be guided at the end of each section as to exactly what you need do. If you have any questions you should refer back to these rules.

MAGICAL ITEMS AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

There are many unusual items which appear in the pages of this adventure. When it is possible for them to be taken by the hero, you will be given the option of doing so. One or more of these items may be necessary to the successful completion of the adventure. You will be given the option of taking these at the end of a section. If you choose to pick up an item and succeed in getting it, you should list that item on the hero's record sheet. There is no guarantee that deciding to take an item means you will actually obtain it. If someone owns it already they are quite likely to resent your efforts to take it. In some cases things may not even be all they appear to be or the item may be trapped or cursed. Having it may prove a detriment rather than a benefit.

All magical items give the hero a bonus (or

penalty) on certain die rolls. You will be told when this applies, and often given the option of whether or not to use the item. You will be instructed at the end of the section on how many points to add to or subtract from your die roll. If you choose to use an item which can function only once, such as a magic potion or hand grenade, then you will also be instructed to remove the item from your record sheet. Certain items, such as a magic sword, can be used many times. In this case you will be told when you obtain the item when you can apply the bonus. The bonus for a magic sword could be added every time a character is in hand-to-hand combat.

Other special items may allow a character to fly, walk through fire, summon magical warriors, or many other things. How and when they affect play will again be told to you in the paragraphs at the end of the sections where you have the choice of using them.

Those things which restore lost hit points are a special case. You may choose to use these at any time during the adventure. If you have a magical healing potion which returns 1 D6 of lost hit points, you may add these points when you think it is best to. This can even be during a combat in the place of a round of attack. No matter how many healing items you use, a character can never have more hit points than he begins the adventure with.

There is a limit to the number of special items any character may carry. In any Cross-roads™ adventure the limit is four items. If you already have four special items listed on your record sheet, then one of these must be discarded in order to take the new item. Any time you erase an item off the record sheet, whether because it was used or because you wish to add a new item, whatever is erased is permanently lost. It can never be "found" again, even if you return to the same location later in the adventure.

Except for items which restore hit points, the hero can only use an item in combat or when given the option to do so. The opportunity will be listed in the instructions.

In the case of an item which can be used in every combat, the bonus can be added or subtracted as the description of the item indicates. A +2 sword would add two points to any total rolled in combat. This bonus would be used each and every time the hero attacks. Only one attack bonus can be used at a time. Just because a hero has both a +1 and a +2 sword doesn't mean he knows how to fight with both at once. Only the better bonus would apply.

If a total of 12 is needed to hit an attacking monster and the hero has a +2 sword, then you will only need to roll a total of 10 on the three dice to successfully strike the creature.

You could also find an item, perhaps enchanted armor, which could be worn in all combat and would have the effect of subtracting its bonus from the total of any opponent's attack on its wearer. (Bad guys can wear magic armor, too.) If a monster normally would need a 13 to hit a character who has obtained a set of +2 armor, then the monster would now need a total of 15 to score a hit. An enchanted shield would operate in the same way, but could never be used when the character was using a weapon which needed both hands, such as a pike, longbow, or two-handed sword.

COMBAT

There will be many situations where the hero will be forced, or you may choose, to meet an opponent in combat. The opponents can vary from a wild beast, to a human thief, or an unearthly monster. In all cases the same steps are followed.

The hero will attack first in most combats unless you are told otherwise. This may happen when there is an ambush, other special situations, or because the opponent simply has a much higher dexterity.

At the beginning of a combat section you

will be given the name or type of opponent involved. For each combat five values are given. The first of these is the total on three six-sided dice needed for the attacker to hit the hero. Next to this value is the value the hero needs to hit these opponents. After these two values is listed the hit points of the opponent. If there is more than one opponent, each one will have the same number. (See the Hit Points section included earlier if you are unclear as to what these do.) Under the value needed to be hit by the opponent is the hit points of damage that it will do to the hero when it attacks successfully. Finally, under the total needed for the hero to successfully hit an opponent is the damage he will do with the different weapons he might have. Unlike a check for completing a daring action (where you wish to roll under a value), in a combat you have to roll the value given or higher on three six-sided dice to successfully hit an opponent.

For example:

Here is how a combat between the hero armed with a sword and three brigands armed only with daggers is written:

BRIGANDS

To hit the hero: 14 To be hit: 12 Hit points: 4

*Damage with
daggers: 1 D6*

*Damage with
sword: 2 D6*

(used by the brigands) (used by the hero)

There are three brigands. If two are killed (taken to 0 hit points) the third will flee in panic.

If the hero wins, turn to section 85.

If he is defeated, turn to section 67.

RUNNING AWAY

Running rather than fighting, while often desirable, is not always possible. The option to run away is available only when listed in the choices. Even when this option is given, there is no guarantee the hero can get away safely.

THE COMBAT SEQUENCE

Any combat is divided into alternating rounds. In most cases the hero will attack first. Next, surviving opponents will have the chance to fight back. When both have attacked, one round will have been completed. A combat can have any number of rounds and continues until the hero or his opponents are defeated. Each round is the equivalent of six seconds. During this time all the parties in the

combat may actually take more than one swing at each other.

The steps in resolving a combat in which the hero attacks first are as follows:

1. Roll three six-sided dice. Total the numbers showing on all three and add any bonuses from weapons or special circumstances. If this total is the same or greater than the second value given, "to hit the opponent," then the hero has successfully attacked.
2. If the hero attacks successfully, the next step is to determine how many hit points of damage he did to the opponent. The die roll for this will be given below the "to hit opponent" information.
3. Subtract any hit points of damage done from the opponent's total.
4. If any of the enemy have one or more hit points left, then the remaining opponent or opponents now can attack. Roll three six-sided dice for each attacker. Add up each of these sets of three dice. If the total is the same as, or greater than the value listed after "to hit the hero" in the section describing the combat, the attack was successful.

5. For each hit, roll the number of dice listed for damage. Subtract the total from the number of hit points the hero has at that time. Enter the new, lower total on the hero's record sheet.

If both the hero and one or more opponents have hit points left, the combat continues. Start again at step one. The battle ends only when the hero is killed, all the opponents are killed, or all of one side has run away. A hero cannot, except through a healing potion or spells or when specifically told to during the adventure, regain lost hit points. A number of small wounds from several opponents will kill a character as thoroughly as one titanic, unsuccessful combat with a hill giant.

DAMAGE

The combat continues, following the sequence given below, until either the hero or his opponents have no hit points. In the case of multiple opponents, subtract hit points from one opponent until the total reaches 0 or less. Extra hit points of damage done on the round when each opponent is defeated are lost. They do not carry over to the next enemy in the group. To win the combat, you must eliminate all of an opponent's hit points.

The damage done by a weapon will vary depending on who is using it. A club in the hands of a child will do far less damage than the same club wielded by a hill giant. The maximum damage is given as a number of six-sided dice. In some cases the maximum will be less than a whole die. This is abbreviated by a minus sign followed by a number. For example D6-2, meaning one roll of a six-sided die, minus two. The total damage can never be less than zero, meaning no damage done. 2 D6-1 means that you should roll two six-sided dice and then subtract one from the total of them both.

A combat may, because of the opponent involved, have one or more special circumstances. It may be that the enemy will surrender or flee when its hit point total falls below a certain level, or even that reinforcements will arrive to help the bad guys after so many rounds. You will be told of these special situations in the lines directly under the combat values.

Now you may turn to section 1.

RECORD SHEET

Geordie Drummond

Strength: 13

Intelligence: 12

Wisdom: 11

Constitution: 13

Dexterity: 13

Charisma: 13

Hit Points: 19

Items carried: Armor, sword

* 1 *

Geordie Drummond sits in the hearth seat of the fireplace, poking at fiercely burning logs with a brass rod. His dark face shines strangely in the shifting, unsteady firelight. A handsome young man, Geordie has the proud bearing of a Deryni lord. Why is he squirming like a sullen schoolboy awaiting punishment?

His impetuosity has gotten him into trouble again. Impatient with his human hostler's handling of the horses in his stable, Geordie treated the man roughly in front of the grooms. Camber heard of it and summoned him to appear at the Great Hall at Cor Culdi. Geordie rode all day to appear before his great-uncle, who is Protector of all the surrounding human villages and takes great pride in his humane treatment of them.

Geordie already feels remorse for his hasty and uncharitable loss of temper. He sought to make amends with the man, but was met by a gruff rebuff. Apparently the stable master is

Section 1

an old and respected member of the fiefal family, whose father saddled Camber to his first horse. The patriarchal Earl considers him almost as one of the family. His mishandling of the horses was merely sloppy, not deliberate, Geordie knows.

The massive oak door to the Great Hall swings slowly open. Geordie leaps to his feet, nearly banging his head on the low overhead ledge of the hearth. Striding to the center of the room, he kneels and waits the stern retribution he expects and knows he deserves from Camber of Culdi, Lord of these lands in the kingdom of Gwynedd.

"My liege lord, I am deeply sorry." Geordie is a darker, leaner version of his famous kinsman, Culdi's seventh earl.

"Your bad temper is not only offensive," Lord Camber reproves him, "it also keeps you from attaining your full power as a Deryni. You must learn to harness your anger to your benefit, by never letting it out, and only converting it like an alchemist to a purer alloy."

"Yes, Lord Camber—"

Camber of Culdi holds up his hand. "In the many years of my stewardship of these lands, we have prospered because we treated the villagers with kindness and compassion. We rebelled against the Festillic rule and overthrew Imre and installed a human on the throne of Gwynedd, in the main because of

his treatment of the populace, not of ourselves. To act otherwise toward them is to be like the tyrants we have only recently replaced."

"I agree, my lord—" Geordie tries to defend himself, but again the earl quiets him with a gesture.

"Your bravery is well known. God knows you trained under Cathan—God rest his soul. But you must learn to temper your rage with wisdom. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord." Humbled and chastised, Geordie remains kneeling with head bowed before the earl.

"Very well. Now, arise, and face me." Geordie does as he is told. "I have an important, dangerous, and difficult mission which needs a brave young Deryni to carry it out.

"I would like to do it, Sire, whatever it might be."

"Good. The reign of King Cinhil Haldane is only recently established. It is like a newborn, fragile and vulnerable. And yet, already a dark threat has arisen from the North, that must be quelled as soon as possible."

Geordie rests his hand on his sword hilt. "I had not heard of it, my lord."

"Near Stavenham in the Northern land of Kheldour, there is a rugged stretch of coastline where rock pinnacles make nearly inaccessible fortresses from the outside world. On

Section 1

one of these spires, which are reached by rope and pulley baskets, a monastery is built, originally of the order of the Michaelines, but recently influenced and taken over by a renegade priest preaching a fanatical gospel."

"Sire, if he is a Michaeline, wouldn't your son Joram be a better choice than myself, being of that order?"

"Do you shirk from the task, Drummond?" The earl's voice is stern and unyielding.

"No, my lord."

"Joram is needed here, and in addition to that he is much too well known to be able to pass safely through Kheldour. You, on the other hand, could pass yourself off as a merchant's buyer, shopping for carpets and other textile goods in the splendid markets of that region."

"I could. I will."

"Excellent. We must know the intentions of this rebel priest. And what are his powers? There are rumors of unorthodox and possibly profane and forbidden practices, secret rituals, and worship of the dark powers. You must look into this, without drawing attention to yourself. Your horse is tired. A fresh mount has been saddled and awaits you in the courtyard. Godspeed, Geordie Drummond."

With those ominous words Camber of Culdi commissions Geordie Drummond to the most

serious venture of his young life. Geordie passes beneath the portcullis and through the gateway to the outer area of the castle. Cathan's steward Wulpher, who after the death of his master at the hands of Imre came over to Cor Culdi in the employ of the earl, holds the reins to a gloriously black stallion. Geordie's saddle and pack are transferred from his own bay Jelsin to this magnificent animal.

"Its name is Noirel, and it is a very special horse. Treat it well and it will reward you."

"Thank you, Wulpher. Wulpher, know that I meant no harm to the stable master."

"I know, m'lord. You're good at heart. I wish you well on this journey."

"Thank you, Wulpher. Farewell."

Thus, at night, without fanfare or ceremony, Geordie Drummond leaves Cor Culdi for the north country of Kheldour. His horse is handsomely bedecked with plumes the color of Geordie's riding gloves, a deep scarlet. Its flanks are wider than Jelsin's and Geordie reaches down to adjust the stirrups as he rides along a path by a plain meandering out of the north. It is his plan to follow the path along the floodplain north to Carbury, then east to Grecotha, where his famous kinsman went to school, then north again into windswept Kheldour, and all the way through that blustery northern country to the coast at

Section 1

Stavenham. It is a ride of several days during which he looks forward to camping under the stars. Tonight a mass of clouds hangs low overhead, dimming the moon and obliterating the stars. At a crossing of the river Geordie dismounts and withdraws a greatcoat from his pack. Noirel waits patiently at his side while he fastens the braided loops over the horn tips that hold the heavy overcoat together. He throws a riding blanket over the huge docile animal, talking to him in a low voice. He only upbraided the hostler from his love of the beasts, not out of malice.

"Good fellow, Noirel. Steady sort, aren't you?" Noirel whinnies softly, his breath visible in puffs in the chill night air. The river ripples softly behind them this peaceful night. All around is the restless whisper of the breeze through the foliage by the river's edge, the dry creaking of cattail stalks rubbing together, the quaking of ash leaves, and the stirring of the dangling loose branches of the willow. Noirel laps noisily at the water. Geordie stretches his sore back, overworked from his second long ride in a day.

Gradually he becomes aware of another sound, a disturbance in the water. He peers into the darkness. Faintly he hears a weak cry for help, but his eyes fail to detect the source until it sweeps past him. Clinging to a broken

tree trunk is a small boy, barely keeping his head above water as the water-soaked log rolls erratically in the swirling current. The imperiled boy is in grave danger of being pulled under by the violent water.

Geordie leaps up on Noirel and dashes down the path along the water's edge, urging the horse on with impatient slaps of the reins against its muscular neck.

Up ahead is a narrowing of the small river, as it cascades between two massive rocks, then drops many feet into a shallow pool before continuing on its way south. If his horse can only outrace the swiftly running water, Geordie might be able to pluck the boy from the log before it plummets over the narrow falls beyond the boulders.

The path dips toward the water as the banks converge. With a last gallant effort Noirel surges ahead of the log and its terrified unwilling cargo.

Leaning over Noirel's right flank with only one heel in a stirrup and one hand clutching the horse's flying mane, Geordie plunges the horse into the icy river. The current grabs at Noirel's forelegs but Geordie heads the horse upstream so that Noirel is braced against the nearest boulder. The log comes tumbling toward the gap, picking up speed as the waters funnel toward the opening. Geordie has one



Section 2

chance to pluck the boy from the timber before it shoots past him over the falls.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is equal to or less than Geordie's value for Dexterity, turn to section 2.

If greater, turn to section 3.

* 2 *

The log glances off Noirel's chest as it shoots the rapids but the horse stands his ground. Geordie stretches full out and grasps at a blurry form in the darkness—he clutches at a tiny arm, seizes it, and pulls a ragged figure back through the resisting current to him. The log plunges over the rushing falls and disappears. A second or so later Geordie hears a muffled splash below the steady roar of the falls.

He places the bedraggled and nearly unconscious child across his saddle, dismounts, and then leads Noirel up the bank from the

Section 2

noisy river, both horse and man struggling and scrabbling up the muddy embankment. Still leading the horse at a gentle walk through the night and mist, he climbs down the hillside to where the falls ends in a pool. The log sticks out at a menacing angle from the edge of the curtain of water, breaking its smooth descent into a dashing spray. His waterlogged passenger almost surely would have been killed in the drop.

By the pool is a cleared-out area with a fire ring, site of many previous encampments by weary travelers who enjoyed the cool breeze given off by the falls in summer. Geordie brings Noirel to the water's edge to drink, then laces the reins around a bush and slings the boy off the horse's back. While he prepares a fire, Geordie covers the child with the riding blanket from Noirel, who stands patiently by.

Soon the fire is brightening everything close by and dimming the rest of the night to an outer blackness. Under the trees close up against the hillside it is almost like being in a cave. Geordie feeds Noirel some oats from a leathern bag, then tends to his human cargo.

The boy has fallen asleep, but as Geordie touches his forehead, he stirs and coughs up a little more water, though the jogging motion of the horse ride has pumped most of it out of him already, as Geordie intended. He looks up at Geordie with frightened eyes.

Section 2

"What's your name?" Geordie asks him, but the boy continues to stare at him in apparent terror. Despite the rough warmth of the horse blanket and the nearby fire, he is shaking with chills. Geordie adds his greatcoat to the covering, so that the little boy nearly disappears under the combined layers. The sight of Geordie giving up his garment for him seems to relieve the boy somewhat of his suspicions.

"Where did you come from?" Geordie asks him.

"A village." The boy draws himself deeper into the cocoon of wool that covers him.

"What village?"

"I don't know. We always lived there."

"How far did—" Geordie starts to ask him how far upstream he lived, but realizes that the boy wouldn't know. "What's your name?" he asks again.

"Beck, sir."

"Is that a first name or a last name, Beck?"

"Don't know, sir. It's just what they call me. Beck."

"Well, Beck, who are your mother and father?"

"Don't have any, sir."

"Who were you living with, then?"

"My uncle. I think he's dead now—" Beck halts in obvious distress. Geordie softly probes a little further. He doesn't want to use his Deryni powers to touch Beck's mind while

Section 2

the boy is still recovering from his recent dunking, and he thinks he can elicit the answers he needs with direct questioning.

"What happened? How did you end up on that log?"

"I was helping my uncle build a bridge over a stream by his hut. We cut some logs and dragged them to the stream, but when we went to put them in one rolled on him and crushed him—" The boy's face twists in anguish as the memory comes back to him. "Then I tried to get it off him. I ran up to the yard and got the cow and hitched a rope up to her and looped it around the log—" Beck rushes on, blurting the story out in teary sobs. "But my uncle had already stopped yelling, and when I tried to help the cow by pushing on the log, I slipped and another log gave way and both me and the log ended up floating away in the middle of the stream, and I just clung on. The stream took us a good ways and then dumped us into the river, and the river took us to where you grabbed us. Thank you, sir, for saving my life." The timorous boy's voice peeps out from under his protective covers.

"Geordie is my name, Beck. Well, it seems we've got some decisions to make here. Tomorrow morning we could ride back upriver to look for the stream that would take us to your village. But that would cost me valuable

Section 3

time on an important assignation I have been given. Or"—he looks at the orphaned boy who has just lost his only guardian in a horrible accident and feels the pangs of a fatherhood he has not yet experienced—"you could accompany me. I have need of a groom for my horse Noirel. What do you say, Beck?"

Roll 1 D6.

If you roll three or less, then Beck agrees to go with Geordie Drummond. Turn to section 16.

If you roll four or more, then Beck wants to return to his village. Turn to section 9.

* 3 *

The log comes rushing out of the darkness before Geordie is quite ready for it. Its unwieldy bulk slams into his horse's flank, knocking them both backward. Geordie leans desperately and dangerously far out to grab for the white form clinging to the log, but it slips by. His eyes briefly meet the terrified eyes of the young boy as he plunges over

Section 3

the watery precipice still riding the runaway piece of wood. A second later Geordie hears a muffled splash below the steady roar of the falls.

Urging his bruised horse out of the river, Geordie scrabbles up the bank and dashes down the hill pell-mell, ignoring the switch-backs in favor of a steep skidding descent through the underbrush until he reaches the bottom where the falls empties into a pool. The log floats harmlessly in a backwater eddy of the pool. A smooth sheet of water drops unbroken into the pool, stirring bubbly froth that subsides to calmness by the time it reaches the edge of the small catch basin. The boy is nowhere in sight.

Dismounting, Geordie leads Noirel back and forth along the edge of the tiny pond, even crossing its rocky lower outlet where it became a small river again to search among the reeds on the other side. Lacing the horse's reins to a nearby bush, he begins to crisscross the pond itself, feeling with both his feet and lowered hands for the broken body he fears he will find there.

After an hour of this, he decides the corpse must have been washed downstream. He has failed to save the boy. Sadly he wades ashore. With a heavy heart he feeds Noirel some oats from a leathern bag and then slowly and dejectedly makes a fire in the fire ring of the

Section 3

clearing by the fall. His clothes are soaked through and he is shivering from the night chill, but Geordie can only think of the young life that has just been lost.

The outer blackness closes in around him and his small fire, leaving him in darkness except for the tiny illumined area almost like a cave next to the pool and up against the bottom of the hill.

His journey has started most inauspiciously, Geordie broods, wondering what else he might have done to rescue the boy. With these and other wearying thoughts Geordie lulls himself to the edge of sleep. Just as he is about to nod off, he hears a faint whimper from behind the curtain of spray. Why hasn't he looked there? Dashing through the sheet of water, he finds the boy, bedraggled, coughing up fluid, and nearly unconscious but otherwise unharmed. The log must have miraculously flung him backward behind it as it fell.

Geordie lofts the boy over his shoulder and carries him to the clearing. He turns him over on his back and pumps water out of him until the boy begins to cough and spit up on his own. Then Geordie rolls him over and covers him with Noirel's riding blanket. The boy looks up at Geordie with frightened eyes.

"What's your name?" Geordie asks him, but the boy continues to stare at him in apparent terror. The boy is shaking with chills despite

Section 3

the rough warmth of the horse blanket and the nearby fire. Geordie adds his greatcoat to the covering, so that the little boy nearly disappears under the combined layers. The sight of Geordie giving up his garment for him seems to take a little of the terror out of the boy's suspicious eyes.

"Where did you come from?" Geordie asks him.

"A village." The boy pulls the coverings over him even more.

"What village?"

"I don't know. We always lived there."

"How far did—" Geordie starts to ask him how far upstream he lives, but realizes that the boy wouldn't know. "What's your name?" he asks again.

"Beck, sir."

"Is that your given name or your family name, Beck?"

"Don't know, sir. It's just what they call me. Beck."

"Well, Beck, who are your mother and father?"

"Don't have any, sir."

"Who were you living with, then?"

"My uncle. I think he's dead now—" Beck halts in obvious distress. Geordie softly questions him a little more. He doesn't want to use his Deryni powers to touch Beck's mind while the boy is still recovering from his recent

Section 3

dunking, and he thinks he can get the answers he needs with direct questioning.

"What happened? How did you end up on that log?"

"I was helping my uncle build a bridge over a stream by his hut. We cut some logs and dragged them to the stream, but when we went to put them in one rolled on him and crushed him—" The boy's face twists in anguish as the memory comes back to him. "Then I tried to get it off him. I ran up to the yard and hitched a rope up to the cow and looped it around the log—" Beck rushes on, blurting the story out in teary sobs. "But my uncle had already stopped yelling, and when I tried to push on the log to help the cow, I slipped. The log under me gave way and both me and the log ended up floating away in the middle of the stream. I just clung on. The stream took us a good ways and then dumped us into the river, and the river took us away. Thank you, sir, for saving my life." The timorous boy's voice peeps out from under his protective covers.

"I wish I could say I had done so, Beck, but you survived on your own. Geordie is my name, Beck. Well, it seems we've got some decisions to make here. Tomorrow morning we could ride back upriver to the stream that would take us to your village. But that would cost me valuable time on an important mis-

Section 4

sion I have been given. Or"—he looks at the orphaned boy who had just lost his only guardian in a horrible accident and feels the pangs of a fatherhood he has not yet experienced—"you could accompany me. I have need of a groom for my horse Noirel. What do you say, Beck?"

Roll 1 D6.

If you roll three or less, then Beck agrees to go with Geordie Drummond. Turn to section 16.

If you roll four or more, then Beck wants to return to his village. Turn to section 9.

* 4 *

As the crowd disperses, happy to have seen a bully vanquished, Geordie catches sight of the plaid hat of the man who had goaded him into the contest. Chasing after the man, he latches onto his shoulder and spins him around.

"What do you know of Beck? What's happened to him?"

Section 4

"Lay your hand off me." The man's voice is quiet but authoritative. Under his plaid hat, icy grey eyes stare at Geordie with detachment.

Geordie relaxes his grip on the man.

"I only wanted to see the lout beaten, and make a little extra on the side, as I knew you could do it. As for your boy, he's all right. I heard him give his name, and call your own. He described you, but you didn't come along until later, when I saw you. The town constable picked him up for pickpocketing."

"That's nonsense," Geordie protests. "I gave that money to him."

"If that is so, you'll have no problem. The constabulary is right over there," the man says, pointing to the building where Geordie saw the three men heading earlier.

Turn to section 10.

Section 5

* 5 *

The abbot studies him for a long moment. Geordie feels his mind being probed by a Deryni will. Because he tells the truth, he throws up no shield, and instead allows the other to share his memory of the event. Finally the abbot speaks: "I can see that you are a sincere young man. Please appreciate why I had to be certain of you. Many troubling events have taken place within the past fortnight. Some may relate directly to the murders you have discovered."

"I understand," Geordie answers, greatly relieved that the abbot believes him. "Tell me what else you know of the northern sorcerer. I lack even the simplest knowledge—what is his name?" Camber had either not known or neglected to tell Geordie this basic fact.

"He is called Devil by some, but refers to himself as the Gryphon of God."

"The Gryphon. '*Sursuum Cortuum.*' 'Lift up your hearts.'"

Section 5

"Very good." The abbot congratulates him on his scholarship.

"It's easy when your cousin is a Michaeline."

"Yes, Drummond. But your high Deryni lineage will help you but little in the coming days," the abbot warns him. "The north is human country. This priest is a human priest. He has allies among the people in the surrounding lands. There is one especially treacherous local lord, a self-serving baron whose own power expands with the priest's growing sway over the local populace. His name is Lord Thornton. I'd keep a good watch on him, because he's certain to do the same to you."

"I appreciate your advice, Reverend Father."

"Commend me to your cousin Joram when you next see him," the abbot says, his craggy features relenting for a moment into a brief smile.

"I'll do so, though it may be many weeks before I return."

"You may not have many weeks, Drummond. This is a serious threat to the peace of the kingdom. Already this rebellious Gryphon, as he calls himself, has stirred the human population of Kheldour to a bloodthirsty fervor. I fear they will soon make war upon Gwynedd."

Section 6

"Surely we are strong enough to defeat them?" Geordie muses aloud.

"Perhaps. But what if we are not? He must be stopped, Drummond. Leave me now. I must pray for the souls of my departed brothers."

His audience at an end, Geordie bows and exits. A monk waits directly outside the door to the abbot's chambers to take him to a guest quarters for the night.

Turn to section 22.

* 6 *

Distrusting the stranger's whispered warning and suggestion that he participate in the tug-of-war, Geordie leaves the area of the mock combat to continue his search for Beck, at the same time keeping his eyes out for the plaid-hatted tipster.

Soon he has walked the entire perimeter of the fair, which is not as big as it looked although it fills the green. Geordie then returns to where he had left Noirel.

Section 6

As much as he has taken to the boy, Geordie can't wait forever for him to reappear. His assignment is too important for any long delays. Geordie skirts the edge of the fair a final time on horseback, buying a bag of apples and giving one to Noirel to munch on.

Just as he is about to gallop out the north gate of the town, he hears a quavering cry behind him. Beck runs up to him, shouting joyously.

"Sir, wait up! Wait up!" Geordie pulls in on the reins and brings Noirel to a stop.

"Where have you been, boy?"

"Oh, sir, I left the fair and got lost in town, and when I came back your horse was gone and I thought you had left without me."

Geordie is about to chastise the boy when he realizes that to himself, who has visited Dhassa, the capital, and other large cities, Twilham is of modest size, to the young farm boy it must seem like a big place.

"Climb up, lad. We've some hard riding to do before the sun sets."

"Yes, sir." Geordie leans down and swings Beck up by an arm. Together they canter off atop Noirel toward the forest between them and Carbury.

Turn to section 33.

* 7 *

Geordie concludes that as an innocent man he has nothing to fear from the just and true nature of his actions. He allows himself to be taken to a dank cell with only matted straw for bedding. A bucket of water in the corner is the only sustenance provided him. A thin blanket that reeks of mold and mildew is his cover.

Alone in the keep, Geordie broods over the dismal results of his venture so far. He has become entangled in events. Here he is locked away in a priory cell, while the threat to Gwynedd grows unchecked. He can only hope that someone will come forward with new evidence to clear his name.

A month, even two weeks ago, Geordie might have raged, heaved the water bucket, torn up the bedding, kicked in frustration at the iron bars that bound him, but the heavy weight of responsibility he feels toward Camber, the whole MacRorie clan, and the nation of Gwynedd itself, has begun to mature him.

Section 8

He rests quietly and hopes for a better turn of events on the morrow.

Turn to section 8.

* 8 *

Geordie wakes sore and stiff, unused to sleeping on a hard floor. He splashes some water on his face and drinks a little, wondering when he might have an opportunity to persuade the abbot of his blamelessness.

By midmorning he is hungry and fretful. Have they forgotten about him? He is about to make a racket to attract attention when a far door opens and the abbot himself paces the length of the antechamber to stand before his cell.

He is accompanied by a lay brother in brown who works the keys to free Geordie. After opening the door, the layman steps aside and the abbot's lean frame fills the entrance.

"A further search of the carriage turned up

Section 8

this," he says, holding forth a wickedly pointed awl fixed into a knobby wooden handle. Flecks of dried blood are visible along its length.

"This does not prove your innocence, but it does lend credence to your story. I am going to take a measured risk and let you go."

"Reverend Father, I swear upon the most holy vows that I am guiltless."

"Future events will prove the wisdom or foolishness of my actions. Now, you must leave, and leave quickly. Today is a day of mourning in our community, and we must shut the doors to all strangers that we may grieve more openly with each other."

"I understand. My groom and I will be on our way within the hour, if you permit us."

"We do. I urge you to make haste on your journey. Reports of new uprisings along the Gwynedd-Kheldour border have reached my ears only this morning."

"Yes, Reverend Father."

Geordie is escorted to the stable by the same brown-hooded layman. He finds Beck combing Noirel with a borrowed brush.

"Good lad, Beck. Come on, our stay here is over. It's the highway for us again today."

"Very good, sir. I was mighty concerned when they took you away. You've not done anything wrong, 'ave you, sir?" Beck looks up at him with trusting eyes. The weight of re-

sponsibility grows just a bit heavier then, as Geordie realizes how much of the boy's future outlook depends on the righteousness of Geordie's example.

"No, Beck, it was a simple misunderstanding, that's all. Come along, we'll get Noirel some breakfast and then be on our way."

Turn to section 22.

* 9 *

Little Beck sits up abruptly, throwing off the heavy bundles that warm him. "Begging your pardon, sir, but I should really go back to search for my uncle. I doubt that he is alive, but I feel it is my duty to make a try." For the first time Geordie gets a good look at Beck's innocent, youthful face, pale from his immersion in the river and drawn with worry over his injured and probably deceased uncle.

Geordie replies: "Then it is my duty to accompany you, Beck, for loyalty to your uncle or anyone is a valuable trait that should

Section 9

be honored. Tomorrow morning we'll follow the river back where it came from. For now you must dry off a bit."

Geordie changes into dry clothes, and he dresses Beck in a long shirt that will have to do until his own soaked and ragged clothing dry out. Then Beck lies back, suddenly tired. He falls asleep while Geordie watches over him till the fire burns to ashes.

At dawn of the next day Geordie and Beck make a meal of some dried meat and fresh water from the pool. Then they climb the hill, and begin to follow the path back upstream along the banks of the river. They have scarcely gone a hundred yards before Beck gives out a wrenching cry.

The battered body of his uncle is caught in a forked, sunken tree limb. Geordie orders Beck to stay by Noirel while he drags the bruised and swollen corpse to shore.

When he has wrapped the body in blankets to shield it from the sight of Beck, he calls to the boy, who comes up slowly, his tear-streaked face red and puffy.

"Now we must continue upstream to return your uncle to his family, if he has one, or at least into the care of the village parson."

"Truth to tell, sir, no one is going to mourn my uncle except me. He had no other family, and he was not well liked in the village. There

was a meanness to him, sir, but he was my uncle."

"I understand, Beck. We'll give him a ceremony right here, then." And they do. Geordie finds a restful bower on a knoll above the river and digs a grave. When he has finished, he gestures for Beck to kneel while he utters prayers to commend the spirit of the deceased to God.

"Lord of the universe, take this man,
who rose from dust and returns there now.
Take him to You as You take us all.
Take this spirit back into Spirit."

When their sad work is done, Geordie addresses Beck. "Now there is nothing for you to return to. I ask you again, will you join me as my groom?"

"I suppose I must, sir."

"Things look gloomy now, Beck, but take heart. Out of your tragedy may come greater opportunities than you might ever have chanced upon."

They set off together back down the hill, and so it is that young Beck joins Geordie Drummond on his secret assignment to the northernmost reaches of Kheldour.

Turn to section 13.

* 10 *

Geordie enters the constable's office and is led to a stone cell with iron bars where poor Beck is imprisoned. The boy is huddled in a corner on a pile of dirty straw, his face turned toward the damp stone. At the sight of Geordie, Beck leaps to his feet.

"I knew you'd come for me, sir. I knew it! I knew it!"

"This boy is traveling with me, officer, and it was I who gave him that coin pouch."

"Well, one can't be too careful especially with the fair on, you know. Lots of ruffians about, taking advantage of the honest citizens, if you know what I mean." Constable Polidor gives Geordie an exaggerated wink and goes on mumbling, while searching for the small pouch to return it to its rightful owner. From another pocket he withdraws a ring of iron keys and fumbles through them.

"Here we are. Here we are. Come on out now, you little imposter. Thought I'd trapped a pickpocket, I did. Well, get along." Straight-

ening the undersize hat on his head and stroking the heavy, ornate chain of office lying on his chest, Polidor fits the rusty key into the lock and opens the cell door. He tries to pat Beck on the head as the boy brushes past him in his eagerness to cling to Geordie.

"Come along, Beck. We've some hard riding to do before the sun sets."

"Yes, sir!" Beck beams, and they saunter out the door together, leaving Polidor grumbling to himself about the waywardness of youth.

Soon the two of them are atop Noirel, cantering toward the forest between them and Carbury.

Turn to section 33.

* 11 *

With his back to the wall, Geordie fights bravely, heroically, desperately, but these northern men, huge and agile, press in on him. He flails his legs and fists to keep them

Section 11

off, but they are too strong. Groggin grasps his head in a headlock and holds him while Lothan pummells him.

Geordie reaches wildly for his stabbing sword but can't bring it to bear, then Lothan swats it away.

Before Geordie can effect any Deryni magic to stabilize the situation, he blacks out from the pressure of Groggin's forearms on his temples. The two robbers would have killed him for certain except that at that moment old Polidor, the warden of the fortified town, comes rushing out of the constabulary, shouting ancient oaths and waving a knobby stick.

More from amusement than any real fear of capture, the two thieves retreat, giving Geordie one or two more vicious kicks as they withdraw.

Before lapsing into unconsciousness, the badly injured Geordie is able to give his family name to the constable, who sends messengers to inform them. A week later Geordie is moved by litter from Twilham to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* 12 *

Rather than stand unjustly accused, Geordie decides to attempt an escape. He touches the unsuspecting guard and with a light spell causes him to faint. Dragging his unconscious body into the shadows, Geordie strips him of his robe and puts it on over his own clothes. Slipping into the stable to the left, he feels his way in the dark until he hears Noirel's distinct low whinny.

Beck lies asleep on a straw pallet in the next stall. He shakes the boy gently to wake him, signs for his silence, then saddles Noirel as quietly as he can. Just as he finishes tightening the girth and lowering the stirrups, a cry of alarm sounds outside. Another brother must have discovered the fallen guard.

Geordie flings Beck onto Noirel and leaps up himself. Urging the horse to a gallop, they bolt out of the stable and across the moonlit courtyard. One man tries to stop them, but Geordie knocks him away. He points the

Section 13

horse at the low wall along the right side of the yard and prays that Noirel is a jumper. Gathering speed, Noirel stretches and jumps beautifully over the wall, and soon they are racing among the farther orchards of the property and beyond, to freedom.

Turn to section 22.

* 13 *

By midmorning they come to the town of Twilham, barely more than a village but this day in a bustle and boom because of a local fair. All morning as they ride, Beck clinging to Geordie's waist on Noirel's broad back, they pass farmers with rickety wooden wagons piled high with vegetables, cages of plump pheasants and quail, an occasional squealing sow or bleating mournful lambkin.

As they near town, the road traffic becomes like a festive parade, buyers and sellers already inspecting each other's goods. The whole colorful cavalcade ends at Twilham Green in the center of town. Geordie and

Beck and Noirel are drawn along irresistibly like part of the procession, though they are merely passing through.

At the green, rows of booths in untidy lines turn the open expanse into a maze of paths. The fair is already lively when they arrive at noon.

"We might as well look for some breeches for you here, Beck," Geordie decides. He draws Noirel off to one side of the green and dismounts, helping Beck down by showing him how to plant his foot in the stirrup.

The delicious aroma of baked pastries drifts over to them, reminding both of the light breakfast that has carried them twenty miles and more. Geordie shakes some coins from a deerskin pouch. "Here, Beck, fetch us some lunch, will you? I'll wait here, and when you get back and we've eaten, I'll hunt you up some clothes."

"Yes, sir." Beck clutches the coins in a small neat fist. "How much do they cost?" Geordie sees that the farm boy has little experience with money. He takes a moment to explain the relative value of the coins, then watches with concern as Beck disappears into the milling crowd in the general direction of the baker's stand. Moments later Beck pops excitedly out of the noisy green and dashes across the street, narrowly avoiding being run over by the dray of a passing farmer.

Section 13

"Easy does it, boy," Geordie cautions him. The eager youngster has both arms wrapped around a paper bundle of steaming pastries. In a few moments he gobbles up his share, while Geordie munches thoughtfully and watches him.

"Just how was it for you on your uncle's farm, Beck?" Geordie breaks off a piece of his last pie and hands it to the hungry boy.

"I'd rather not talk about it, sir, if'n you don't mind."

"Did he beat you, Beck?" Geordie asks, but Beck remains silent. "You don't look like you've been getting enough to eat, to me. How about a tart and some apple cider to follow down the pastries?" Geordie hands Beck a few more coins and sends him off again into the noisy marketplace. Removing a stiff brush from his pack, he combs Noirel's mane and rubs the horse down briefly.

When Beck hasn't returned after a few minutes, Geordie begins to worry about him. Perhaps he shouldn't have sent the boy off alone. He looks for someplace to tie off his horse, as it is impossible to lead the animal through the cramped lanes of the raucous fair.

After a short search, Geordie finds a hitching post in front of a town building across the way from the green, and is just about to finish looping the reins through the topmost

Section 13

iron ring of the post and head off in search of Beck, when two huge, bearded, rough-looking men tread by, marching a third man between them. The two hirsute giants nearly shake the earth with their heavy footsteps. Their companion's feet barely touch the ground, as each one of his escorts have him by an elbow. Do they hold him captive? Geordie wonders. If so, why? Just then the man turns his head toward Geordie and gives him a glance that might be a pleading expression for help, though he says nothing.

If Geordie decides to search for Beck, turn to section 21.

If instead Geordie decides to follow the three men, turn to section 14.

* 14 *

Troubled by the look on the face of the third man bracketed by the other two, Geordie lets them round the corner, then follows discreetly.

When he reaches the wall, Geordie peeks past the edge cautiously. The two larger men are in the process of stripping the smaller man of his possessions. Instinctively, without thought for his own safety, Geordie rushes up to the scene.

"Lay off, you two," he cries. Neither has a visible weapon, but Geordie has only his stabbing sword. His broadsword is in the pack on his horse. Without drawing the short hunting sword, he advances toward them. The victim makes a sudden movement and darts from the grasp of his surprised tormentors. Rather than stand and help his rescuer, however, he scurries away, hastily fastening the satchel he's nearly lost.

The two giants advance on Geordie, one

Section 14

saying to the other in a hearty voice: "Well, what do you know, Groggin? The Good Samaritan deserted by the one he aided."

Geordie backs up until he feels the wall behind him. There is no escape. He will have to stand and fight.

"No matter, Lothan," the other replies, "the trap that was sprung has snagged its springer. He looks a plumper catch than the other. So lordly, such a fine cut to his clothes, don't you think?" In a moment they are on him.

TWO NORTHERN GIANTS

*To be hit: 12 To hit Geordie: 14 Hit points: 4
Damage with short sword: 1 D6*

Damage with fists: 1 D6-1

If either of the two giants is defeated, the other will run away.

If Geordie wins, turn to section 20.

If the two giants win, turn to section 11.

* 15 *

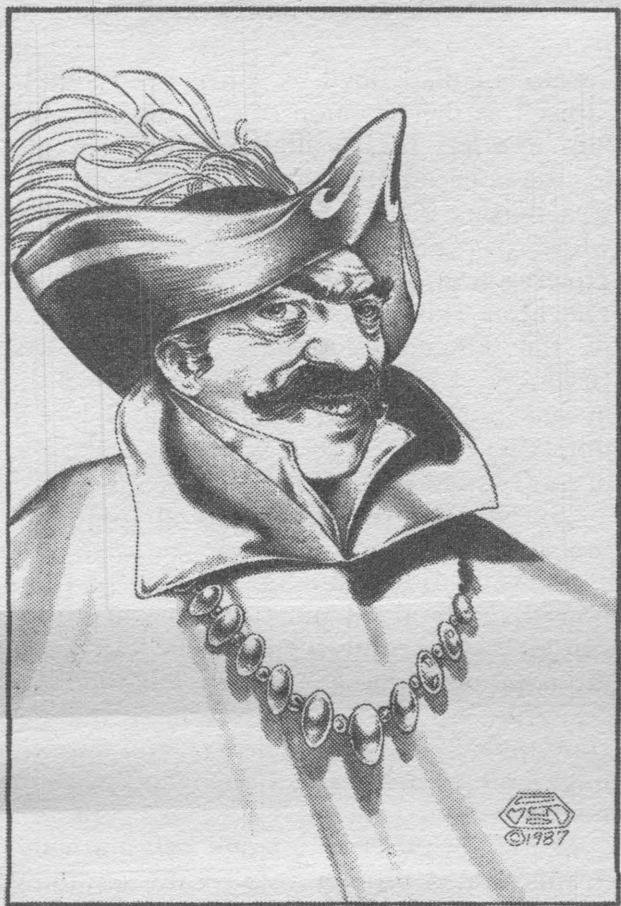
The abbot studies him for a long moment. Geordie feels his mind being probed by a Deryni will. Cautious because of the secret nature of his mission, Geordie wards off the probe. They lock wills for a moment, then the abbot breaks off his efforts.

"Suppose there was no tailor," he speculates. "Suppose there was only an ambitious young man with secrets he thinks he can keep from his superior—yes, Drummond, on these holy grounds I am your better—your high Deryni heritage will not help you here, nor in the coming days, if we find that you are innocent and allow you to continue."

"What!" Geordie cries. "You are going to hold me here?"

"Until I can determine the veracity of your story."

"Please," Geordie pleads. "Before you lock me up, tell me what you know of the northern sorcerer. I lack even the simplest knowledge—



Section 15

what is his name?" Camber had either not known or neglected to tell Geordie this basic fact.

"He is called Devil by some, but refers to himself as the Gryphon of God. He also is a human priest. He has allies among the people in the surrounding lands. One especially treacherous local lord, a self-serving baron whose own power expands with the priest's growing sway over the local populace, is Lord Thornton. This is a serious threat to the peace of the kingdom. Already this rebellious Gryphon, as he calls himself, has stirred the human population of Kheldour to a blood-thirsty fervor. I fear they will soon make war upon Gwynedd."

"Surely we are strong enough to defeat them?" Geordie muses aloud.

"Perhaps. But that is no business of yours now, Drummond. I must detain you until I can verify the truthfulness of your tale. There are none here who can truth read. You must admit the circumstances are very suspicious, your arrival with two corpses and no witnesses other than a small boy who saw nothing."

The abbot picks up a small bell and rings for his aide. A brother answers the summons immediately.

"Place this man in a holding cell and put a

guard before the door," is the abbot's stern order. Geordie bows and leaves the room following the brother.

In the cold moonlight they cross the open courtyard, Geordie's mind racing with ideas. Should he try to escape? Any delay in his mission might be costly. And how is he to prove his innocence while under armed guard inside the priory walls? Yet if he attempts to escape he will be confirming a false impression of his guilt.

To the left is the stable where he knows he would find Noirel and Beck. To the right is a short wall that leads to the gardens and then to the outer grounds of the monastery. Geordie knows he only has the short space of the passage across the courtyard to make up his mind. The guard walks ahead of him, unaware. It would be easy to overcome him, but would the commotion wake the rest of the sleeping brothers, not thirty yards away in the priory dormitory?

If Geordie tries to escape to the left, turn to section 12.

If Geordie tries to escape to the right, turn to section 17.

If Geordie allows himself to be taken to a cell, turn to section 7.

* 16 *

The diminutive Beck sits up and shrugs his tiny shoulders. For the first time Geordie gets a good look at his young, innocent face, pale from his immersion in the river, but bright and eager nonetheless.

"Not much to go back to, sir. I'd much rather come along with you, if I may."

"Excellent, Beck. You shall be my ward, and I your new guardian. Tomorrow at the first town we'll get you a proper groom's outfit. For now you should change out of your wet clothes and wear this long shirt of mine. Take heart, Beck, this may be the start of a whole new life for you. Out of your tragedy may come greater opportunities than you might ever have chanced upon."

Beck's eyes grow shiny with wonder and hope. He lies back down and falls asleep while Geordie watches over him.

The next morning young Beck joins

Geordie Drummond on his secret mission to the northernmost reaches of Kheldour.

Turn to section 13.

* 17 *

Rather than stand unjustly accused, Geordie decides to attempt an escape. He touches the unsuspecting guard and with a light spell causes him to faint. He drags the guard's unconscious body into the shadows, Geordie strips him of his robe, and puts it on over his own clothes.

Geordie thinks he will have a better chance to escape if he leaves on foot. He hates to leave both horse and Beck behind, but he doesn't dare risk entering the stable of restless animals.

Crossing the moonlit courtyard, he prepares to hoist himself over the low wall to the right. Just as he is able to surmount the wall, a cry of alarm sounds. Torch-bearing men flood from the brothers' dormitory. Geordie scram-

Section 18

bles up the wall, but before he can vault over to freedom, a dozen hands seize the bulky grey robe he hoped would disguise him.

He is roughly hauled down from the wall and thrown unceremoniously into a waiting cell.

Turn to section 8.

* 18 *

Geordie steps into the arena. The crowd quiets instantly, then buzzes anew when he says in a loud voice: "I challenge the Boggy Hillman." Geordie has not only accepted the invitation, he has mocked the larger man. Perhaps he is attempting to provoke him to a rash act. The showman has to restrain his prize warrior from crossing the line from the symbolic combat to outright fighting.

"All right, young man, let's see what you're made of. Prepare for the tug." The showman redraws the scuffed line in the dirt, and lays out the rope while Geordie strips to the waist.

Boghill, impatient to begin, hefts his rope and secures his grip, spitting into his hands and rubbing them along a length of the rope in obvious anticipation of showing up the lordly Geordie.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's Strength value, turn to section 19.

If greater, turn to section 25.

* 19 *

While the crowd sizes him up and places their bets, Geordie collects his thoughts. It would be unfair and unseemly for him to use Deryni magic to win a contest such as this, but he can at least concentrate his mind for the test of strength, for he knows that often such contests are not determined by mere brute strength but by cleverness, readiness, and watchfulness.

He breathes in deeply until he feels that his

Section 19

mind is relaxed and attentive. Then he grasps the rope and nods his readiness to Boghill's handler.

The handler places a palm on the center of the rope. At the count of three he lifts his hand and the rope goes taut from both ends with a snap.

Geordie can feel the giant's strength through the vibrating hemp. Like the man before him, Geordie finds himself being dragged inexorably toward the center line. But the giant is overeager. He tries to yank Geordie across the line in one bold heave and overextends himself, losing his balance. Geordie seizes that moment to whip around and put his back into a driving pull of his own. Caught off guard, Boghill stumbles forward and falls, his front hand just crossing the line. Geordie has won!

Turn to section 4.

* **20** *

Perhaps overconfident because of their greater size, the two robbers lash out at him carelessly, not protecting themselves. Geordie kicks out at Groggin, the left-hand attacker, dodging a fist from Lothan on the right. He ducks and snatches a leg from under Lothan, but Groggin recovers from the kick and grabs Geordie's head in a headlock. Twist as he might, Geordie can't loosen the man's grip on him, and he starts to black out from the pressure of the man's hands on his temples.

As Lothan stands up to help his partner finish Geordie off, Geordie arches his back for a final effort and succeeds in freeing himself from Groggin's grip. They square off again, two against one, and charge him. At the last second Geordie draws his short sword. Not seeing it, Lothan plunges forward and impales himself on the blade, ripping his gut. He falls, bleeding heavily. "Take your friend and get out of here," Geordie commands, sur-

Section 20

prised at the authority in his voice, for inwardly he shakes with emotion.

With a glance at the bloody cutting edge, Groggin shoves his hands under Lothan's body and hauls him off, the wounded man groaning in pain.

Just at that moment a rotund mustached gentleman wearing an antique cape festooned with egret feathers and a brass medallion of office bursts from the constabulary building. On his huge head is perched a tiny purple and yellow courtier's cap of a type long out of style, and suitable, even then, only for indoor wear.

"What's this? What's this? Fighting right in front of my very eyes? Be off with you!" He chases the two men, the one struggling to help the other stagger off, but quickly runs out of breath and gives up the pursuit. Puffing for air, he returns to resume his lecture for Geordie's benefit.

"What is the meaning of this disruption of the civic peace? This, sir, is a quiet town, a peaceful town. I can see that you are a stranger, and obviously an important one by the mark of your clothes, but I cannot allow the showing of weapons in the street. No, sir, I cannot allow that. Must put a stop to it, you know," and he mutters under his breath for a moment. Then he raises his fluffy white eye-

brows and asks Geordie for an explanation of his behavior.

Geordie describes his intervention on behalf of the man who ran away, and the subsequent combat.

"Well, I must say this is shocking. First, a little pickpocket, and now a brazen robbery attempt in daylight right under my nose."

"Pickpocket, you say?"

"Yes, a little lad not more than ten. Sinful. Of course he claimed that a gentleman had given him the pouch, but I am not one to be fooled with—"

"Where is this boy?"

"I have him inside. He shan't escape the clutches of the law, not so long as Officer Polidor is on duty. No, sir. You can wager on that."

"Yes, Constable, but may I see the boy?"

"What for?"

"I myself gave some money to a boy this morning. He may be the same one, in which case he is innocent."

The white-haired constable eyes Geordie suspiciously. "If you say so, sir. Right this way."

Turn to section 10.

* **21** *

Ignoring the man's plaintive gaze, Geordie turns his attention to the busy market. Two behemoths cart their quarry around a corner as Geordie strides across the roadway to the green.

He hunts among the fruitsellers, animal pens, fortune-telling stands, pastry and cider tables, games and gurdy-men, reliquary salesmen, local pottery stalls, and the carpet and textile wares from the Kheldour north. The cider girl has sold a pot of cider to a small boy not ten minutes ago, and she points down a congested lane toward the center of the fair, where a small arena is encircled by cheering crowds. Attracted by the commotion, Geordie pushes his way through the tumult until he can see the focus of the crowd's fervor.

Two men, hugely muscled and bearded like the ones who were carrying off the third man across the way, are matched in a one-to-one tug-of-war—great coils of rope wrapped

around each of their waists, both sets of arms extended down a length of rope. Halfway from the center of the rope in each direction is a ribbon, one red, one blue. Drawn on the ground is a rude line. Clearly, if either man's ribbon crosses the line, the other is the victor, but at the moment the tussle seems to be a stalemate.

Gradually, though, one of the two muscular combatants begins to haul in on the thick line, dragging his resisting but helpless opponent toward him. Their neck muscles bulge under the strain, and their chests and shoulders crack and pop like ice breaking, but in the end the weaker man tumbles forward on a sudden jerk of the rope and falls across the line. The crowd cheers, and money exchanges hands along the perimeter of the circle.

The loser slinks off into the crowd, followed by good-natured shouts of congratulations for a good effort and some hoots of derision. The triumphant man struts around the ring, gesturing to the crowd with grunts and grimaces, suggesting by insulting gestures what he thinks of them.

A gaudily dressed showman hurries to the center of the massed faces, raises the winner's hand in victory, and cries out: "Who'll be the next to challenge the great Kheldour strong man Boghill? Who dares test his strength against Boghill the northern bear, eh?"

Section 22

Just then, a man standing next to Geordie speaks to him under his breath. "If you want to see that boy of yours again, Drummond, you'll challenge him."

"What?" Geordie turns to confront the man, but he has slipped off and the crowd closes quickly around Geordie, trapping him along the inside circle. Geordie leans and cranes his neck to follow the man, but sees only a flash of tattered plaid as he disappears beyond the fringes of the gathering.

Why should a tug-of-war have anything to do with finding Beck? Geordie wonders. Still, the stranger knew who he was and that he was looking for the boy. The crowd murmurs its excitement as the giant continues to taunt them.

If Geordie decides to challenge the Kheldour strong man, turn to section 18.

If Geordie decides instead to ignore the suggestion and keep searching for Beck, turn to section 6.

* **22** *

Although it was but a day's journey on horseback from Carbury to Grecotha, a noticeable change comes over both the countryside and its inhabitants as Geordie and Beck ride north. Both land and men become more rugged-looking, more wind-chiseled, and angry-visaged.

At Grecotha the university dominates the landscape as much as the priory at Carbury. It is perched like an eagle on the highest land, and the town has grown up around it. Here Geordie's Kinsman Camber and Archbishop Anscom had been lowly subdeacons in their youth, students at the seminary. But the relationship between Deryni and human in these regions was always uneasy, and now, with the coming of the Gryphon, a man like Geordie in lordly dress and armor is the object of increased attention and sometimes outright hostility. More than once Geordie has to rein up Noirel to avoid passersby crossing deliber-

Section 22

ately in his path. And they have not yet even entered Kheldour itself!

They stop at the side of the road before entering the town. "Camber was right, Beck. I'll need to disguise myself as an ordinary man, a merchant, as Camber suggested. Let's put away the chain and the fine cloth, and bring out some less ostentatious wear. Something suitable for a rag merchant." Geordie opens the pack and rifles through it. "How about this outfit?" Geordie holds up a shirt less ruffled and breeches less finely tailored, but still those of a wealthy man, as a merchant would be, and a velvet jacket appropriate for a trader of goods.

"You still look like a lord to me," says Beck.

"Mmm. Yes, and you'll have to watch how you address me, Beck. No more m'lord. 'Master' will do now, as befits your position as my assistant."

"Yes, sir—Master." Beck grins foolishly.

"Also, my sword will have to go into the pack. A textile merchant does not carry a full sword, perhaps only a dagger to protect himself from thieves. Put the long blade where I can easily reach it, Beck."

The guise, though simple, is adequate to protect him here far from his home estates. He enters the town of Grecotha as Geordie Drumm from Rhemuth, to the south of Cor Culdi.

Near the center of town is a wayfarers' inn known as the Inn of the Seven Friars. Geordie secures a room for himself and bedding in the stable for Beck, and sends the tired boy off to bed after a supper of roast chicken, bread, and cider from the tavern next door to the inn.

Geordie betakes himself to the tavern which serves as an informal meeting place for travelers and local merchants, hoping to establish a connection for his journey farther north into Kheldour.

A smoky peat fire in the hearth lends a haze to the crowded tavern. Claret and mead flow freely, served from casks mounted behind a long serving table. A few latecomers are still working their way through heaping platters of meat and bread. Geordie sits at a small table and eavesdrops on the conversation around him.

"The sorcerers have rule of us now. But we ruled them once, and shall again, I swear it."

"Yes! The king may be a human and a true descendant of the Haldanes, but he is a puppet at the whim of Deryni witchery."

All around him there are rumbles of assent. How quickly the people have forgotten the brutal excesses of the Festillic rule, Geordie thinks. Cups are filled and drained. A drunken man recklessly leaps up on one table, shouting: "Now we have one of our own whose

Section 22

sorcery may outdo the sorcerers'."

"Yes, the Gryphon."

"The Gryphon!" others take up the call.

"To the Gryphon!" the cheer goes up, and Geordie hoists his cup along with the rest of the rowdy crowd, hiding his distaste with a smile. The spirit of rebellion is in the air. Geordie feels more than ever the importance of the task that has been put to him. He wonders if even Camber understands how high the flames of uprising are fanned in these border regions.

Just then a large hand claps Geordie on the back. "The Gryphon has an expression for what he is going to do to the Gwynedd magicians. He says: '*Fiat justitia, ruat caelum.*' Do you know what that means, stranger?"

Geordie tries to stand up, but the hand presses down on him like a strangling vine, rooting him to his seat. He has to answer.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Intelligence (Geordie understands the meaning of the phrase), turn to section 35.

If the value is greater than Geordie's value for Intelligence (he does not understand the phrase), turn to section 23.

* **23** *

Try as he may, Geordie can't remember what the words mean, though he should know. If only he had paid more attention during those years of instruction from the priests, he might be able to give the right answer. He had been a good student—it must be the pressure of the moment blocking his memory.

"I'll tell you, then, stranger. It means: 'Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.'"

Geordie trembles inwardly at the implied threat of ruin in those words.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" the man asks, his hands still pinioning Geordie to his seat. Geordie twists to look at his accuser. It is the man in the plaid hat from Twilham Green! Uncertainty clouds the man's eyes. Geordie's simple disguise is working. He turns away quickly before the man can get a thorough look at him.

"I don't think so. Many people think they recognize me, I guess I have that kind of

Section 24

face," Geordie stutters. He realizes that he has just avoided a trap. His knowledge of the ancient language would give him away as an educated person, and not who he says he is. Geordie quickly puts the thought out of the man's mind with a light spell.

"I guess not," the man in plaid says dully, turning away. The crisis is past—Geordie is saved from betraying himself by his own forgetfulness. What luck! He finishes his drink as quickly as he can without calling attention to himself and leaves the tavern for the safety of his room at the Inn of the Seven Friars.

Turn to section 46.

* 24 *

As Geordie walks away, his eyes clouded with pain, he thinks he sees the man who goaded him into the contest. Chasing after the man, he tries to grab him by the shoulder, but he can only use one hand and the man angrily shrugs off his enfeebled grip.

Section 24

"What do you know about Beck? What has happened to him?" Geordie calls out, but the man's icy grey eyes stare at Geordie with detachment from under his plaid hat.

"I don't have to tell you anything," the man spits. "I expected you to defeat that bully, and instead he took you with ease. I lost a good bit of money on you."

"Please," Geordie pleads, "the boy has done no harm."

"That's not what the town constable thinks. He picked the little brat up for pick pocketing."

"That's nonsense," Geordie protests. "I gave that money to him."

"Then you'll have no problem. The constabulary is right over there," the man says, pointing to the building where Geordie saw the three men heading earlier.

Turn to section 10.

* 25 *

The crowd sizes him up and places their bets. Geordie grasps the rope and nods his readiness to Boghill's handler.

The handler places a palm on the center of the rope. At the count of three he lifts his hand and with a snap the rope goes taut from both ends.

Through the vibrating hemp Geordie can feel the giant's strength. Like the man before him, Geordie finds himself being dragged unavoidably toward the center line.

A sudden jerk from Boghill tears at his shoulders. Geordie feels as if his muscles were separating from the tendons. Pain shoots down his arm and back up into his neck. He clings with one hand to the rope, but is towed easily across the line by the disdainful giant. Clutching his aching shoulder, Geordie leaves the fighting arena to the caustic scorn of the giant and his fans.

Subtract one hit point for damage.

Turn to section 24.

* 26 *

Geordie has misjudged the man. For all his talk of justice and peace, he is a miserable thief. Later that night as Geordie sleeps, Jarmuth Rhydon creeps stealthily toward him, knife in hand. Having secured Geordie's trust, he is now going to slit his throat.

Geordie awakes just as the villain pounces on him, deflecting the knife blade from his throat to his shoulder, where it sinks deeply into a fleshy part but cuts no muscles. He has escaped the first thrust. Now he must fight for his life.

JARMUTH RHYDON

*To be hit: 9 To hit Geordie: 12 Hit points: 7
Subtract 2 points damage already inflicted with
dagger.*

Each does 1 D6 damage.

Section 27

If Geordie wins, turn to section 45.

If Jarmuth wins, turn to section 27.

* 27 *

Geordie howls with pain, but the assassin claps his hand over Geordie's mouth. With a quick motion he plunges his dagger into Geordie's side, and Geordie faints into unconsciousness. The robber busily searches Geordie, taking the coin pouch and rings, gold jewelry and the hunting sword, before fleeing through a rear door. Had he known that Beck was a mere boy he certainly would have killed him for the horses, but as he's never seen Beck, the robber assumes with the cowardice of a criminal that the boy is big and strapping, and he runs off without trying to take the animals.

When Beck discovers Geordie the next morning, he is alive but greatly weakened by loss of blood. With a great effort Beck is able to prop Geordie on his horse for

a discouraging ride back to Grecotha for help.

Turn to section 29.

* **28** *

Geordie resists the natural urge to charge after the resounding hooves of racing horses. Noirel twitches excitedly under him, but Geordie is concerned for Beck, and also unsure of the circumstances ahead. Instead of racing after the party, he and Beck continue at a slow, steady pace.

After several miles they come upon Jarmuth Rhydon, resting next to his tired horse. Geordie approaches him.

"Ho, friend. What was that all about?"

"Merely a little skirmish with the local authorities. I suppose you felt it was no concern of yours," Jarmuth chides Geordie gently for not intervening on his behalf.

"I could scarcely tell who it was, you went by in such a rush," Geordie protests, but he is

Section 28

stung by the inherent truth of the accusation. To make up for his previous indecisiveness, Geordie speaks boldly now: "Jarmuth, I like your company. Join us for a while on this cold and inhospitable highway."

"Agreed. Now we should move on. I've lost my prosecutors for the moment, but like stubborn hounds they may pick up the trail again."

"The odds have turned in your favor now," Geordie boasts, momentarily forgetting that he is masquerading as a merchant and should not act like a lordly Deryni. Then, remembering who he is supposed to be, Geordie turns to Beck and adds a loud aside: "Of course a rag buyer and his assistant aren't much for fighting, are we, Beck?" Beck smiles foolishly. Jarmuth says nothing as the three of them ride off together.

Turn to section 47.

* **29** *

Once again Geordie faces his great-uncle Camber, Earl of Culdi. News of his failure has outpaced him back to Cor Culdi. The earl shakes his head wearily.

"The dark threat to our kingdom remains, like a sea storm off our coast, brooding and awaiting its appointed time to wreak havoc on our lands. Perhaps I should have sent my son Joram in your place, but you deserved a chance to set your honor aright, after leaving here in disgrace. If nothing else, I hope you have learned that your violent temper will garner you only bitterness, mistrust, and resentment."

Geordie remains silent. What can he say? He has let down the Deryni race and the MacRorie clan, and the high hopes of his great-uncle.

"Return to your estate now. Perhaps I'll call on you again, for we still face grave dangers."

Section 30

With a wave of his hand Camber dismisses his disappointed nephew.

Return to section 1 and start over.

* 30 *

Geordie races for the cave mouth, but boulders smashing down the path cut him off from safety. The leading edge of the snow knocks him off his feet, and he is swept down the mountain among the debris of the slide.

He tries to keep his head above the crashing, pounding snow as he tumbles along, leaving Jarmuth buried far back. Almost like a swimmer he tries to paddle on the crest of the snowslide, but he misses trees only by inches, helpless to avoid them.

It is only a matter of seconds before he smashes full force into one, fracturing a leg. A party of game hunters crossing the same region two days later find him crawling along the trail, alone. Beck and Jarmuth have van-

Section 31

ished beneath the snowslide. Geordie has failed even to reach the site of his most important challenge. The hunters help him return to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* 31 *

Geordie digs until his strength gives out and he collapses next to Jarmuth. He has nearly breached through the wall of snow that buried them. A passing fox happens along moments after the disaster, snuffs at the depression in the snow where Geordie has almost broken the crust, and finishes the job with his paws, but when he discovers humans inside he flees.

The trickle of air from this tiny hole keeps Geordie and Jarmuth alive until a party of hunters find them two days later, weak, hungry, and disoriented but alive. Beck has vanished beneath the snowslide, and Geordie is in no condition to continue on his mission.

Section 32

The hunters help him to return to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* 32 *

Geordie sprints quickly across the trail. Boulders begin to smash down ahead of the main body of snow. As the leading edge of the snowslide plays around his feet trying to trip him, Geordie dives for the opening, beating the rumbling bulk of the slide by an instant. The hole of the shallow cave is blocked up immediately by masses of dirty snow mixed with gravel and tree limbs.

In a few seconds the snowslide is over, but Jarmuth and Geordie are faced with a new problem. They are buried under untold feet of snow.

"Breathe shallow, my friend. The air will not last long," Jarmuth warns him. "Also, make your movements measured. The more we exert ourselves, the faster we use up what air there is."

"But I must hurry to find Beck," Geordie implores Jarmuth, though he knows that the boy's chances of outracing the snowslide are few.

They begin to dig their way out, but the limited air and cramped space make digging difficult and slow. In an hour they have tunneled only two feet.

Jarmuth gives out first, collapsing from lack of air. Geordie places his inert form behind him and labors on, every scraping thrust of his stabbing knife a strain against succumbing to seductive drowsiness. If he can only stay awake and stave off the lack of air long enough to work his way up to the surface, he can rescue them both.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Constitution, turn to section 50.

If the value is greater, turn to section 31.

* **33** *

A chill breeze blows through the tops of the proud firs that line the muddy road. The branches of the trees whistle an endless and subtle tune as Noirel plods north. The weather turns increasingly cold. Geordie and Beck hunch down on the horse's back, trying to shield themselves from the wind which comes straight at them from the frigid north.

The sky, which held to a cheery blue over the fair, gradually mists up and turns a uniform grey, not clouds but a steadily enfolding mist that drops down to the level of the high treetops, blanketing everything in a blurring fog. The silence of the forest is increased by the low roof of blankness that muffles all sound.

Noirel clops along at an even pace, though the road varies from hard ground to muddy muck where wagon wheels have churned up wet earth into a thick mess. The steadfast animal perseveres, gaining the growing admir-

ation of his rider Geordie. *Even from an animal such as this I can learn*, he thinks to himself, and he silently gives thanks for the chance he has been given to prove himself.

As evening nears, Geordie begins to look for a campsite out of the wind. The endless pines, laying their carpet of needles on an otherwise bare floor, offer little shelter. Their boughs end some twenty feet above the ground, and buffer the wind but little. The country is flat here, a prelude to the rocky heights of Kheldour.

At last they come to a place where the pines grow closer together. Up ahead a semicircular clearing has been hacked out of the surrounding forest next to the road. Other weary travelers have already encamped by the time Geordie, Beck, and Noirel approach the spot.

Here, between wayhouses, the rule of the road is that all are entitled to equal space at the camps. A rude tradesman's wagon sits next to a finer carriage that apparently failed to make its regular stopping point, which would have included both a stable for changing horses and some victuals for both men and animals.

In the excitement at Twilham, Geordie neglected to buy Beck a set of groomswear—the boy is still garbed in an outsize shirt of Geordie's and what remains of his own tattered clothes.

Section 33

After they settled down in a corner of the clearing, Geordie decides to canvas the others at the site for clothing for Beck. In particular he noticed that the trader might be a tailor. He heads toward the painted wagon after instructing Beck to collect some fallen branches for a fire.

"Good man, are you at home?" Geordie calls out, his words startlingly clear in the bright cold air. An unintelligible reply from inside the covered shell of the wagon makes Geordie repeat his question: "Who is there?"

A rattling and clanging from within indicate human presence, but no one shows his face at the tiny door at the back end of the wagon where Geordie stands. He tries once more: "Is anyone there?"

The door flies open in his face, nearly swiping his nose. A pinch-faced fellow pokes his head through the meager opening.

"What is it? Don't you know it's nearly bedtime on the travelers' road?"

"Excuse me, my friend," Geordie apologizes, "but my young groom is without proper apparel. Can you help me equip him?"

"Where there's a coin or two to be made, I can help. Do you need any cookware?"

"No," Geordie answers, somewhat surprised at the question.

"How about blades? Have any that need sharpening?"

"No. Clothes for a small boy, that's all I need."

"Oh, all right." The man sounds petulant and cross. Geordie feels apologetic that he has no more purchases to make.

"How big is this boy?" the tailor asks as he rummages through a pile of woolen goods in one corner of his wagon while Geordie looks on.

"Oh, you know, small," Geordie replies, unsure of the measurements the tailor requires.

"This might do," the tailor comments, hauling out a pair of breeches and a small animal-skin vest with no sleeves. Though it doesn't appeal to Geordie, with its rough, untreated pelt, he can see that it might be of benefit here in the wintry north.

"Fine," Geordie agrees, and after a few exchanges of offers they meet on a price.

Beck is delighted with his new outfit. He tucks Geordie's shirt into the breechings and wears the vest over it, so that the whole roughly approximates a groom's dress.

"Splendid, Beck. I, too, must soon put on the rude homespun stuff of a northerner. You've a jump on me."

"Thank you, sir."

"Fine, Beck. I'm pleased. Let's get a fire going and warm some of our dried meat.

Section 33

Everything in the packs must be nearly frozen."

In the morning the tailor's wagon is gone, but the fancier coach remains. Curious that no one has bothered to take care of the horses, which are still hitched in their traces, Geordie approaches the wagon. It is, he sees now, a church vehicle, one the priests use to move from town to town when necessary. Its outside is decorated with carved panels, each adorned with a symbol and a motto. Emblazoned on one panel is a lion with wings, on another a bull's head with crown and wings, on a third two swords and a crown. "*Fides et Pietas*" reads one precept. "*Pax et Copia Sapientia*" reads another.

Geordie knocks softly on the fine rosewood door to the coach. An ominous silence prevails. Concerned now, Geordie raps louder. Finally, his Deryni senses warning him of danger, he gingerly eases open the door.

Two tonsured priests in full robes lie on the two crushed velvet seats as if asleep, one on his stomach and one with his face to the wall. Geordie touches one to wake him. He is cold!

Geordie steps back with a short sharp cry of horror. Across the clearing, Beck raises his head sleepily. "What is it, sir?"

"Beck!" Geordie calls out, his voice surprisingly firm. "It is time for you to assume your

duties as a groom. Feed Noirel and water him and get him and yourself ready to go."

"Yes, sir." While the boy is occupied, Geordie enters the coach to examine the death scene. It is possible the two priests, unused to travel in the cold weather, merely failed to take adequate precautions and froze to death.

No. A trickle of blood from the mouth of the second priest tells of violence. Each has been stabbed in the back of the neck by a thin blade—tiny, nearly bloodless wounds that the cold has stanchd almost immediately. Nevertheless, they are dead. Not even a Deryni Healer could help them now.

Geordie broods on the ghastly circumstances. Could the tailor have done this? The wound marks might have been made by an awl for punching holes in leather.

Geordie is just about to close the door on the gruesome tableau when he notices a small piece of paper protruding from the clenched hand of the one lying facedown. Gently Geordie pries the missive from stiff fingers. On a small square of parchment are the following words in the old language:

NEMO ME IMPUNE LACESSIT

It is a message from the murderer: "No one attacks me with impunity."

Section 33

Springing from the scene, Geordie hastily shuts the wagon door and tucks the frightening warning into a sleeve.

"Beck!" he cries out again, startling the poor little boy and causing Noirel to stamp his feet nervously. Geordie crosses the short distance to their campsite and claps his hands on Beck's shoulders to steady himself. Beck looks up at him worriedly.

"Sir?"

"Can you ride a horse by yourself, Beck?"

"I've rid a mule. I suppose I could."

"Very good, Beck. That's a brave lad. I'm going to tie Noirel here off to the back of this wagon and drive it to Carbury. I want you to stay on him. Can you do that?"

"I'll try, sir."

"Excellent, Beck. Up you go." Geordie boosts the boy onto the horse and leads him slowly to the back end of the wagon. After quickly watering the horses he climbs into the driver's seat and clucks the pair of bays into motion, bumping over cleared stumps until the rig is back onto the road. Geordie imagines with horror that the rigid corpses are bouncing around inside, but can't bring himself to stop to secure them.

With Beck and Noirel in tow, Geordie drives the carriage through the last miles of forest between them and the city of Carbury. His goal is the priory of St. Stefan. Rather

than bring the bodies to any civil authority, Geordie decides it would be more appropriate to take them to a monastic compound like the priory and let the church leaders make a determination of what to do next. He can't get out of his head the nagging thought that these murders are in some way related to his own mission. Is the cryptic note a warning to him as well as to the church?

St. Stefan's stands on a hill overlooking Carbury, just on the edge of the thriving city, which, along with the university city of Grecotha, is one of the two main cities on the northern Gwynedd border. A deep bay inlet from the northern sea makes Carbury a thriving port city for trade with Meara and even around the outer shores and south to Howicce. The textile goods of Kheldour pass through this port, and word of any strange activity in the north country would reach this city quickly.

Geordie bears his sad cargo up a winding road that provides glimpses of boats at harbor and the city below. Reaching the gate of the fortress monastery, he jumps down and rings the gate bell.

Soon the double doors of the priory are swinging open and he drives the carriage through. A procession of monks are crossing the interior courtyard between their quarters and the chapel. There is a stir in their ranks

Section 33

when it is noticed that a lay person is at the reins of a church vehicle, one that some of the brothers obviously recognize, but the chapel's bell rings insistently and they hurry on to the abbey church for services. A senior monsignor breaks off from the procession and steps up to Geordie.

"What is the meaning of this? Where are Brother Yorel and Brother Cyric?"

Geordie nods gravely toward the coach door. The agitated monsignor investigates while Geordie walks back to Noirel and makes sure that Beck is at least distracted from the gruesome scene within. The priest ascertains the situation and quickly closes the door. With a troubled glance back at the coach he grasps the reins from Geordie.

"The order of Ordo Verbi Dei thanks you for returning its sons to it. Please come with me."

The monsignor leads Geordie toward the main priory building where Geordie knows the abbot's residence will be. His guide pauses briefly to whisper in the ear of a passing brother in grey, who immediately stops two more brothers. One takes the carriage reins, the other Noirel's reins, and the brother with Noirel indicates that Beck should go with him. Beck gives Geordie a dismayed look, but Geordie conveys with a gesture that they are safe here.

Within a few minutes Geordie is presented to the abbot, Reverend Father Farone, a tall, spare, stern-looking human with hawk eyes and a gleaming bald pate.

Geordie tells his story, starting with their arrival at the camp and the brief encounter with the mysterious vanishing tailor.

The abbot interrupts briefly to ask a question: "You never saw this tailor afterward on the road?"

"No, Reverend Father."

"Continue."

Geordie finishes his story by fishing the note from his sleeve and presenting it to the abbot. With piercing eyes the aging but still towering and erect man reads the hostile epigram. Suddenly Geordie realizes the precarious position he's put himself in, riding into the priory with two dead priests who can't speak for themselves to tell their story. Does the abbot believe him?

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Charisma, turn to section 5.

If greater, turn to section 15.

* 34 *

Geordie can't contain himself. Ordering Beck to follow slowly on, Geordie digs his heels into Noirel's flanks and the strong-hearted horse bolts in chase.

Noirel makes up ground quickly. Within two miles he catches up with Jarmuth Rhydon, who is resting by his tired mount. His pursuers are nowhere in sight.

"Ho, friend. What goes here? Where are those who were after you?"

"I sent them on a merry goose chase." Jarmuth points up the hillside where a narrow path winds through thickets and thornbushes.

"What was the reason for their interest in you?" Geordie asks politely, but Jarmuth laughs at his delicacy.

"Those were henchmen of the local lord, for whom I have had some business. My crime? I did my work too well. The lord asked for a portrait in stained glass. 'Warts and all,'

he said, so I did, but of course he didn't want it—too lifelike—what he really wanted was for me to make him look like a tender saint, the swine."

"Still, why do they hunt you? Surely not for painting an imperfect portrait?"

"No. The lord refused to pay me for my labors, so I took the window out of the chapel he'd asked me to install it in, and replaced it with a whimsical creation of my own."

"Oh? What was that?" Geordie asks innocently.

"I made an image of the fallen angel Lucifer, with the face of my erstwhile patron. A brilliant conceit, I thought. The lord didn't appreciate my sense of humor."

"I see. Jarmuth, I like your company. Ride north with me a way." Just then Beck comes trotting up on Neela. The boy is flushed—he's just had his first gallop on his new horse!

"Agreed. Now, let's move on before the three fools discover their mistake."

Turn to section 47.

* 35 *

Geordie is a good scholar, as Abbot Farone of Carbury Priory had noted. He handles the translation with ease: "'Let justice be done, though the heavens fall,'" he recites, quivering inwardly at the ill-concealed threat of ruin contained in that motto.

Geordie thinks that his answer will satisfy his accuser and quiet the crowd. He twists to look at the man who holds him down. It is the man in the plaid hat from Twilham Green!

"What's your name and profession, tradesman?" the man in plaid asks him with an evil leer.

"Master Geordie Drumm, buyer of cloth and spun goods from Rhemuth in Kheldour."

"So. Just what does a common rag dealer like yourself know about the old language?" It is a trap. The man has tricked him into revealing himself. "Hey ho, everybody, listen here. I saw this so-called rag dealer in the south and he was wearing the signs and symbols of a lord. I say he's a Deryni sorcerer himself!"

Section 35

"String him up!" someone in the darkest dusky corner of the tavern shouts. Others join the call for hanging Geordie. Some want him to dangle by his thumbs, others by his toes, a few bloodthirsty ones by his neck. "Let's see what he's made of!"

"No. Give him the Oath Cup!" cries another. "We'll find out if he's Deryni all right."

"What do you say, Romlin?" one of the rabble-rousers calls out to the man still holding Geordie to his seat. "You uncovered the imposter. You choose."

Roll 1 D6.

If the roll is three or less, then Romlin decides they should hang Geordie. Turn to section 40.

If the roll is four or more, then Romlin decides to administer the Oath Cup. Turn to section 48.

* **36** *

They ride as fast as they dare down the icy mountain trail, but the snowslide gains on them. They can hear the churning mass of boulders, snapped trees, chunks of ice, and tons and tons of snow thundering down on them.

A new rider, Beck can't keep the pace. Geordie keeps having to pull up short to keep Noirel from running up the heels of Neela; if their legs collide it could cause a disastrous fall.

Jarmuth pulls ahead of them by a few yards. Just then Geordie sees him dismount and send his horse on without him.

"Cave!" he shouts. "Let the horses run for it, we might survive in here."

Geordie slows up and dismounts, and calls for Beck to do the same, but the boy dashes on by, either too afraid to stop or unwilling to part with his new horse. Geordie watches helplessly as the riderless Noirel and Beck

and Neela crash down the mountainside nearly toppling out of control. He has only a few seconds to run for the cave mouth before the snowslide will be on him.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to the value for Geordie's Dexterity, turn to section 32.

If the total is greater, turn to section 30.

* 37 *

Geordie fights to balance himself to ease the pressure on his thumbs and wrists, but is soon overcome by pain and exposure to the driving cold wind. For hours he hangs, taking the full strain on overwrought tendons and ligaments, until the muscles stretch and tear. He tries to concentrate his mind, but his body reminds him relentlessly of his agony.

During the night he lapses into unconsciousness, and his body temperature drops

Section 38

dangerously. At the end he can't take any more. When Beck finds him in the morning (Romlin hasn't bothered to come back), Geordie is conscious but delirious. With the help of a few loyal townspeople, Beck frees Geordie and the boy is able to send a message to Cor Culdi for help, but Geordie Drummond's mission to Kheldour is over, at least for the time being.

Turn to section 29.

* 38 *

They ride as fast as they dare down the icy mountain trail, but the snowslide gains on them. They can hear the churning mass of boulders, snapped trees, chunks of ice, and tons and tons of snow thundering down on them.

"Faster!" Jarmuth shouts. "Let the horses have free rein!"

Boulders begin to smash by them, bouncing off the trail into the deep ravine. The leading edge of the snow plays at the horses'

feet, increasing their terror and escalating their precipitous plunge downward.

Geordie is sure they will tumble off the trail into the ravine, but the horses too are fleeing for their lives, and they careen down the mountainside in a snorting, wild-eyed fury.

The snowslide continues to shake the ground under them, but by fearless riding they are able to keep ahead of the sliding mass. Gradually the fearsome noise fades, and when the trail turns into a side valley, they are safe.

Turn to section 39.

* **39** *

The next day the trio rides for the northern coast of Kheldour. Beck, still new to riding, is beginning to grow confident of his newfound abilities. He and Neela dance and prance ahead of the two slowly riding men.

"Careful, Beck," Geordie warns him, but the boy in his exuberance will not stop clowning on the horse. He stands up in the saddle, a

Section 39

dangerous trick, and just then a rat crosses Neela's path and she rears, throwing Beck off backward. His head slams against a rock and he lies terribly still.

Geordie is off his horse in an instant and rushes to the boy's side. He is about to try to minister to Beck when Jarmuth pushes him aside gently.

Then Geordie sees that Jarmuth has changed clothes. He now wears a green robe, the green of a Deryni Healer, over his ordinary tradesman's garb. He has been in disguise as well! In his hand he holds his medical pouch, but the powers of a Healer reside in healing touch and mental control and not, for the most part, in drugs or instruments.

Conflicting emotions shoot through Geordie as he watches the Healer, whose name he cannot be sure of now, gently caress Beck's forehead with one hand while taking his pulse with the other. Did Camber send this man as a spy to check on him, a secret ally he has not asked for? Didn't his Kinsman trust him enough to let him go on his own?

Jarmuth falls into a Healer's trance, his hands stroking the boy's head as Geordie watches, his mind subconsciously reaching out to touch and soothe Beck while the Healer works. For several minutes Jarmuth works on Beck, massaging and manipulating dam-

aged tissue, which revivifies under his restorative handling. Soon Beck is able to sit up and take a sip of water from the skin Geordie offers him.

"You'll be fine, boy. We have a Healer among us." Beck looks up in reverence at the legendary Deryni practitioner of the sacred art of Healing, to which one can only be born and not aspire to.

When Beck falls asleep, Geordie questions Jarmuth.

"Is your real name Jarmuth Rhydon?"

"Yes, Geordie," Rhydon answers quietly.

"And I suppose you know that my name is not Geordie Drumm?"

"Yes, Geordie Drummond. I hoped never to have this conversation with you, but now that you know, please don't be angry with Camber. He only wanted you to have an advisor, not one who would act in your place or order you about."

Geordie does not show his injured pride. "I understand," he tells Jarmuth, though in his heart he still feels that Camber has not fully trusted him. Why should he, Geordie admits to himself.

"When you come to your battle with the Gryphon, I shall not be able to help you. Not me nor any of my healing arts. You will be on your own. Until then, I am here to assist you any way I can."

Section 40

Geordie realizes he has much to thank Jarmuth for. "The boy will be all right?" he asks softly.

"Yes."

"I humbly thank you for that," Geordie says with conviction. The two men shake hands over the sleeping boy.

Turn to section 60.

* 40 *

"There's an old saying in these parts, Geordie Drumm, or whoever you are. It goes: 'If a man can hang by his thumbs until morning, it doesn't matter if he's telling the truth or not.' Let's take him out to the great oak and test him."

With those words a dozen hands seize Geordie and drag him out the back door of the tavern into an alley that runs downhill away from the town. The revelers tumble from the tavern and gather under a heavy-limbed black oak a hundred yards or so away,

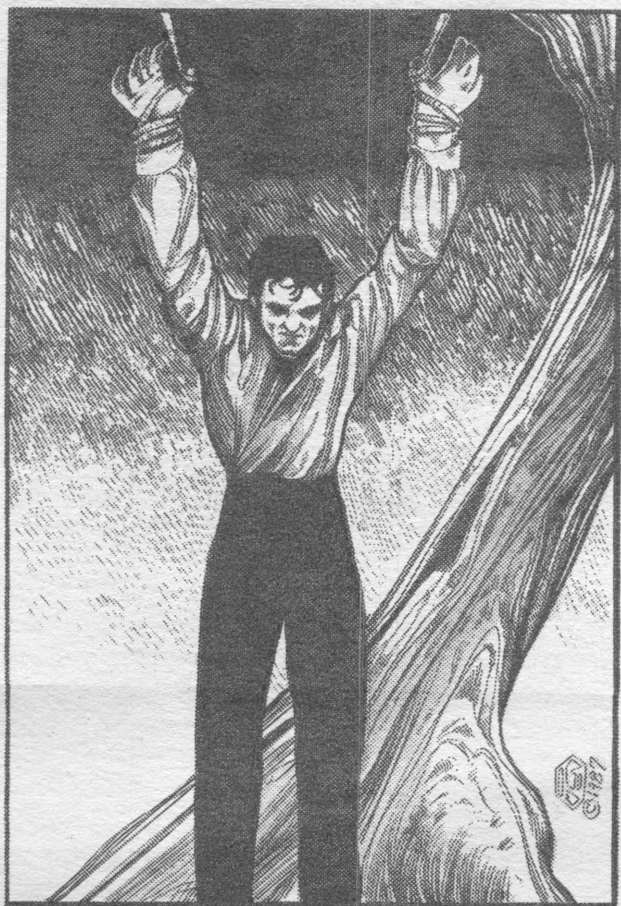
on the edge of a field. A rope is produced and looped tightly around Geordie's thumbs and then around his wrists. With a painful yank he is hauled up and left to dangle with his feet just touching the ground.

"Leave him there till morning. Let it be a lesson to any sneaking spies who try to learn from us the secrets of the Gryphon!" Romlin declares, and the party breaks up, leaving Geordie alone, twisting slowly in the darkness.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Constitution, turn to section 42.

If the value is greater than Geordie's value for Constitution, turn to section 37.



* **41** *

After a moment's thought, Geordie resolves to ask Jarmuth to join him on his journey north.

Rhydon agrees readily, concurring that the next few days require caution and alertness, a burden more easily shared by two sets of eyes than one.

"Or three sets of eyes than two," Geordie adds, referring to Beck.

Soon after they reach this agreement, both men retire to their bedding. As he lies on his pallet, Geordie can't help but ask himself if he's done the right thing. After all, he barely knows this Jarmuth Rhydon, though he seems an honest sort, and an industrious craftsman in the bargain.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's

Section 42

value for Wisdom, turn to section 44.

If the total is greater, turn to section 26.

* 42 *

Geordie marshals his energies to withstand the pain and the cold. For long hours he balances himself on tiptoe to take the strain off his aching thumbs and sore wrists. He concentrates his thoughts and removes himself to a place of peace within, where the episode seems like a distant dream even as he experiences it. By these and other means he is able to sustain himself.

In the morning Romlin returns. He is surprised to find Geordie in such good shape, but true to his word he cuts him down and lets him be, walking away with an air of disdain as Beck comes running up to Geordie. The Deryni lord can only watch as his tormentor moves off, confident of his impunity.

"Oh, sir, your wrists." Beck stares in horror at the bloodied raw sores where the rope has cut Geordie's flesh.

"Don't worry, Beck. I'll just wrap some cloth on them and we can proceed. What I've learned in Grecotha makes our speed and dispatch the more urgent."

Subtract 1 hit point for damage.

Turn to section 46.

* **43** *

Geordie and Jarmuth pick their way slowly down the mountainside. Near the bottom of the ravine they are in, they discover all three horses gathered under a spreading pine at the edge of the snowfall. Unless the boy fell off Neela as they descended and they have missed him, he must be close by.

"Beck!" Geordie shouts. "Where are you, boy?" A faint whimper from nearby bushes sends Geordie running to its source.

Section 43

There lies Beck, his small body bruised and battered. His injuries look serious. Geordie drags the boy from where the snowslide has flung him and stretches him out on the soft bed of pine needles near where the horses stand.

He bends to examine the boy further, but Jarmuth pushes him aside gently. Then Geordie sees that Jarmuth has changed clothes. Over his ordinary tradesman's garb he now wears a green robe, the green of a Deryni Healer! He too has been in disguise! In his hand he holds his medical pouch, but the powers of a Healer reside in healing touch and mental control and not, for the most part, in drugs or instruments.

Conflicting emotions shoot through Geordie as he watches the Healer, whose name he is now unsure of, gently caress Beck's forehead with one hand while taking his pulse with the other. Is this man a spy sent by Camber to check on him, a secret ally he had not asked for? Doesn't his Kinsman trust him enough to let him go on his own?

Jarmuth falls into a Healer's trance, his hands stroking the abrasions on the boy's badly cut arms and legs. Geordie watches, his mind subconsciously reaching out to touch and soothe Beck while the Healer works. For several minutes Jarmuth works on Beck, mas-

saging and manipulating damaged tissue, which revivifies under his restorative handling. Soon Beck is able to sit up and take a sip of water from the skin Geordie offers him.

"I almost made it," Beck manages to say. "Just at the end Neela jumped a clump of rocks and spilled me, or I would have been all right."

"You'll be fine, boy. We have a Healer among us." Beck looks up in reverence at the legendary Deryni practitioner of the sacred art of Healing, to which one can only be born and not aspire to.

When Beck has fallen asleep, Geordie questions Jarmuth.

"Is that your real name, Jarmuth Rhydon?"

"Yes, Geordie," Rhydon answers quietly.

"And I suppose you know that my name is not Geordie Drumm?"

"Yes, Geordie Drummond. I hoped never to have this conversation with you, but now that the cat is out of the bag, please don't be angry with Camber. He only wanted to provide you with an advisor, not one who would supercede you."

Geordie does not show his injured pride. "I understand," he tells Jarmuth, though in his heart he still feels that Camber had not fully trusted him. Why should he, Geordie admits to himself.

Section 44

"When you come to your battle with the Gryphon, I shall not be able to help you. Not me nor any of my healing arts. You will be on your own. Until then, I am here to assist you any way I can."

Geordie realizes he has much to thank Jarmuth for. "The boy will be all right?" he asks softly.

"Yes."

"I humbly thank you for that," Geordie says with conviction. The two men shake hands over the sleeping boy.

Turn to section 60.

* 44 *

The next morning an incident proves Geordie has made the right decision in asking Jarmuth Rhydon to join with him and Beck.

They are an hour up the road, walking the horses at an easy pace up a winding hilly section, when they hear the sound of galloping horses' hooves behind them on the road. A young man with fear and terror on his pan-

icked face flies past, followed by three grim, determined-looking men hunched low over their horses' lathered necks.

In a flash they are by Geordie and Beck and Jarmuth, and the horses' upkicked hooves and rolling, hard-working hindquarters vanish around the next bend in the road.

Immediately Jarmuth gives chase, while Geordie and Beck hold back, proceeding at a cautious pace. Several miles up the road they come upon Jarmuth—dismounted next to his panting horse—respiring heavily himself but laughing between gasping breaths.

"That was a local yeoman I've done some work with. His crime—not enough levies paid to the lord hereabouts. I couldn't stand to see him caught for a whipping or worse, so I outraced the three horsemen to catch the yeoman. I showed him a fork off the main trail, then hid myself down there in the bracken until they passed. Oh, they might find the trail I put the yeoman on, but it'll be a wild goose chase up in the thickets. They'll get a good scratching from thorns and stickers, but they'll never catch that yeoman where I sent him."

"Ho! Well done, Jarmuth. I like your company already."

Turn to section 47.

* 45 *

Geordie howls in pain, but manages to throw the assassin off him. His terrible anger rises up and he smites the man a two-fisted blow despite his injured shoulder. The blow crushes Jarmuth's skull. The jolt of it sends waves of nausea through Geordie.

Beck rushes in at Geordie's first cry to find his master bleeding heavily and the other man mortally wounded. Geordie has won the fight but is incapacitated by the knife wound. With a great effort Beck is able to prop Geordie on his horse for a discouraging ride back to Grecotha for help.

Turn to section 29.

* 46 *

The disturbing events at Grecotha sharpen Geordie's determination to reach the northern coast as soon as possible and confront the Gryphon. His plan is to make contact with this Lord Thornton who is the Gryphon's sponsor and chief benefactor, and let the lord lead him to the Gryphon.

He and Beck breakfast on barleycakes and honey and then set out for the northern wilds of Kheldour. Between them and the sea are several sets of high mountains they will have to cross. Geordie knows that both of them cannot continue to ride on Noirel. It is both uncomfortable and impractical, as it slows them down considerably. He keeps his eyes open, and soon after they cross into Kheldour itself he spots a small but frisky bay romping in a nearby meadow, fenced in by rails connected by a row of posts set at angles to each other so they form a zigzag wall.

"Wait here," he commands Beck, and walks

Section 46

on foot to the door of the human residence, a rundown thatch-roofed cottage stuck in the mud of this misty land. Just then the farmer comes around the corner of his house.

"Ho there, good morning," Geordie calls out.

The farmer grunts but says nothing. Geordie tries again. "How much would you take for that quick young filly in the front pasture?" he asks, going directly to the point.

"Not mine to sell. I'm a vassal, not a freeholder. Everything you see belongs to the local lord, including that horse."

"How much would your lord want from you, should the horse be lost or killed?"

"I hardly know how to reckon?" the farmer answers, but Geordie can see his mind working as he calculates the possibility for a profit. Geordie pities the poor man. His lot in life is a hard one. This farm would never turn a profit, and the man would likely sink deeper and deeper into the debt of his fiefal lord. Without waiting for an answer, Geordie makes a generous offer which is immediately accepted.

Beck is nearly speechless when Geordie presents him with Neela, a sturdy brown filly with white markings and a high-stepping gait. It is obviously the first thing the poor urchin has ever owned, and it is the size of a horse! He walks all around her and pats her and

nuzzles her, standing on tiptoe to scratch the horse's ears and neck. The farmer has thrown a simple but workable saddle into the deal, so they are able to ride off together, Beck whooping in delight as they trot up the trail.

The road winds higher and higher, passing by degrees through rounded foothills and into jagged passes. Canyons shrink so suddenly from broad depressions of arable land into craggy shadowed gorges full of thickets and dangerous narrow pathways along cliff faces that they are surprised when nightfall catches them in a high mountain pass, which promises tilted sloping ground for their bed. They are happy then to discover a solitary mountain shelter near the last turn of a twisty summit climb, not an inn but a rude lodge that anyone may inhabit for a night or two without recompense.

They tie off their horses, Beck insisting on staying with them for the moment, even in the frosty cold of the high altitude. He takes off his own primitive fur vest that Geordie has bought him and places it over Neela's neck. Geordie tells him that this is foolish and unnecessary, but the boy won't take back the covering.

Leaving Beck with the animals, Geordie enters the stone dwelling. One other traveler is stranded in these inhospitable heights. He

Section 46

camps in a corner of the barren space, which is little more than a large stone leanto with a fireplace and chimney in one corner, where the traveler has built a small but warming fire.

"Good even, fellow wayfarer," Geordie addresses the stranger, uncertain of his rank.

"Indeed, sir," the man replies from the shadows. He has a high-pitched reedy voice that seems somehow comical to Geordie in the rugged circumstances.

"What brings you to these remote parts?" Geordie asks.

"My name is Jarmuth Rhydon. I am a humble guildsman, a glazier by trade, though I tinker in other professions," the mysterious tenor-voiced person in the shadows responds.

"And you?"

Geordie gives his by now familiar alibi as a merchant.

"Well, then," Rhydon exclaims, "we are of the same calling. Sit down and share the fire with me."

"My young assistant stays with the horses. Let me at least bring him a heated brick to sleep with."

"'Tis a cold night to remain outside," Jarmuth remarks.

"Yes, but his horse is new today, and the excitement of it keeps him warm."

"I see."

Geordie brings Beck a warming stone and a mug of soup that Jarmuth is gracious enough to proffer him from an iron kettle. The boy is busily brushing Neela.

"Don't forget about Noirel here, now," Geordie cautions Beck in a playful jesting tone.

The boy replies in earnestness: "Oh, no, sir. He'll get his rub just as soon as I've done with her."

"Good boy, Beck. Don't let your soup go cold."

"No, sir." Geordie returns to the shelter. Jarmuth Rhydon has shifted his position to one side of the fire so that two can sit in front of the hearth. He motions with a friendly gesture for Geordie to be seated.

"'Tis a dangerous time for peddlers and journeymen, is it not?"

"Yes, it is," Geordie answers, thinking of the travails he has already encountered.

"Where stand you on the matter of the Saint from Stavenham?"

Geordie shifts uneasily. The last talk caused him trouble. Now they were calling him a saint. Geordie speaks guardedly. "You know the saying: '*Omnis caro foenum.*' 'All flesh is hay.' What matters it what men or Deryni do, in a hundred years it is all forgotten."

"Well, I'm against him, and I'm not afraid

Section 46

to tell you, or anyone, especially not these Kheldouric barbarians." Jarmuth surprises Geordie with his vehemence.

"What cause have you to distrust him?" Geordie asks, cautiously retaining a neutral attitude.

"It's bad for business, that's why. The locals are all in a row and ready to take up arms. War is bad business. Everybody loses. Better to make trade with your enemies, put them in your debt, or better yet, put yourself in their debt or make both of your interests so far intertwined that it isn't profitable for them to burn your villages, destroy your barns and granaries, slaughter your livestock. Don't you agree?"

"Surely there are some times when it is justifiable, even necessary, to defend one's honor, one's family."

"Honor, no. Family, yes, of course, every man must defend the innocents. But I tell you, we'd be better off if we didn't war over religion."

"I can't disagree with you there." Geordie finds the man's unique point of view refreshing after the rabid fanaticism of the crowd in the tavern.

"Now you take me for instance. I've done the glasswork in some of the great cathedrals in Gwynedd and Kheldour. Does it matter if it

is for Michaelines or some other brotherhood? To me it doesn't. I do the best work I can, and let God judge its value. One can put too much stock in the words of men, especially leaders, because leaders want followers."

Geordie considers the man carefully. Perhaps he would make a good companion for the next difficult and treacherous miles through the mountains, where wild beasts, bandits, and bad weather make traveling alone the more dangerous. He wonders whether to offer the man a temporary partnership.

If Geordie decides to talk to Jarmuth Rhydon about traveling together, turn to section 41.

If Geordie decides against asking Jarmuth to join him, turn to section 49.

* **47** *

The next few days they toil together up and down the rugged slopes of the Kheldour Range. Going is slow even on the downhill sections, for the horses' legs have to be protected against suffering splints from the strain.

Winter comes early in the mountains. More than once they wake from sleeping out under the stars to find their coverings frosted with snow. The horses need special care and wear their blankets continuously now. Mornings Beck has to chop holes in the ice on ponds and over fast-running streams for water.

As they travel, Geordie learns more and more respect for his extraordinary companion Jarmuth Rhydon. Much more than a mere glazier, the man is an amateur philosopher whose unusual ideas of justice and civil organization are stimulating to Geordie, trained as he is in the classical line of thinking. Jarmuth substitutes a profound common sense for rigid doctrinal thought.

"Take this Gryphon, for example," Jarmuth says one morning as they jog along, Beck hanging back a few yards while the two men ride side by side. "Even from afar I can see what his weakness is, and what his eventual downfall will be."

"What is that?" Geordie asks, for any advantage he can gain on his adversary will be beneficial.

"Pride. The love of power. Antithetical to the very concept of monkhood, isn't it? Shouldn't he be locked away in his cell, meditating on the greater glory of God? Instead he trumpets his name abroad, gathers followers, prepares to emerge from his isolation as a holy warrior bent on conquest. Yes, excess of pride will fell him."

Sometimes Jarmuth's words are like those, simple and direct. Other times, when he talks about schooling for all, not just the children of the elite, or when he envisions a society of the future that might be founded on the participation of all the people, not merely the few royal families, Jarmuth sounds like more of a revolutionary than this Gryphon.

"Such talk could get you hanged in the Haldane court," Geordie declares at one point, though he feels parochial and backward thinking when he says it. "Surely there's something to be said for fealty to king and country?"

Section 47

"Of course."

"And for the way the great families, the MacRories and the others take care of their yeomen and laborers?"

"Yes. I don't want to see a return to the tribal squabbling of our distant past. I too love Gwynedd and all she stands for. I am merely staring into the misty future, perhaps hundreds or thousands of years from now, at what changes might come to pass in the affairs of men. It's an idle hobby."

"No, no," Geordie assures Jarmuth, "I find it most enlightening."

The horses are struggling now against the wind and the steep rocky path. They break out of the high forest above the tree line, along a snowy ridge that connects two broad mountain backs. The ridge is fairly level but barely wider than a horse. On either side of the narrow ridge the ground falls away sharply into deep ravines. One slip here and horse and man will go tumbling to their death.

Before starting out onto the ridge they dismount and lead the animals by their bridles. At Geordie's suggestion Beck goes between the two men. The snow beneath them groans and creaks, but all three make it across safely. After traversing this spine the trail dips down into the valley on the near side, switching back and forth underneath the

overhanging ledge it has just crossed. The three are still leading their horses down the switchbacks when a low rumbling sound above causes them to look up.

"The snow! Our footsteps must have loosened the ledge," Jarmuth shouts as he leaps upon his horse. "Mount up and ride! If that snowslide catches us we're done for!" Geordie snatches Beck up onto Neela, then throws himself onto Noirel. They take off down the perilous mountain trail at break-neck speed.

Roll 1 D6.

If you roll three or less, then they get away. Turn to section 38.

If you roll four or more, then the avalanche overtakes them. Turn to section 36.

* 48 *

Romlin stares evilly at Geordie. "I think we ought to find out once and for all if this is a Deryni spy. Bring me a portion of the Gryphon's Oath Cup."

Geordie fears that he knows what is in the Cup. It is probably merasha! Merasha is the drug, devised by the Deryni themselves, which produces a light sedative effect in humans but near-total incapacitation in Deryni, bringing on dizziness, nausea, loss of control over limbs, and disruption of mental concentration and magic powers. If the Gryphon has somehow gotten hold of merasha and is using it to detect Deryni, then the situation is even more serious than anyone has imagined.

But he is helpless. Romlin keeps him pinned to his chair until the potion is brought in, decanted into a small inverted church bell. Geordie is forced to drink, and soon the merasha overpowers him and he lapses into unconsciousness. A local lord finds him the

next morning, badly beaten and tossed into a ditch on the side of a road. He helps Geordie get back to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* **49** *

Ruminating for a long moment in silence, Geordie settles against asking Jarmuth to ride with him. He knows too little about the man, and has too many secrets to conceal about the real reasons for his trip. With Beck along, he has all the companions he needs or can be responsible for. They would each have to fend for themselves.

"Your talk is interesting, Jarmuth Rhydon. Perhaps we'll have further opportunity to discuss these matters at another time. Now, however, I feel the weariness of a long day's ride in my bones. I regret I must sleep soon."

Soon after this both men retire to their pallets.

The night passes peaceably enough. Some-

Section 49

time late in the evening Beck creeps in and sleeps by the fire. The next morning before Jarmuth Rhydon stirs, Geordie and Beck are already outside in the nippy air, saddling the horses for the day's ride.

They are an hour up the road, walking the horses at an easy pace up a winding hilly section, when they hear the sound of galloping horses' hooves behind them on the road. Jarmuth Rhydon comes flying around a corner, pursued on horseback by three grim, determined-looking men hunched low over their horses' lathered necks.

In a flash they are by Geordie and Beck, and the horses' upkicked hooves and rolling, hard-working hindquarters vanish out of sight around the next bend in the road. What is going on? The incident has occurred so quickly that it is hard to tell exactly what the circumstances are. Is Jarmuth fleeing from just men or criminals? Who is in the right? Should he follow after and see what happens? Geordie wonders.

If Geordie joins the chase, turn to section 34.

If Geordie and Beck hold back, turn to section 28.

* **50** *

His strength failing and the air giving out, Geordie makes a last effort to break through the snow that has buried him and Jarmuth in the cave. He thinks he sees a faint glow through the crystallized wall of packed snow, and digs toward it. His hands are numb from the cold, and his knuckles bleeding from rubbing against the sharp ice as he stabs away at it with the knife.

The blade of the stabbing sword breaks off, leaving only a few inches of metal before the hilt. Geordie digs resolutely, but each chopping stroke takes more of his strength. Finally he drops the shattered hilt of the knife and scrapes with both hands at the icy wall before him. With a last effort he punches through the crust at the top of the slide and wriggles through the hole he's made.

Geordie flops on his back and breathes deeply. The reverberating roar of the snow-slide past, the forest is quiet again, and the



blue sky has never seemed so bright and friendly before.

After a moment's rest, Geordie slithers headfirst down the tunnel he's made and hauls the unconscious body of Jarmuth up. A few minutes' fresh air revives him.

"I owe you my life, my friend," Jarmuth thanks him.

"Now I must go look for Beck," Geordie insists, "though I fear 'twill be useless."

"Ah, don't say that yet, Geordie. We don't know what we'll find at the bottom of the mountain. Perhaps your horse was able to lead the other to safety. Perhaps the snowslide lost its impetus as it descended. Do not give up hope until there is no hope. Then let go."

"You're right, Jarmuth. Have you recovered enough to accompany me?"

"I think so. Let me try." Together they start down the mountain in search of Beck.

Turn to section 43.

* **51** *

Thornton Hall looks even more impressive from below. It is sunk into solid rock, the foundation resting directly on a chunk of bare cliff.

Just as Geordie suspected, there is a set of stairs, narrow and precarious but passable, that leads from a rear door to the beach by a circuitous route back and forth down the cliff face. No supplies can be moved in or out by this path, but a man might make his way unseen in and out of the castle, if he possessed the key to the door.

The tide is flowing in, and the beach above it is smooth. No one has been here for at least six hours, since the last high tide.

Geordie thinks he will venture up the rock stairs just to have a look. He doesn't want to be caught down here, but it may be important later to know exactly what difficulties they may face if they have to return to Thornton Hall.

Section 51

Curiously, though, the stairs end some twenty feet above the beach. A ladder is lashed to the rock at that point, so that someone climbing down could loosen it and lower it to the beach. But there must be a way to reach the stairs from below. Geordie looks around, but he doesn't see anything resembling a ladder. There are a few cracked barrels, their staves loosened from their bands and lying split on the sand. There is some driftwood, and a few split and frayed ends and bits of rope from previous lashings, and there is an iron ring at the base of the cliff where boats can tie off at extreme high tide. The last flood tide has washed away everything else.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Intelligence, turn to section 59.

If the total is greater, turn to section 63.

* 52 *

In desperation Geordie tries to negotiate the treacherous overhang that stands between him and the top. He works his way up until he can nearly grasp the lip, but the relentless tug of earth tears at his tenuous grip, and he can no longer brace himself on his legs as they are too high above his center to support him.

With a lunge he throws himself upward and reaches wildly for a handhold. His searching fingers grab a tuft of the rough grass along the clifftop, but it gives way and he tumbles, still clutching the uprooted grass stems, toward the beach. A projecting ledge breaks and softens his fall, but he still lands heavily and lies motionless.

Some hours later Jarmuth Rhydon lowers himself down to Geordie. The mistake in judgment nearly cost him his life. As it is, the mission to the north is ended by a broken shoulder and numerous other bruises and scrapes. Jarmuth rigs a sling and is able to

haul Geordie up for the dismal and bitter journey back to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* **53** *

Geordie knows that he should accept, but he is angry at being offered lodging in the barn. Geordie forgets for the moment his role as a humble merchant.

"I'd rather face the wind all night than sleep on wet straw," he declares in a rash outburst. "Tell the daughter of Lord Thornton that we shall call on her in the morning." So saying, he wheels on his horse, leaving behind the surprised guards, and trailed by his equally surprised and disappointed companions.

The town of Stavenham is dark when they enter. The tavernkeep is just placing the wooden bar across his door as they near his shop. He directs them to a farm on the outskirts of town where a man named Skenfor might let them sleep—in a barn.

Section 54

With a rueful smile at his companions, Geordie leads the way toward Skenfor's farm.

Turn to section 83.

* 54 *

The cliff face is daunting. Geordie decides that it is wiser to risk a yell. If it is foe above, he'll still have the time to make an escape up or down the beach before they can reach him.

He cups his hands around his mouth and tilts his head up toward the clifftop. "Hello, Jarmuth!" he yells, but the booming surf drowns his words before they reach the heights above.

"Hello! Hello!" he calls out again and again, but receives no answer.

He has given up shouting and is seated on a washed-up log when he hears loose pebbles bouncing off the side of the cliff and looks up to see the rope end snaking its way down the nearly perpendicular wall of rock. Jarmuth

Rhydon's concerned face pokes itself over the overhang.

"Hoy there! Grab hold and we'll haul up." His faint words echo off the wall on their way down. Within minutes Geordie is again standing with his companions on the moor.

Turn to section 81.

* **55** *

Lady Carrega Thornton sits on a high-backed, elaborately carved wooden chair, surrounded by two fluttering ladies-in-waiting. With an imperious tilt to her flaming red head, she looks very much like a royal personage. Geordie thinks he has never seen such beautiful, bountiful masses of red hair, such lovely green eyes, such translucent pale white skin.

"We apologize that our lord and father is not here to greet you himself," she utters in sweet tones that set Geordie's head to ringing. "In his absence you will have to settle for my

Section 55

poor judgment. Come then, let us see your goods."

Geordie finds his tongue. "Your ladyship has been misled. We do not come to sell but to buy. We are merchants from Gwynedd to the south, come in search of the strong and colorfully woven goods of your region, such as that lovely wrap you yourself are wearing."

Lady Carrega laughs and pulls the wrap closer to her. "You'll not get this piece," she chides Geordie. "My nursemaid labored long and hard on this before my birth, and would throttle me if I ever traded on it. Why do you not simply go to Market Day in Stavenham? The selection there would be wider than anything Thornton Hall has to offer."

"Ah, yes, the choices might be broader but not as fine," Jarmuth answers. "The skill of the weavers of Thornton Hall is widely told." He gestures to the set of tapestries that grace the walls of the receiving room. Unicorns at play in a field of marigolds make up the motif of one. A pheasant stretches its glittering wings in flight over a lush landscape in another. All are scenes from a mythical land, softer, sunnier, and more pleasant than the harsh landscape outside.

"Yes," Lady Thornton replies, "they do fine work. But there are so few true craftsmen anymore, don't you agree?" A servingman

brings a platter of oysters, anchovies, and salted beef.

"We do agree, my lady, and that is why we have journeyed so many miles, to see the best."

"You have come at a poor time, Master Drumm. Our lands stand poised on the verge of great tumult."

"What mean you?" Jarmuth presses.

"My father is all in a fury over this Gryphon. Myself"—she leans forward to whisper to Geordie and Jarmuth out of the hearing of her chambermaids—"I believe the Gryphon is a madman, but my father is won over. All his spare moments he spends at St. Stefan's, the Gryphon's lair. It may mean war, I fear, and war is for foolish men."

"Not all wars are foolish, Lady Carrega," Geordie boldly replies, once again forgetting himself.

"Indeed. When has a war been good for your business, tradesman?" Carrega's clear sea-green eyes sparkle with humor.

Jarmuth covers quickly for him. "Never, your ladyship. You are quite correct. Sometimes my young friend forgets that he has no part to play, when his hot young blood rises at the thought of manly combat."

"If that is so, he should find another profession, sword-maker, perhaps."

Section 55

"Beyond my capacity, Lady Thornton. I shall have to remain a merchant buyer."

"Then you will always be subject to the vicissitudes of war, as all women are. I wish that men would think for a minute before rushing off to slaughter one another." This sounds like Jarmuth's philosophy, and Geordie tells her so.

"Then your companion Jarmuth Rhydon is a wise man. The Gryphon will sally forth, his legions will confront the armies of others, there will be bloodshed, death, destruction, and then what? The women will be left to care for the wounded and put the land back in order. And what will have changed? Nothing."

"Perhaps this war can still be avoided, Lady."

"How?"

Geordie cannot say. To explain would be to reveal his true identity. "I know not how," he falters, "it is merely my earnest hope."

"So, you have changed your tune from the hothead of before?" she says, amused, and Geordie is forever charmed by the melodious sound of her laughter.

Jarmuth steps in again. "Perhaps your ladyship could arrange a showing of the Thornton Hall wares for us?"

"Perhaps," Carrega Thornton replies, "but not today. It will need some arranging. Could you come back on the morrow?"

"As your ladyship requires," Geordie answers. They cannot pass up a second opportunity to survey the scene at Thornton Hall, and it may be that Lord Thornton himself will be on hand.

Their audience is ended for this day. Both men bow and withdraw. Beck waits in the outer courtyard with the horses. Before they ride out, the gate at the castle entrance opens, and a wagon is let through. Geordie catches a glimpse through the staves of a cart piled high with freshly made shields, swords, and other implements and armaments of war.

"Look at that," he nods to Jarmuth. A company of footmen surround the shipment. They cast unfriendly stares at Geordie, Jarmuth, and Beck as they pass by. These are men ready for a fight.

One of them notices Geordie's interest in the wagon and steps up to him, challenging him with a swaggering walk and a fist thrust under Geordie's chin.

"Nosy stranger, eh? A spy, maybe? Would you like to see the inside of the castle dungeon, eh?"

Geordie stands his ground but takes his eyes off the passing cart. "I am only interested in rugs and wools, good man."

"I'm not a good man," the soldier spits back. "I'm a warrior. I like to kill, and I'd as

Section 55

soon kill you as the next person that sticks his nose where it isn't wanted."

This business of keeping hold of his temper is difficult. Geordie smiles tightly at the man. "My apologies, soldier. I meant no intrusion."

"All right then. Get along."

They pass through the castle gate, and take the road toward Stavenham. When they have passed from sight of the outer fortifications, Geordie halts them.

"I don't like the looks of it, Jarmuth. War may be closer than we thought. They have hidden their preparations well."

"Indeed."

"I think we should examine the shore for access by sea to the castle."

"The Gryphon's monastery is your real target, remember."

"Yes, Jarmuth, but they may be using the castle as a supply redoubt. The two could be reached one to the other by sea."

"True, but the load we just saw was brought in by wagon."

As they debate the merits of their next move, a troop of men on horseback rides by at a gallop. At their head is Lord Thornton. Geordie would have recognized him by his red hair even if he hadn't seen his portrait in the castle.

"The lord is in a hurry to return to his demesne," Jarmuth comments.

"That makes it all the more important that we know all about his fortifications. Let's ride to the cliff and see if there's a way down to the back of the castle." Geordie urges his horse off the path and onto the heath, picking his way slowly toward the cliff, Jarmuth and Beck following.

At the edge of the steep drop he dismounts. There seems to be no path, no steps cut into the cliff, no way to descend to the sea from this point. Taking a coil of rope from his pack, Geordie ventures close to the dropoff. He ties the hemp line around a large boulder and makes ready to let himself down.

"You and Beck stay here. If there's any trouble, haul me up in a hurry."

"Very well," Jarmuth agrees. Beck looks on with wide-eyed admiration for Geordie's daring move.

Geordie puts his full weight on the rope. It holds the load easily. He backs over the cliff edge, avoiding a glance down the dizzying drop. Gradually he eases his way down, bracing himself against the rock with his legs. When he has descended thirty or so feet, he calls up to Jarmuth. No answer. He yells again. No response.

Dangling from the thin line, Geordie wonders what has happened to his companions. It will take a tremendous effort to pull himself to the top of the cliff. Maybe he would be

Section 56

better off to continue his climb down. He can't take too long to make his decision, as his hands and shoulders already ache from the strain.

If Geordie decides to keep descending, turn to section 70.

If Geordie decides to try to climb out at this point, roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Strength, turn to section 57.

If the total is greater, turn to section 67.

* 56 *

Geordie is concerned for the fate of his friends. He chooses to stay put as his best course of action. This is where they will expect to find him if they come back. He sits down on the boulder where he has tied off the rope.

Within minutes he spots two riders coming his way. Sure enough, it is Jarmuth and Beck,

with Noirel being led by a bridle.

"As I watched you climb down, sharp-eyed Beck here noticed more horsemen on the road," Jarmuth explains after they arrive. "I thought it best if we didn't call attention to you, so we rode off a ways and hid in a gully. Now we're back, you may make the climb down again if you wish."

"Aye, Jarmuth, in a minute. I worried that Lord Thornton's men might have changed their minds about seizing us and taken you away. Again, well done, little Beck. You serve us well."

The boy beams with pride. Geordie rubs his hands together and takes to the rope again. Soon he is standing on the shore of the ruffled sea. A sand beach extends south to a point under the buttressed foundation of the castle high above.

Turn to section 51.

* **57** *

With only his youthful strength to aid him, Geordie hoists himself hand over hand toward the top of the cliff. A stiff wind rocks him from side to side as he dangles, making it difficult to brace his feet to aid his climb. His hands, dry and stiff from the cold, chafe and blister on the rough hemp. Still, in a few minutes he is able to haul himself over the last overhang at the cliff top and lay on the stubbly plain of the heath again.

Jarmuth and Beck are nowhere to be seen, and all three horses are gone. Have his companions been chased off? Geordie wonders. Where did they go? Should he wait for them here or climb back down? Geordie sits down and stares toward the lilting, tilting sea while he ponders what to do.

If Geordie decides to wait for Jarmuth and Beck on the cliff top, turn to section 56.

If he climbs back down the rope, turn to section 61.

* **58** *

Jarmuth's plan is sound. Geordie agrees that they should try the lord's castle first, especially since it is nearest on their route and the weather has turned from a threatening mist to freezing rain. They trot in silence toward the outer redoubt of the castle, where a large guardhouse stands sentinel to the main building.

With a wall and gatehouse in front and the sea at its back, the castle is well protected. Two sentries step in their path as soon as they approach the gatehouse.

"Halt!" one cries. They are both of the oversize variety that seems to grow in this hostile environment.

"We are weary merchants, on the final day of a long journey to Stavenham. We have heard of the fine rugs and woolen goods available here, and have come to the home of

Section 58

the greatest lord in the region to ask his guidance in our purchases. Perhaps the lord himself has goods of this nature for sale?"

The two guards look at each other, thrown off by the commanding tone with which Geordie delivers this formal speech.

"What are your names and places of origin?" the second guard demands.

"I am Geordie Drumm of Rhemuth in Gwynedd, and this is my companion Jarmuth Rhydon of—" Geordie stumbles, realizing he doesn't know Jarmuth's home town, or his story if there is one.

"—Nyford in Gwynedd, and this is our groom Beck," Jarmuth interjects. "Would one of you ride to the castle and announce us? We seek lodging, and the night grows late and the rain cold."

The two guards consult hurriedly, and one leaves wordlessly while the second takes up a defensive position to guard the gatehouse entrance, which is still some several hundred feet from the castle itself.

The first guard soon returns. "Lord Thornton is not on the estates at the moment." Strange that the guards didn't know that, Geordie thinks, unless there is a back way out of the castle, perhaps by sea. "However," the guard continues, "his daughter Carrega will

Section 58

see your goods in the morning. She regrets she cannot extend the hospitality of the house to you in her father's absence. However, you can avail yourselves of one of the barns."

Geordie bridles at the thought of being shunted to the barns like a common peddler, but the night is late, as Jarmuth has said. Still, his pride is stung by the guard's superior attitude. Should he endure the implied insult and take the proffered lodging, or reject it and look elsewhere for a dry spot to sleep?

If Geordie decides to accept the offer, turn to section 64.

If he decides to look elsewhere for lodging, turn to section 53.

* **59** *

His brain working nimbly, Geordie gathers up the loose barrel staves and the hemp ends. Laboriously he splices together the rope ends into two long pieces, each of which he knots at one end. Then he bores two holes in each barrel stave, one at each end, with his stabbing sword.

He loops each rope through an end hole so that the bottom stave rests on the two knots at the end of the ropes. Next he leaves two feet of slack, ties a knot larger than the size of the hole, slips another board on, leaves two feet of slack, ties another set of two knots, and repeats the process for several staves, making a crude ladder with barrel stave steps and rope sides.

Standing on the iron ring, Geordie slings his rope and wood ladder toward the spike to which the bottom of the castle's ladder is tied. After several attempts he is able to hook the top stave on the spike. The barrel stave ladder

hangs lopsided, but securely enough that Geordie is able to climb up it without too much difficulty.

He is pleased with his ingenuity and would have spent more time congratulating himself but just then he notices a man in a small open boat rowing into the very cove beneath him where the stairs start!

Fortunately for Geordie, the man has his back to the beach as he rows in. Geordie just has enough time to scurry back down his improvised ladder and hide behind a fallen boulder at the shore's edge before the man beaches his boat and flings the oars down into it. With difficulty the man tugs the boat up the beach to a point where the incoming tide won't reach it.

Then from the bottom of the boat he takes out a ladder—of course, that was the answer, he brings his own ladder with him! Then Geordie realizes with a start that his own makeshift ladder will give away the fact that someone has been there. But it is too late, the man, a monk in a plain brown robe, with a sword strapped to his outer garment in a leather scabbard, has discovered the evidence. He looks around suspiciously and stares hard up at the stairs, but seeing nothing, he props his own ladder up and climbs to the small platform where the stone steps end.

Section 59

Once there, he hauls both his own and Geordie's ladder up with him. He ties off his own ladder to the castle ladder, bundles Geordie's handiwork into a roll and carries it with him as he climbs. In a few minutes he is out of sight from Geordie's vantage point.

Now Geordie has no means to climb the stairs. He thinks of mischievously stealing the monk's boat, or setting it out to sea adrift, but there is no purpose to it. He makes up his mind to wait until the monk returns.

At the end of an hour, Geordie isn't sure he's made the right decision. His legs are cramped from crouching behind the boulder, and no one has come or gone. He clings to his original decision, though, and near the end of the second hour his patience is rewarded.

The monk struggles down the steps under a heavy burden, a small but obviously weighty chest of dark wood, banded with copper and locked with a huge padlock that is clearly visible even from Geordie's far-off viewpoint.

The man retrieves his ladder and slides it down the rock until it touches sand, then backs down with the chest on his shoulder. He walks the chest to the boat, then returns for the ladder, looking around cautiously again for the intruder. Seeing no one, he grunts to himself and drags the boat to the edge of the water.

Then he climbs in, lifting the skirt of his

Section 59

robe to avoid wetting it in the surf. He launches himself, pulling hard at the oars to careen over the incoming breakers, then quickly rows out of sight around a corner of the cove.

Geordie walks quickly up the beach to the spot where he'd descended. The rope is gone! He looks up at the clifftop, but can see nothing.

He could call to Jarmuth, but suppose it was not him that hauled up the line? Scanning the cliff, Geordie thinks he sees a way he could climb hand over hand, at least as far as the overhanging lip beneath the top. From there the going is doubtful, but there may be a break off to the left a little. The ascent would be risky, but so would shouting to attract attention, if it is foe and not friend above.

If Geordie shouts to Jarmuth on the cliff top, turn to section 54.

If he climbs the cliff, turn to section 79.

* 60 *

After their arduous trek through the highlands of Kheldour, they reach the northern coastal plain, a wild place of heather and peat moss, marshes and windswept twisted gorse. They near the landed estates of Lord Thornton. The plain seems to rise up again near the coast, and in the distance they can see the jutting needles of rock that line the shore, rising even higher than the plain, left by giants some said, now inhabited only by the fanatical monks of the Gryphon.

It is a grey, eerie, desolate country, always cloudy or misty, the sun a stranger on this extremity of the known world.

Under this dismal sky they ride farther north, occasionally passing rude cottages along the heath, but more often traveling over vast undeveloped tracts of harsh landscape.

Finally they glimpse the stone walls of a great mansion, rising out of the bleak terrain, a chimney in every corner and two larger

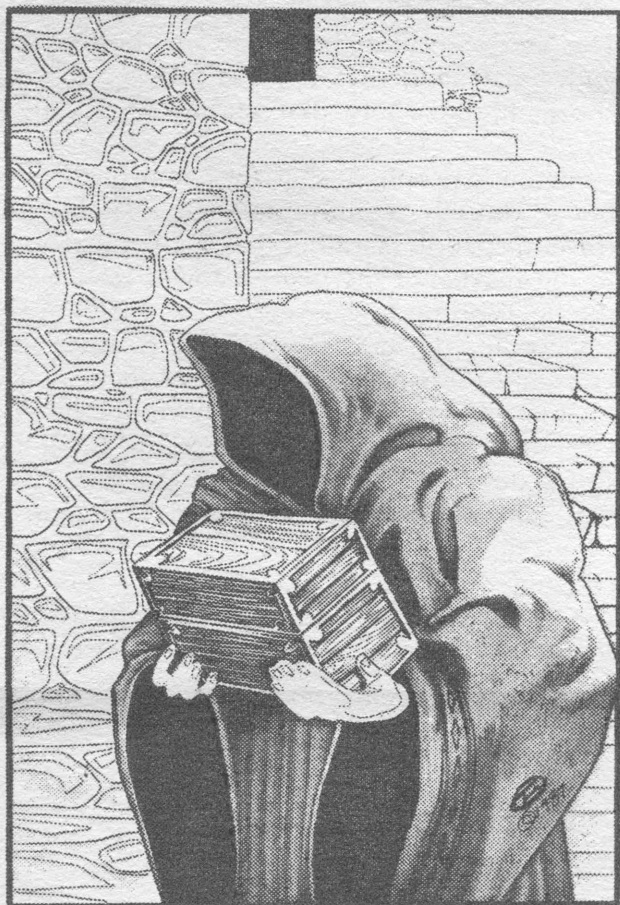
ones amidships, all blazing away as if to try to ward off the forlorn chill of the surroundings. The lands around the estate are cultivated with barley and wheat, but it grows only on short stiff stalks here, that scarcely wave in the wind.

Jarmuth proposes that they approach the house directly, continuing their disguise as traveling peddlers, rather than setting up shop in the market at the nearest town. He leaves the decision up to Geordie.

Geordie considers his options. In town he can gain information from other local merchants and learn the latest news about the Gryphon. At the estate he can "beard the lion in his den," as the common saying goes. He can make himself sure of Lord Thornton's intent firsthand.

If Geordie decides they should ride to town, turn to section 66.

If instead he decides to visit Lord Thornton, turn to section 58.



* **61** *

There seems to be no point in waiting around for Jarmuth and Beck. This may be the only opportunity to investigate the rear fortifications of Thornton Hall. Geordie jumps up, approaches the cliff face again, and impulsively scurries back down the rope, wrapping his legs around it and braking with his feet.

Soon he is standing on the shore of the ruffled sea. A sand beach extends south to a point under the buttressed foundation of the castle high above.

Turn to section 51.

* **62** *

His courage failing him, Geordie ventures out across the gap between him and the narrow gully. If only he can reach this rift, he can scurry up it to safety. But his heart is pounding furiously, and he makes the mistake of looking down to see what is beneath him—the dizzying height sets his legs shaking again in uncontrollable palpitations. If he can't get hold of himself, he'll knock himself off the narrow ledge where he stands.

With a deep breath Geordie calms himself and continues, but the possibilities for handholds and footholds grow fewer and fewer. He has managed to traverse half the distance between him and the opening when a knobby stone gives out and he loses his grip and falls.

A projecting ledge breaks and softens his fall, but he still lands heavily and lies motionless.

Some hours later Jarmuth Rhydon lowers himself down to Geordie. The mistake in judgment nearly cost him his life. As it is, the mission to the north is ended by a broken shoulder and numerous other bruises and scrapes. Jarmuth rigs a sling and is able to haul Geordie up for the dismal and bitter journey back to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* **63** *

Geordie can see nothing promising in the litter at the base of the steps. He scratches his head but is unable to make anything of the jumble of assorted materials at his feet. He is still looking for a way up when he hears the scraping of a boat bow on sand. Startled, Geordie turns to see the oarsman, a brown-garbed priest, rushing him with blade high. Backed against the cliff face with no means of escape, Geordie barely has time to draw

Section 63

his sword before the priest is on him.

Geordie fights valiantly, but the determined priest never relents his advantage of surprise, keeping Geordie pinned with clever thrusts until he catches Geordie with a vicious swipe beneath the left shoulder, over the heart. Bleeding heavily, Geordie swoons and falls.

Hours later Jarmuth climbs down the rope and finds Geordie, who has been left for dead by the priest in the boat. With Beck's aid he is able to haul the fallen Deryni lord up the cliff to his horse for the long discouraging journey back to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* **64** *

Though he is angered by being offered lodging only in the barn, Geordie knows that this is the lot of most traveling tradesmen. To maintain his deception as a merchant, he must go along. In the absence of Lord Thornton they may learn more from his daughter.

"Thank you," he tells the guard, "we accept your offer gratefully."

Lord Thornton's man leads the trio off to their humble quarters.

Turn to section 55.

* **65** *

Geordie rushes forward but one of Neela's slashing hooves catches him on the side of the head. He blacks out. Jarmuth drops his horse's reins and runs at Neela, seizing her bridle and jerking her head around. Terrified and unseeing, Neela flies into the barn and Jarmuth quickly slams the barn door behind her. The other two horses wait patiently for their masters.

Beck, unhurt, kneels over the fall Geordie. He has received a blow to the temple, a weak spot in the brain's armor. The Deryni Healer Jarmuth eases Beck away from Geordie's prone form and ministers to him, but his injuries are severe and a period of convalescence will be necessary. By the time Geordie is well it is too late to go on with his mission and he returns to Cor Culdi.

Turn to section 29.

* 66 *

The town seems most promising to Geordie. He doesn't want to show himself to the enemy too soon, if indeed Lord Thornton is on the side of his enemy. So, overruling Jarmuth and exerting his own leadership, Geordie directs them to ride to the local town of Stavenham, a few miles north. Still farther north by a few miles is the pillar of rock crowned by the spire of the Gryphon's monastery, St. Stefan's, with the village of Stavenham between them.

Stavenham is not a large port city like Carbury. The coast is too rocky and the sea too rough for a good port. There is a small harbor used by the local fishermen, but to sail in or out one has to shoot a narrow channel between two of the many needles of rock that line this section of the coast. Stavenham clings to the edge of the cliff like a hardy bush, oblivious to the continuous buffeting of the wind coming off the water from the frozen wastes to the north.

Section 66

They inquire after lodging at a local tavern filled with hardy-looking seafarers, some wearing pelts of shiny oily-skinned fur that would keep water off in wet weather. No one seems inclined to offer them any rooms.

"Strangers aren't welcome here," the tavernkeep tells Geordie bluntly. Geordie's temper flares, but then he remembers his pledge to himself.

"Perhaps there is a stable where we can bed down with our horses?" he asks, holding back his desire to make a sharper reply.

"Old Skenfor might take you. Then again he might set his dogs on you. Half a mile up the road toward St. Stefan's." The tavernkeep turns his back on Geordie. Clearly this is all the help he can expect from this place.

With a shrug toward Jarmuth, who has watched the dialogue with interest, Geordie nods toward the door, and they rejoin Beck who has waited outside with the horses.

It has begun to rain, a freezing rain that could change to sleet or snow if it turns much colder.

"Well, what do you say?" Jarmuth asks Geordie. "Shall we go to the lord's house now, or do you want to try for this old man Skenfor's barn?"

If Geordie agrees to go to Lord Thornton's, turn to section 58.

If Geordie wants to ride to Skenfor's barn, turn to section 83.

If Geordie has another plan, turn to section 69.

* **67** *

As hard as he tries, Geordie, burdened with heavy merchant's clothes, can't muster the strength to pull himself up the rope. His shoulder, weakened from an earlier injury, refuses to cooperate, and he finds himself slipping down, his hands burning on the rough hemp.

To save his hands from further injury and to prevent a sudden fall, Geordie wraps his legs around the rope and eases himself down in stages, using his feet as a brake.

In a few moments he is soaking his hands on the shore of the ruffled sea. A sand beach extends south to a point under the buttressed foundation of the castle high above.

Deduct 1 hit point for damage.

Turn to section 51.

* **68** *

Geordie rolls forward under the frightened horse, grabs Beck, and keeps rolling until he is clear of Neela's slashing legs. Meanwhile Jarmuth drops the reins of his horse and tries to catch the loose leather of Neela's bridle. The other two horses trot nonchalantly into the barn, waiting for their masters. Finally Jarmuth is able to calm the excited animal and walk her into the barn. Beck and Geordie wipe the mud from their clothes and follow.

"You are a lucky boy," Geordie says.

"No," Beck answers, his eyes shining with devotion, "I have a quick and daring master!"

"Tomorrow we meet Lord Thornton," Jarmuth states matter-of-factly. They are nearing their first confrontation with the forces of the Gryphon.

Turn to section 55.

* **69** *

"I have another idea on it," Geordie declares. "Let's ride out to St. Stefan's immediately. I want to see the fox's den."

"A good idea," Jarmuth agrees. "We have the element of surprise that way, at least for our first look."

They skirt the mansion and ride through Stavenham without stopping, their polestar a light at the top of the spire of St. Stefan's. As they approach it begins to rain, a bitter freezing rain. Soon it is raining so hard they can hardly see each other as they ride. Geordie motions for them to dismount and walk. There is the danger of riding off the sea cliff if the trail changes suddenly.

Far beneath them they can hear the crashing of breakers on the rocky shore, and the salty taste of spray is in the air even here on top of the cliff. They walk single file along a path that seems to run boastfully, needlessly, close to the dropoff.

Section 69

Across the chasm they see the lights of St. Stefan's, but it is impossible to tell through the fog and rain just how one gets to the monastery. Camber had mentioned rope-and-pulley baskets, but Geordie sees none. The sea between the small beach and the island of sheer rock is a roiling cauldron of incoming breakers, outrushing undertow, and crashing spray where waves hit huge scattered boulders broken away from the cliff face.

"There's no place to encamp here, Geordie," Jarmuth counsels. "What say we double back and search out this Skenfor's barn? Tomorrow we'll make our first approach to Lord Thornton."

"Very well," Geordie agrees. With a last look at the desolate monastery on its high lonely outpost, Geordie turns Noirel around and they head for shelter for the night.

Turn to section 83.

*** 70 ***

There may be danger above, Geordie speculates. If Jarmuth and Beck are in trouble, there is little he can do to help them from his position dangling at the end of a rope. He would do better to continue his climb down, which would be easier than trying to haul himself out without help from above.

He wraps his legs around the line and eases himself down in stages, using his feet as a brake. In a few moments he is standing on the shore of the ruffled sea. A sand beach extends south to a point under the buttressed foundation of the castle high above.

Turn to section 51.

* 71 *

His fingers stiffening and his resolve weakening, Geordie determines that his only hope is to try the lateral move across the cliff face to the narrow fissure in the rock. Just as he starts he almost slips, and he curses the slippery bottoms of the soft leather merchant's shoes he wears, wishing he had on his own heavy but sturdy riding boots.

Forcing himself not to look down, Geordie stretches himself to his limits and finds a crack in the rock where he can wedge his fist. Using this method strains the tendons in his wrist, but enables him to swing his body across the first three feet of the gap. His right foot probes out along the face, fumbling for a foothold. The tiniest protrusion of rock is all he needs—there, a small knob, just enough to sustain him. He shifts his weight onto his right foot and moves two more feet toward the breach.

Now, up a foot and onto a strong dead root—no, it won't hold—back down and pant-

ing from the effort, Geordie sways dangerously, his whole weight resting on the flimsiest of support. Another try—up two feet, jamming his fingers into another minuscule rift in the rock. Now he is only two feet from the opening.

But there are no more places for his hands or feet. Between him and the gully which he could scramble up to safety are two feet of smooth rock. He will have to make one final leap for it. Gathering himself up, he heaves his weight toward the gap and flails his arms upward, hoping to find a supporting rock or root. His momentum carries him into the gap but he bounces dangerously off the near wall and only by luck does he find himself shimmed into the space, his elbows pressing against the side walls of the gully. He has made it!

Just as he hauls himself up the last few feet to the edge, Jarmuth and Beck come galloping in from a reconnoitering foray.

Turn to section 81.

* **72** *

Geordie prepares to try to lift the bale, wondering if there is something hidden inside it, lead bars or gold ingots perhaps. But the instant he touches the hay he realizes in a flash why it is so heavy: The priest is exerting some mental pressure on it! What is this? Deryni magic in the human north of Kheldour? To combat this he will need mental strength of his own, not physical strength, because he knows now that the peculiarly heavy hay is ordinary, unremarkable straw and nothing more.

He ought to be able to penetrate the man's aura, Geordie thinks. After all, he is a Deryni lord, and this priest, whoever he was, is merely a clever mimic. Geordie begins to exert his own mind pressure, and sure enough, the other man's force upon the bale of hay wavers, then crumbles. In a minute Geordie is able to lift the bale easily and deposit it at the feet of the hermit.

"A very impressive demonstration, strang-

er. But beware, you will need all your magic skills to confront the Gryphon. Go now. Leave this old priest to his prayers." The man withdraws farther into the shadows, and Geordie never does see his face. With careful steps he proceeds toward the glowing windows of St. Stefan's main hall.

Turn to section 73.

* **73** *

When he reaches the narrow slit windows of the main hall, Geordie stands cautiously to one side, then peers in. At the near end of the hall, close to the very window from where Geordie watches, two men stand in conference, their heads bent toward each other conspiratorially. A single candle flickers on a bare table behind them, and on the floor next to the table is a locked chest of dark wood with copper fittings.

One of the men is almost certainly Lord Thornton. His hair and beard, reddish-brown mixed with grey, shines in the wavering, flick-

Section 73

ering glow of the candlelight, and his chain mail gleams, revealing fancy tooling in fine detail of stags running in the hunt and hounds at bay.

The other might have been any of dozens of monks, until Geordie hears him speak.

"I will not have it, Thornton!" are the first words Geordie hears the Gryphon utter, but there can be no mistaking the cruel dominating quality of the voice, the sheer charismatic presence conveyed even while his face remains hooded from Geordie's sight behind a cowl.

"Dear Brother, understand," Geordie hears Thornton answer, a mixture of fear and wheedling greed tinging his voice, "I've a great deal invested in you now. This is no time to question the foundation of our relationship. It is mutual self-interest, and we both know it. This," he says, gesturing to the chest, "is the last payment I can make. All preparations are in order. There is no longer any reason for you to delay. I must see some return on my investment, so to speak."

"What of these rumors of a Deryni spy in our midst?" the Gryphon presses Thornton. The voice of the Gryphon bespeaks of the fascinating mixture of power and insecurity that motivates many great men, Geordie has time to muse. The intense driven quality in

the rabid priest's voice is almost visible to Geordie.

"Calm yourself, Brother Gryphon. My emissaries will find him and take care of him. Even now they are out pursuing him, and have already captured his two companions."

Jarmuth and Beck in the hands of Thornton's men! Geordie has to do something, and quickly. He listens for more information, but the two begin to stroll away from the window toward the other end of the hall, where another pile of armaments is being tallied by two cleric monks.

Geordie considers his options. To go looking for Jarmuth and Beck now is out of the question. They are undoubtedly locked up in the keep at Thornton Hall, miles away across the moor. No, he must act here and now, without benefit of the wisdom and courage of his companions. But what to do? Alone, he feels he will be a match for the Gryphon, no matter what the hidden strengths of his adversary might be. But to attack him now, with the powerful Lord Thornton at his side and vigilant monks all around, would be foolish and futile. He must lure the Gryphon to a solitary confrontation. But where to meet him, and how to entice him there?

Jarmuth's words come spinning back to him out of memory. It is pride that will bring

Section 73

down the lofty flying Gryphon. If Geordie appeals to the leader's self-serving vanity, he might be able to coax him to a fight.

There are two possibilities for catching the Gryphon alone. Either Geordie can follow the Gryphon wherever he goes, hoping to find an opportune moment to challenge him, or he can provoke the meeting by slipping a note to the Gryphon by some means. Both options are fraught with dangers. On receiving the note the Gryphon will know that there is an enemy near him. But shadowing the Gryphon means risking discovery at any moment by the guards who accompany him everywhere, and even now stand a short distance off as the Gryphon paces with Lord Thornton in the unsteady candlelight of the main hall.

If Geordie decides to leave a note, turn to section 93.

If he decides to follow the Gryphon, turn to section 91.

* **74** *

By sheer grit Geordie holds on through storm and wind, rain and dripping rock. At last all the monks pass into the chapel and the door is left open. Geordie hauls himself up onto the parapet, jumps down, and quietly makes his way to the rope to wait for the Gryphon.

Turn to section 94.

* **75** *

Geordie turns to lead the way back to the rope, expecting the Gryphon to follow. Instead the Gryphon makes a rush behind his

Section 75

back for the barred door and his trapped legions. When Geordie defends, the Gryphon closes with him. Their swords ring out as they clash. From within the chapel come shouts of encouragement and rage.

"Wait!" Geordie yells. "Are you not a man of honor? Let us talk awhile before we fight." They stand facing each other, Geordie with his back to the door. Again Geordie remarks on the Gryphon's remarkable visage, so lordly, almost a pale mirror of his own race—suddenly the idea jumps into his head—could the Gryphon be a Deryni?

"I am curious, Gryphon, what is your parentage?"

"I am an orphan. My mother was a witch!" In the priest's voice Geordie hears something more than mere ambition, the echoes of madness. If he is a Deryni and doesn't know it, Geordie thinks, the powerful natural Deryni tendencies toward hearing other men's thoughts, and other mental magic, might have driven the man mad. But how to find out? Perhaps this is why Lady Carrega gave him the merasha. But he can never dupe the Gryphon into drinking it—that would be unmanly and dishonorable.

"What do you mean, a witch?" Geordie asks, playing for time while he determines his next move. He knows he must get the Gryphon onto the rope if he is to do battle. On this

pinnacle the Gryphon knows every step and turn of every hallway.

"She was burned as a heretic, because she gave birth to me, a human with the powers of magic. For my talents, she died."

"Do you know what this is?" Geordie asks his adversary, holding up the clear liquid vial of merasha. "This potion affects only those of Deryni lineage. If I were to give you a small dose, it would prove or disprove that you yourself are a Deryni orphan. Perhaps that would explain and mitigate your acts in the eyes of the authorities."

"What? Let you drug me? To prove that I am Deryni? I hate the Deryni! Before I finish, you will drink from that vial."

Suddenly from behind the two men comes a tremendous muffled crash, then another. The Gryphon gives a bemused smile. "Apparently the brothers are using a pew for a battering ram," he says, enjoying the moment. "They are very devoted to me, you know. Some would say they're fanatics. Their methods of torture are also exquisite."

Geordie knows he must do something, and quickly. The bar's fittings groan as the ram thuds dully into the other side of the chapel door. A cheer goes up as the point of the pew shreds the heavy beams on the door and protrudes through. In a minute they will break through and be on him.

Section 76

Roll 1 D6.

If the value is less than Geordie's remaining hit points, he uses his Deryni powers now. Turn to section 87.

If the value is equal, Geordie makes a break for the rope, hoping the Gryphon will follow. Turn to section 78.

If the value is greater, the monks breach the chapel door before he can do anything. Turn to section 96.

* 76 *

The entire population of the monastery gathers in the chapel on the pinnacle's peak, except perhaps for those solitary hermits in the caves on the walkway. Geordie can hear their prayers and chants, and then he listens to a harangue from the Gryphon, villifying the Deryni race and the populace of Gwynedd, human and Deryni alike.

As the service ends, a processional is sung

as the Gryphon leads the monks out of the chapel, walking ten feet or so in front of the mass of monks. Geordie sees his chance. He seizes the bar that stands next to the opening and hides behind the door. As soon as the Gryphon passes, Geordie slams the door shut and slips the bar over it into place. There is no other exit to the chapel—the rest of the monks are trapped, and Geordie stands between the Gryphon and the barred door.

A great commotion arises from within, but there is no escape. The windows are narrow slits that a man cannot pass through.

The Gryphon throws back his cowl and faces Geordie, drawing his sword. Geordie does likewise, but then he shouts: "Wait—not here, Gryphon. On the rope is where you shall dance your dance of death."

"Why should I go with you?" the Gryphon snarls, advancing on Geordie. Geordie holds up his sword, and the Gryphon hesitates.

"Do you want to die in front of your followers?" Geordie taunts him. "Come to my rope, and I'll make you pay, for you have forgotten one of the basic precepts: '*Nihil est magnus nisi bonum*' 'Nothing is great except the good.' For this you must be punished."

"I repudiate your precepts," the Gryphon boasts. "For mine is the new law. But I will fight you anywhere—lead on."

Section 77

Roll 1 D6.

If you roll four or less, then the Gryphon follows Geordie to the rope. Turn to section 100.

If you roll five or more, then the Gryphon suddenly turns and fights. Turn to section 75.

* 77 *

Geordie fumbles for words but doesn't really know what to say. He stumbles around the tale, trying to explain why he has come north, but his words are confused and he is like a man who has lost his way, hesitant and uncertain.

"Enough!" the hidden monk declares. "This is the third time you have failed. You are obviously immature and unworthy. Guards! Guards! Sound the alarm! There is an intruder in our midst!"

The priest's shouts instantly draw a crowd of armed men, rushing at Geordie from both ends of the catwalk. Judging that escape is his only hope, he vaults over the thin railing and

Section 77

begins to climb down the cliff to the shore, hoping to swim across the narrow strait and somehow get up the other side.

Lances hurled from above clatter against the rock. Another man calls for the boiling soup pot from the kitchen, and rocks are thrown and tumbled at him. A large boulder catches him on the neck and sends him crashing into the sea.

Jarmuth finds him the next morning, washed up on the lee shore with the incoming tide. His neck is bruised but not broken. With help from his companions, he can make it back to Cor Culdi, but his attempt to stop the Gryphon is a failure.

Turn to section 29.

* **78** *

Geordie knows that now is the time to use his Deryni training, the long hours of meditative practice of concentration that developed his capacity to use his will to bend others to him, when necessary. He seeks out the other man's mind, and finds it a wall of blocking shields. He probes, but the other mind is aware of the intrusion and throws up more mental barriers, ducking and disguising. Geordie steps up his efforts, searching for contact, and then he stumbles back, surprised by the whipping winds of anger flowing over him from the Gryphon, but he pushes further and seizes hold: "To the rope, knave—then we'll fight fair!"

As Geordie wills him, the Gryphon marches toward the outstretched rope shimmering across the gulf to the other shore. But the Gryphon is strong, Geordie cannot keep him in his mental grasp forever. They are nearly to the rope when behind him Geordie hears the

surging roar of the monks bursting out of their confinement. Geordie runs ahead to wait for the Gryphon at the rope.

Turn to section 100.

*** 79 ***

Geordie is worried and impatient over the disappearance of the rope. Perhaps his friends are in trouble on the clifftop. The rock face, though steep, seems climbable. He decides to risk it.

The first few yards are easy. He scrambles right up until the angle of the slope increases sharply. Soon he is clinging to the steep face on all fours, inching himself up from handhold to foothold. A slip now can cost him his life. Loose rock trickles down behind him, clattering against the cliffside, then plummeting to the sand below.

Up and up he edges, the danger increasing with every foot he gains off the beach. Once a noisy tern swoops at his head when he ven-

Section 79

tures too near its nest in search of a secure grip. And once he nearly falls when a rock gives way just as he puts his full weight on it.

By dint of a great effort he manages to haul himself to within ten feet of the top, but the cliff juts out sharply, more sharply than he envisioned from the beach. To climb over it he would have to suspend himself almost upside down—no—it's impossible! To the right is a break in the uniformity of the rim, a cleft where water has eroded a small passage, wide enough for a man to wedge himself into and boost himself up, but ten feet still separate him from his path.

He scours the intervening few feet for handholds and sees none. But he can't cling to the cliff forever—already his hands, bruised from his previous passage on the rope, are beginning to ache from the strain of holding on, and his knees begin to quiver on their own.

If Geordie tries to climb the overhang, turn to section 52.

If instead he tries to make it across the gap to the right, roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Dexterity, turn to section 71.

If greater, turn to section 62.

* 80 *

Geordie makes several more tosses, but each one falls shorter and shorter. The rope is beginning to grow heavy in his hands, as it hits the churning water below with each miss and becomes soaked in brine. The darkness is also starting to obscure his far-off target.

He is about to give up when Jarmuth approaches him.

"Perhaps our combined efforts might succeed," he suggests.

Geordie, panting with exertion, responds sharply: "How can two of us throw the rope," he asks.

"You miss my meaning, Deryni lord. I meant our combined strength of magic and mental power." Yes! That is it! Together they may be able to endow the rope with enough magic.

To prepare they link hands and bring their heads close together. Beck backs off, unsure of what is to transpire next. The rope, like a

Section 80

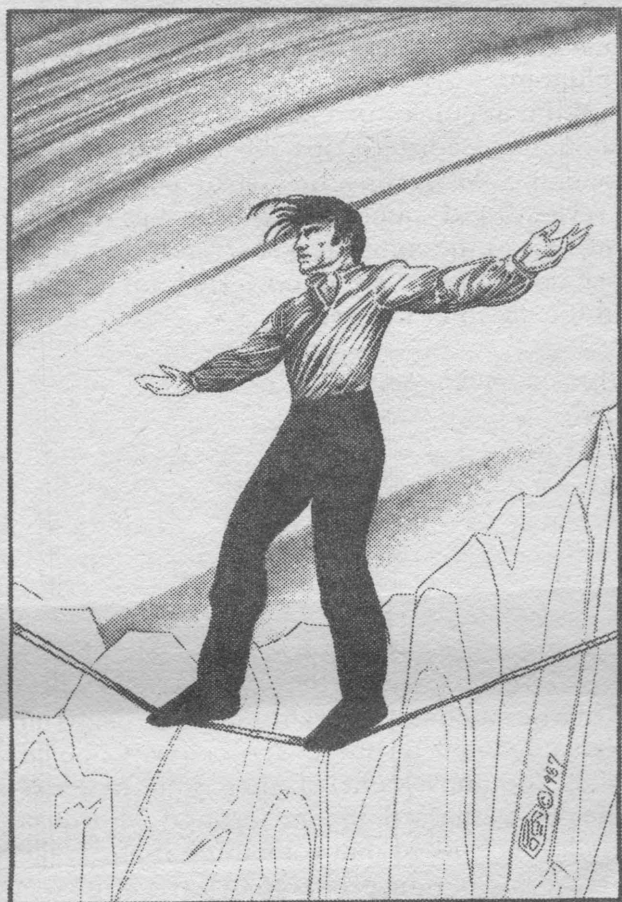
snake, begins to dance of itself in Geordie's stationary hand. As the two Deryni, one a Healer and the other a cousin of the most powerful Deryni lord of them all, maintain a mental bond, their strength multiplies like two lions or two eagles hunting, until the sum is greater than the parts.

Their combined energy arcs out into the inert rope and imparts mysterious energy into it. In a slight trance Geordie moves forward to the edge of the cliff, Jarmuth now touching his left shoulder lightly. With his right arm Geordie brings the rope over his head and lets loose a mighty throw. The rope skims the air and curls out over the abyss, slipping neatly over a conical rock on the promontory of St. Stefan's. Geordie snaps down hard on the line and the looped end draws taut around the rock.

"Wonderful!" Jarmuth shouts over the rising wind, and Beck claps his hands, for he knows the best part is coming.

"Now stand guard here and watch," Geordie tells his companions, after tying off the other end of the rope as tautly as he can to a large rock on the moor side.

The soft-soled merchant shoes help him now, as he ventures out onto the rope, gingerly at first, then with increasing boldness. The blustery wind tries its best to knock him off



Section 81

the swaying rope, but Geordie bends and balances and hops his way to the center of the bowing line, which dips a full six feet at its midpoint.

With a quick turn and a wave over his shoulder, Geordie skips the rest of the way over the flimsy line he's strung across the crevasse and vanishes into the passageway leading to the monastery. Jarmuth and Beck can do no more for him now. He is on his own in the camp of the enemy.

Turn to section 84.

* 81 *

After he catches his breath, Geordie recaps all that he's seen on the beach below. Coupled with the movement of men and materiel they've witnessed in and around Thornton Hall, it is evident that something is afoot.

"We had best be prepared to move quickly," Geordie decrees. "It would appear that the Gryphon is much further along in his

plans than anyone might have suspected. The revolt could break out at any time."

"Then you know what you must do," Jarmuth tests Geordie, and Geordie comes back immediately with an answer that pleases him.

"Yes! We must strike at the head, and quickly. This very night I will attempt to enter the monastery in the guise of one of their own priests. If I can slay the Gryphon in his chambers, so much the better. If he enters the field of battle, I will confront him there, but then we will have his legions to contend with. Without him, there is no revolt."

"Lord Camber chose wisely when he chose you, intrepid Geordie," Jarmuth praises him, and Geordie feels ready in his heart to stand against the magic of the Gryphon and the power of his rogue priest army.

The trio are just about to mount up for the ride to the monastery when a lone rider appears on the horizon, from the direction of Thornton Hall. Even from a distance and partially veiled by a riding hood, the sun-red hair of Lady Carrega Thornton shines in the late afternoon after-rain glow of the Kheldour north.

She reins in her horse when she is forty yards hence and slows to a walk. When she approaches, Geordie walks out to meet her.

Section 81

"Here," she say peremptorily, flinging a small leather pouch at Geordie. "Take this! You'll need it!" She is about to turn back toward Carrega Hall when Geordie bursts forward and grabs the halter of her dappled bay.

"What is it?" Geordie implores her.

"It is the stuff that makes you weak, Oh Deryni lord!" she laughs, and her green eyes laugh too.

"Merasha!" It must be. This is the only substance Geordie knows of that would have the effect Lady Thornton describes. But why give it to him? It is a weapon for his enemies to use on him, not the other way around. Geordie opens the bag with one hand, keeping the other firmly on the reins of Lady Carrega's horse. Inside the sack is a glass vial of clear liquid. It is indeed the dreaded merasha.

Carrega tugs impatiently on the reins Geordie holds, but Geordie lingers a moment longer. "Many thanks to the lady. Why do you do me such an honor?" Again the green eyes flash with bemused light.

"Perhaps I only wish to see peace restored to these lands, and my father restored to his senses, for the Gryphon has him in his sway, and he no longer listens to the plain reason of his daughter."

"A worthy motive, to be sure," Geordie continues in his courtliest manner, "but how

does this potion aid that cause?"

"Ah. That is for you to find out. A woman can't give away all her secrets, now, can she?" With that she gives the horse's head a furious tug, wrenching the reins from Geordie's hold. With a toss of her head she stings the bay into a gallop for Thornton Hall.

"What was all that about," Jarmuth asks when Geordie returns to his little group.

"Aid from an unexpected source, my friend," Geordie replies. He shows Jarmuth the vial within the sack, then ties the bag securely to his belt.

"Curious," Jarmuth agrees. "Keep it with you. Perhaps there are ways to use the drug itself as an antidote, though I've never heard of it."

"No, that can't be it. It's something else." Geordie wears a puzzled look on his face, as if he knows the answer but has momentarily forgotten it. "Ah, well, it'll come to me. Let's ride!"

They pass again through the quiet town of Stavenham and back out onto the reaches of the moor. The monastery looms in the twilight.

"Have you an idea for how to get over there?" Jarmuth asks him. "I see none of the rope-and-pulley baskets that were talked of."

"I do," said Geordie. "It's something I saw in the town fair at Twilham. Have you ever

Section 81

seen the motley-man or clown walk a slack hemp line between two trees?"

"I have!" Beck pipes up.

"I fancy I could do the same across the gap between the moor and the monastery pinnacle, with the help of a little Deryni magic!"

"You mean it?" Beck shouts with excitement, for this will be a show to see, his lord and master dancing on the rope.

"I mean to try," Geordie says with resolve glinting in his voice like quartz crystals in granite.

"How do you secure the rope on the other side," Jarmuth wants to know. Before Geordie can explain his method, the sharp-eyed Beck calls out a low warning, and the three of them trot into the shadows of a low swale while ten or so horsemen in the plain brown of the order of St. Stefan's ride by. From their hidden vantage point, Geordie, Jarmuth, and Beck are able to watch as they lower rope ladders and carry crates down them.

Though they cannot see precisely what happens next, it becomes clear that there are rowboats stored on the shore below, for soon baskets appear on the other cliff face, attached to heretofore unseen ropes, and the same lowered crates can be seen being hoisted by groups of brown-robed monks on the opposite needle of rock.

"So that's how they do it," Geordie says

admiringly. To attach the baskets each time is extra work, but also provides extra security. And reaching the shore by ladder and dory also makes the effort of supplying (or attacking) St. Stefan's arduous indeed.

It begins to rain again, and it is nearly dark. Apparently satisfied that their work is done, the remainder of the horsebacked troop draw up the ladders and take off for town, leading four riderless horses with them.

The trio creeps to the cliff face. Sure enough, two dories bob at anchor at the base of the offshore rock. The baskets have reached the top and have been withdrawn into the hewn rock interior of St. Stefan's. No one can be seen as the intensifying rain has driven all indoors.

"I'm going to try my trick now," Geordie declares. First he loops one end of a long coil of rope over Noirel's broad neck, fastening it so that it doesn't choke the horse but is tight and taut. Then he forms a loop at the other end that slides closed on itself when tightened. Beck sees the object of the game right away.

"If you can catch one of those peaks over there, you can make the clown's rope," Beck says, proud to have figured it out for himself.

"Correct, Beck, but it's a risky throw and a long one. Perhaps now a little magic might do the trick." Geordie steps off to one side and summons up his inner strength. He holds the

Section 82

rope before him and meditates on it, trying to visualize the coil leaping toward a single rock he's picked as his target. When he makes his first throw, it seems to both Beck and Jarmuth that the rope has a mind of its own and points itself toward the rock, but it falls just short and has to be hauled laboriously up the near cliff side by the three of them. Geordie prepares for a second toss, knowing that each throw saps his strength.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Wisdom/Luck, turn to section 88.

If greater, turn to section 80.

* 82 *

The Gryphon's cell will be well guarded, Geordie reasons. He would be better off to find a place where the Gryphon is sure to discover the note. At that moment the chapel bells begin to ring. It is time for evening

Vespers. Geordie tears the note from the ledger and quickly retraces his steps across the dark room and out the window. The broken glass will be discovered sooner or later, but Geordie can't concern himself with that now, because footsteps ring out down the passageway, headed toward him.

The chapel is built above the living quarters and main hall on the highest portion of the rock. It is reachable only from this outer walk, up a set of stairs carved into the solid rock.

Geordie runs up the stairs ahead of the first of the monks responding to the call to prayer. He takes a chance and enters the chapel, another dark room illuminated by only two or three candles. He quickly places the note on the altar where only the Gryphon, who Geordie is sure will conduct the service, can see it, then rushes out the same door he came in.

The footsteps he heard before are just about to turn the last corner up the winding rock staircase. Geordie leaps up on a parapet of the chapel wall and edges his way out of sight around its outer edge, clinging above a sheer drop to the ocean below. If he can hang on until everyone enters the chapel, he'll be safe. But the rain chooses that moment to well up and begin to rage, torrents of it striking the exposed bluff of the monastery. The rock,

Section 83

already slippery, becomes more and more difficult to cling to as rivulets of water course down from the chapel roof. Wind and water tear at his grip as the monks file by on their way to prayer, unaware of his struggle.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Constitution, turn to section 74.

If greater, turn to section 86.

* 83 *

Skenfor's place is easy to locate: It is the only one on the road, a rundown, ramshackle structure with one dilapidated barn and a mean dog out front that immediately rushes up to the rickety gate, barking and howling over the rising, shrieking wind until his master appears on the front step of his house.

"What do you want there? Get out or I'll set the other three hounds on you."

"We are travelers. They said at the tavern

you let sojourners stay in your barn," he answered while they entered.

"Who said? All right, I do, for a fee." He names it. Geordie rankles at the excessive price.

"Don't be absurd, old man. All that for a bed of straw under a leaky roof?"

"Who addresses me thus? Are you vile Thornton's men?"

"Travelers, sir. Tired travelers from another country," Jarmuth jumps in, endeavoring to smooth the old farmer's ruffled feelings.

"The price remains the same."

"We'll pay it," Jarmuth replies. Before Geordie can object, Jarmuth speaks quietly to him. "This night's stay shall be my gift to you. 'Tis late, and my bones ache."

"Very well."

Skenfor stands in his nightshirt, holding a peculiar knobby club in his left hand, while they enter through the gate and file past him toward the barn. His dog nips at the hooves of the horses. Jarmuth's horse and Noirel's pay it no mind, but Neela is skittish.

They are almost to the open barn door when the hound comes too close and Neela rears up kicking. Beck is tossed backward by the horse's raised neck, then drops to the ground under the horse's flailing hooves. Without a second thought, Geordie runs to-

Section 84

ward the high-bucking horse, trying to snatch Beck from beneath her murderous kicks.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Dexterity, turn to section 68.

If the value is greater, turn to section 65.

* 84 *

Once safely on the pinnacle of St. Stefan's, Geordie quickly discovers that he has landed his rope at the perfect spot, a craggy spire on the outer edge of the complex. Between him and the main building are a series of five small caves hewn out of the solid rock, where the most devout of the recluses spend almost all of their time, solitary enclosures for the most ascetic of devotees. A rickety catwalk connects the outpost where Geordie has crossed from the monastery's principle residence.

The catwalk is almost more dangerous to

tread on than the narrow rope he's just passed over. It is pinned to the rock face by rope lashings, but still sways and bucks when Geordie steps onto it. The darkened caves give no indication of being inhabited at present. No votive candles burn within them.

Geordie is halfway across the walkway when a muffled voice addresses him from within the center of the five caves lining the way.

"Who goes there, in the name of God?"

Geordie does not dare not answer. "A pilgrim," he says, wondering if that is anything like an appropriate answer. He cannot pass himself off as a brother without the brown robe and trappings of a monk.

"Indeed? A layman? Has the brotherhood starting letting rooms to wayfarers, now?"

"I am in search of the Gryphon," Geordie says, trying to find plausible footing for being on the grounds of St. Stefan's, generally forbidden to those not of the calling. His answer does not please the unseen presence within the recess.

"The Gryphon. Pahhh! Gryphons are like phoenixes—they rise and fall. I have been here since before the Gryphon was born, and will be here long after you or someone else destroys him."

Geordie is startled that the strange recluse has surmised his motive, but there seems no

Section 84

threat that this solitary meditative monk will betray him.

"Do you think the Gryphon is wrong to foment revolution?" Geordie asks, trying not to give himself away.

"I don't think of these things at all," the shadowed figure replies. "I think on the unimagined face of our Lord, and so should the Gryphon, if he is truly one of the Order."

"Who are you?" Geordie asks, because he wants to know who is this possible surprise ally, who disparages the Gryphon even in his lair.

"I will tell you who I am if you can answer my riddle," the hermit enjoins him.

"What is it?" Geordie asks immediately, not afraid to take the challenge of the mysterious monk.

"What would you call the animal made from the leftover parts of a Gryphon?" the voice asks, and chuckles at his own question. "Oh, and if you fail to answer I shall call the monastery guards on you, sacrilegious intruder on the sacred and blessed soil of St. Stefan's."

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Intelligence, turn to section 90.

If greater, turn to section 85.

* **85** *

The unseen priest has Geordie trapped. He has to figure out the meaning of the riddle or risk being exposed by the cries of the hermit monk.

What can the priest mean by "the parts left over"? Geordie racks his brain, but nothing comes. He can't see any meaning in it. At any second he fears the monk will start shouting.

At last he gives up. "Please," he pleads to his captor, for Geordie is powerless to move for fear the man will begin to shout. "I don't understand your riddle. Can't you help me?"

"If I helped you it wouldn't be much of a challenge, now, would it? Very well, since you failed that test, I'll try you with another. How about a test of strength, or would you prefer that I holler for the guards?" he says sharply, for Geordie has taken the moment while the priest is talking to try to slip past his tormentor.

"What is it you want me to do?"

Section 85

"A modest task. You see that bale of hay sitting on the walkway? That is my humble bedding and pillow. Bring it here and I will let you go."

"That's all?" Geordie asks, suspicious of the priest's sudden kindness.

"Do this for me, and I will forget I ever saw you."

"Very well." The bale is a few feet from the mouth of the cave where the voice is issuing. Geordie wonders with a start if there are listeners in the other four recesses, perhaps laughing at his tribulations. The thought angers him, but he concentrates on the task at hand. It seems simple enough, but when Geordie reaches down to lift up the straw he discovers that it is immensely heavy. Even all his youthful strength may not be enough to move it the few feet and lift it into the hermit's cave.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Strength, turn to section 72.

If greater, turn to section 92.

* **86** *

Geordie holds on as long as he can, but it is no use, his grip gives way and he tumbles down to the first ledge beneath the chapel where the walkway connects all the buildings. Fortunately for him, the monks are all in the chapel. He bruises a thigh in landing, but Geordie is able to climb back up onto the main walkway and make his way quietly back to the rope to wait for the Gryphon.

Subtract one hit point for damage.

Turn to section 94.

* **87** *

The pounding of the ram distracts Geordie. Not knowing what to do, he runs for the rope and safety. The Gryphon, instead of following, dashes to the door and frees his disciples. The whole crowd of them, with the Gryphon at their head, charges after Geordie, who barely beats them to the rope.

Instead of jumping up on it immediately, Geordie decides to try one more trick on the Gryphon. He poses nonchalantly before the rope. When the shouting mob reaches the tiny clearing they come up short, surprised to find their quarry not fleeing. The Gryphon holds up his hand to quiet them.

"Have you something to say before we kill you, arrogant Deryni?"

"I have." Geordie continues to play the casual role of one perfectly at ease. "It is simply this: If you are truly the Gryphon, you would fight me alone, and not depend on your henchmen." He is pricking at the weak point

in the Gryphon's armor, but is it too late to dissuade him, now that his followers are massed behind him, ready to strike?

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Charisma, turn to section 97.

If greater, turn to section 98.

* 88 *

The whole success or failure of his mission depends on his ability to send a rope spinning through the darkness, across this unassailable chasm above the raucous surf. Geordie descends deep into himself, and projects a part of himself into the rope, which dances as if alive in his hand.

Great mysterious Deryni magic transmutes the power of Geordie into the coils and fibers of the rope, which, on his next toss, spins and curls across the gorge and drops neatly over a large conical boulder. Geordie snaps down

Section 88

hard on the line and the looped end draws taut around the rock.

"Fantastic!" Jarmuth shouts over the rising wind, and Beck jumps up and down and claps his hands, for he knows the best part is coming.

Geordie ties off the other end of the rope as tautly as he can to a large rock on the moor side. "Now stand guard here and watch," he tells his companions.

The soft-soled merchant shoes help him now, as he ventures out onto the rope, gingerly at first, then with increasing boldness. The blustery wind tries its best to knock him off the swaying rope, but Geordie bends and balances and hops his way to the center of the bowing line, which dips a full six feet at its midpoint.

With a quick turn and a wave over his shoulder, Geordie skips the rest of the way over the flimsy line he's strung across the crevasse and vanishes into the passageway leading to the monastery. Jarmuth and Beck cannot help him now. He is on his own in the camp of the enemy.

Turn to section 84.

* 89 *

"Good priest, I'll tell you my story whole and true. My name is Geordie Drummond, and my Kinsman is Lord Camber of Culdi himself."

"Go on."

"My lord Camber chose me for this assignment not for my virtue but as a testing, a form of punishment for his displeasure at an impetuous action of mine. In the course of my travels north I have gained two companions, an orphaned boy, Beck, who acts as my groom, and a Deryni Healer named Jarmuth Rhydon who is my counselor and ally."

"A small army you have brought with you," the disembodied voice mocks him.

"Even alone I am prepared to give my life to stop the scourge of the Gryphon, and if you let me go I will not fail you." With these words Geordie bows his head and awaits the priest's response.

"You have shown me a pure heart and true,

Section 90

Geordie Drummond. Continue on, and leave this poor monk to his prayers, for I am in the world but not of the world." The concealed priest withdraws farther into the shadows, and Geordie never does see his face. With careful steps he proceeds toward the glowing windows of St. Stefan's main hall.

Turn to section 73.

* 90 *

It is curious: Here on the verge of his greatest battle Geordie finds himself in the company of a hidden priest who is challenging him with riddles and conundrums. And now the threat of calling down the guards on him if he fails to make sense of the whispered puzzle.

Let's see, Geordie muses silently. The mythological gryphon has the head, forepart, and wings of an eagle, and the body, hind legs, and tail of a lion. What does the stranger mean, "the parts left over"? If he refers to what you would have left, then you'd have the

body and tail of an eagle with the head and mane of a lion. That'd be an odd sort of bird, kind of backward-looking.

That's it, Geordie thinks to himself. Backward. Now what's the reverse of gryphon? I'd better hurry with my answer!

Aloud he says: "Do you mean a 'nohpyrg'?"

"Precisely! You're an intelligent young man, whoever you are. Now leave this old priest to his prayers." With that the man withdraws farther into the shadows, and Geordie never does see his face or learn his name. With careful steps he proceeds toward the glowing windows of St. Stefan's main hall.

Turn to section 73.

* 91 *

Rather than give himself away, Geordie elects to follow behind the Gryphon and his entourage. Because the monastery is built on solid rock, there are few interior courtyards or hallways. All the rooms and windows face out-

Section 91

ward. By following this one wall he would eventually circumnavigate the pinnacle, though a few outer buildings cling precariously to ledges attached to the main stone block.

Again Geordie realizes his incredible luck—the one isolated outcropping where his rope has landed is the only safe spot on the rock.

But where have they gone? Geordie wonders. He follows the outer wall of the main hall around till he comes to the door they have exited. There is no sign of anyone. He continues along the circular passageway, stopping before several closed doors but hearing nothing, until he estimates that he is halfway around to the rope. At the next door he thinks he hears voices, but there are no windows in this section of wall.

Just then the latch on the door begins to lift. Geordie hurriedly retreats. The door swings open and footsteps come his way. Retreating still farther, Geordie backs into a recess in the wall, not a doorway but a small shrine. He ducks behind the ceramic statue of a saint he can't identify and hopes the unknown saint will accept his apology and grant him the boon of sanctuary.

Tramping feet pass by. It seems like the whole monastery is up and moving about. Then the chapel bells begin to ring. Of course!

It is time for evening Vespers. The chapel is built above the living quarters and main hall on the highest portion of the rock. It is reachable only from this outer walk, up a set of stairs carved into the solid rock.

If Geordie remains in hiding, turn to section 95.

If he follows the monks to the chapel, turn to section 76.

* **92** *

The bale grows increasingly heavy the more Geordie strains at it. What can be buried inside this innocuous-looking block of straw, lead bars, or maybe gold ingots? Ignoring the tiny warning signals in his brain that perhaps there is magic at work here, Geordie continues to strain and pull at the bale, which seems to pin itself down to the ground no matter how strenuously Geordie exerts himself.

He is forced to admit that he cannot budge the bale of straw.

"That is twice you have failed." The bodi-

Section 92

less voice within the cave speaks harshly and with disappointment.

"Please," Geordie begs, "give me one more chance to show you I am worthy."

"Well, it is unusual, but I will make an exception in your case. St. Stefan's was once a place of great learning and wisdom. Now it is nothing but a battle camp, an armory for the preparations for bloody war. If you return the monastery to its original purpose, that will be reward enough. But first, you must convince me you can do the job."

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is less than or equal to Geordie's value for Charisma, turn to section 89.

If greater, turn to section 77.

* **93** *

It seems more prudent to approach the Gryphon by means of a note. But Geordie has no quill and paper. Just then another monk enters the room, confers briefly with the Gryphon, then the Gryphon, Lord Thornton, the guards, and the clerics all leave the hall, extinguishing the candle and locking the door from the other side as they go.

Geordie draws out his stabbing blade and chinks a tiny hole in the glass, stopping each time the tiny fragments shatter to the floor within, but the room is silent and empty. In a minute he has made a large enough hole to reach inside and unlatch the window, which swings inward cleverly on a hinge-pin. Geordie lets himself down and crosses the room carefully in the dark, remembering not to trip over the chest next to the empty table.

At the far end of the room is the table where the accounting of weapons has taken place. Turning to a later blank page in the ledger, Geordie writes the following:

Section 93

To the Gryphon:

Your day of reckoning has arrived.

You have forgotten one great truth:

Nihil est magnum nisi bonum.

(Nothing is great except the good.)

For this you must pay with defeat.

Come to the rope and dance with death.

Geordie Drummond, of the clan

MacRorie

Waiting in the darkness for the ink to dry, Geordie ponders how to get the note to the Gryphon. He could find the man's resting place and try to leave it there, or drop it where the Gryphon would be sure to find it and pick it up.

If Geordie decides to find the Gryphon's cell, turn to section 99.

If he decides instead to leave the note in a conspicuous spot, turn to section 82.

* **94** *

The Gryphon comes, with his whole company of monks behind him. Geordie does not have time to jump on the rope before they crowd into the small clearing. The Gryphon holds up his hand.

"Silence. Stand back, O monks! I shall vanquish the intruder myself." But the monks will not stand back, they crowd in toward Geordie, eager to protect their master.

"Keep him at bay, men!" the Gryphon shouts. With that, he pushes his way past Geordie and leaps onto the rope. He twirls his way out to the center of the line above the watery chasm. Around his head blue vapors of flame swirl. "Come, fight!" he cries.

Turn to section 101.

* **95** *

The monks all pass him by without discovering him, but Geordie remains hidden behind the statue, unsure of his next move. Just then a solitary monk comes striding back toward the living quarters. It is the Gryphon! This time Geordie catches a glimpse of his face: a high nose, proud bearing, piercing eyes. It could almost be the face of a Deryni lord, Geordie muses. But surely he should be conducting the service in the chapel right now?

Geordie waits until he has passed, then follows the Gryphon toward his cell. But before he can confront the villainous priest, Geordie is surprised from behind by the Gryphon's two guards. A brief sword battle ensues, but Geordie is overmatched and never makes up the disadvantage of being caught unawares. He might have cursed himself for waiting when he should have acted, but as he fights for his life he has little time to think of past mistakes. A slashing blow sends him

reeling toward the precipice, and one of the two guards gleefully pushes him over.

Geordie falls, out of control, and bounces off the cliffside into the sea, but he is able to swim to the lee shore and climb the cliff. Injured and helpless, however, he is forced to leave his comrades in the hands of the enemy and struggle back toward Cor Culdi, alone and defeated.

Turn to section 29.

* **96** *

The booming of the battering ram paralyzes Geordie with fear. He stands helplessly, the Gryphon between him and the rope, the enraged monks behind him, until they break the bar and burst through the opening to seize him.

"Treat him gently," the Gryphon commands them. "He is valuable property."

Gravely disappointed that he has come so far only to fail, Geordie is led off to a cell,

Section 97

where he is confined until ransomed by his great-uncle Camber, at great loss of both riches and honor.

Turn to section 29.

* 97 *

"You are right," the Gryphon says. Geordie has goaded him into it. "Stand back, O monks. I shall vanquish the intruder myself."

But the monks will not stand back, they crowd in toward Geordie, eager for revenge.

"Very well," the Gryphon says boldly. "I'll do it for you." He pushes past Geordie and leaps onto the rope. He twirls his way out to the center of the line above the watery chasm. Around his head blue vapors of flame swirl. "Come, fight!" he cries.

Turn to section 101.

* **98** *

"Why should I give up my advantage for some paltry notion of honor?" The Gryphon is unconvinced. "Keep him at bay, men!" he shouts, and he pushes past Geordie and leaps onto the rope.

By doing so he places Geordie between himself and his men, surrounding him. He twirls his way out to the center of the line above the watery chasm. Around his head blue vapors of flame swirl. "Come and fight me!" he cries.

Turn to section 101.

* 99 *

If he can find the Gryphon's lair, so much the better, Geordie thinks to himself. But where to look? Geordie tears the note from the ledger and quickly retraces his steps across the dark room and out the window. The broken glass will be discovered sooner or later, but Geordie can't concern himself with that now.

Because the monastery is built on solid rock, there are few interior courtyards or hallways. All the rooms and windows face outward. By following this one wall he will eventually circumnavigate the pinnacle, though a few outer buildings cling precariously to ledges attached to the main stone block.

The monks' cells, except for those caves between the outcropping and the main rock, all have to be in a line along this one walkway, Geordie reasons. Then he hears the sound of voices coming his way. He ducks into a recess in the wall, not a doorway but a small shrine. Kneeling behind the ceramic statue of a saint

he can't identify, he hopes the unknown saint will accept his apology and grant him the boon of sanctuary.

It seems like the whole monastery is up and moving about. Then the chapel bells begin to ring. Of course! It is time for evening Vespers. The chapel is built above the living quarters and main hall on the highest portion of the rock. It is reachable only from this outer walk, up a set of stairs carved into the solid rock. Sandal-shod monks tramp by.

Now would be a perfect time to find the Gryphon's cell and leave the note. Geordie waits until everyone has passed by, then hurries down the passageway, encountering no one. Sure enough, after the main hall doors and a row of closed doors which are probably storerooms, Geordie comes to a series of doors which are clearly the living quarters of the monks. They are all identical, humble wooden doors with rope latches, except one in the center which is decorated with a wooden carving. It is a Gryphon, talons outstretched in pursuit of a hare. Here in the midst of these world-forsaking monks, his vanity has given him away.

Geordie slips the note under the door and quietly makes his way back to the rope, to wait for the Gryphon.

Turn to section 94.



* **100** *

"No," says Geordie, wise to the ways of the crafty Gryphon, "you lead, to the promontory that juts out from the lee shore side, you know where I mean."

Geordie steps aside and gestures with his broadsword for the Gryphon to pass by. Somberly the Gryphon obeys, walking slowly and proudly. Again Geordie comments on the remarkable visage, so lordly, almost a pale mirror of his own race—suddenly the idea jumps into his head—could the Gryphon be a Deryni?

They reach the small clearing before the outcropping. Geordie orders the Gryphon to halt.

"I am curious, Gryphon, what is your parentage?"

"I am an orphan. My mother was a witch!" In the priest's voice Geordie hears something more than mere ambition, the echoes of madness. If he is a Deryni and doesn't know it,

Section 100

Geordie thinks, the powerful natural Deryni tendencies toward hearing other men's thoughts, and other mental magic, may have driven the man mad. But how to find out? Perhaps this is what Lady Carrega meant about the merasha. But he can never dupe the Gryphon into drinking it—that would be unmanly and dishonorable.

"What do you mean, a witch?" Geordie asks, playing for time while he determines his next move. He knows he must get the Gryphon onto the rope if he is to do battle. On this pinnacle the Gryphon knows every step and turn of every hallway. He can also hear the sounds of a mob of monks climbing the stairs. He must get the Gryphon out onto the rope soon or he will be surrounded by his enemies.

"She was burned as a heretic, because she gave birth to me, a human with the powers of magic. For my talents, she died."

"Do you know what this is?" Geordie asks his adversary, holding up the clear liquid vial of merasha. "This potion affects only those of Deryni lineage. If I was to give you a small dose, it would prove or disprove that you yourself are a Deryni orphan. Perhaps that would explain and mitigate your acts in the eyes of the authorities."

"What? Let you drug me? To prove that I am Deryni? I hate the Deryni! Before I finish,

you will drink from that vial." With that, the Gryphon leaps onto the rope and whirls his way out to the center of the line above the watery chasm. Blue vapors of flame swirl around his head. "Come, meet your end!" he cries.

Turn to section 101.

* **101** *

The fight begins with Geordie at a disadvantage. He has the roaring mob of monks at his back, and the Gryphon between himself and the safety of the mainland. But at least he knows the nature of his enemy. There can be no doubt—the Gryphon is a Deryni. If Geordie wasn't sure before, the flashing aura surrounding him in an iridescent nimbus is proof enough. This will be a battle of wills, of minds, of mental strengths and weaknesses.

But Geordie has learned much on his trip north. From Beck he learned kindness toward strangers and the poor. Through Jarmuth he

Section 101

has increased his patience and his perceptiveness. In meeting all the challenges of the journey he has strengthened himself, physically and mentally. Yes, he feels ready to do battle! He follows the Gryphon onto the rope, their combined weights making the line sag and sway dangerously farther.

The mass of monks rush up behind him, but none dare to dance out on the rope, where Geordie and the Gryphon slowly close on each other, swords drawn. Neither has benefit of a shield, except those invisible mental ones which keep the steady stream of fiery licking tongues from penetrating either man's defenses.

"You overreach yourself," the Gryphon ridicules him. "You cannot do battle with one as powerful as I."

"Be silent and fight, Gryphon. And remember my warning. I win because my cause is just." Geordie steels himself for another onslaught from his rival. Their swords reverberate as they meet above their heads in wild swinging blows that would have knocked lesser combatants off the swinging line, but both Deryni right themselves quickly.

Swords still in hand they grasp each other's wrists, and the Gryphon, a slightly larger man than Geordie, begins to ply his strength to bending Geordie to his knees on the rope. Geordie lets the Gryphon work him down,



Section 101

then feints at his lower body and throws his hands up, breaking the grip. The Gryphon staggers backward.

"You are a clever fighter, Deryni, but you cannot outlast me."

"I will not need to—" Geordie begins a reply, but the Gryphon swipes viciously at his legs, forcing him to skip on the rope to avoid being cut.

"A neat trick—let's see it again!" the Gryphon screams, and again Geordie hops on the rope to avoid a slashing blow.

Then their minds lock again, and shadowy fire plays around their bodies, drawing sympathetic lightning from their rejuvenated storm, which seems to swell and rage in tempo with their private war.

Geordie feels the raging power of the Gryphon's personality, that has won the hearts of many men by the sheer force of its brilliance and bravado. But since his revolt will benefit no one but himself and satisfy only his dreams of aggrandizement, his aura is like a brittle shell. As Geordie penetrates it, the power falls away, leaving only the empty vitiated rage of frustration.

Still the Gryphon fights on, battling with braveness and tenacity that Geordie has to admire even as he fends off thrust after thrust. The wind-whipped waters below churn and roar as if cheering the battle on the rope, and

the sky answers with deafening rumbles and sudden flashes that illumine the fantastic scene of the two warriors balancing on the thin line.

Gradually Geordie moves the Gryphon back toward the mainland. He knows that cut off from his followers the Gryphon will lose his power. They are within thirty feet of the moor, over the boulder-strewn beach, when the Gryphon summons up one last burst of malicious strength and stops Geordie's forward movement.

"Why?" comes the tortured cry. "Why destroy my dreams?"

"Because they were yours alone, and did not mirror the desires of the people," Geordie answers simply, for the Gryphon deserves to know the cause of his failure.

"No!" his frantic opponent shouts. "I will prevail. You can't stop me!" He rushes at Geordie, who, caught by surprise, can only leap blindly upward. The Gryphon tumbles under him, but too fast, he loses control and slips off the line as Geordie comes down hard on it but manages to hang on with both hands.

With a final scream of terror the Gryphon plunges to his death on the rocky shore below. Geordie slings a leg over the rope and works himself back up to a standing position.

Lord Thornton pushes his way through the silent group of grieving monks. "Drum-

Section 101

mond," he yells, "I still hold your companions hostage. My freedom for their lives."

Instead of replying, Geordie crosses the last few feet to the moor and slashes the rope with his sword. It falls to the sea, the frayed end draped over the Gryphon's body in a final gesture of defeat. Then he calls over the gap to Lord Thornton: "I think your daughter will free them, when she knows the Gryphon is dead."

And so it is that the Gryphon's reign of terror comes to an end. Within a day the three heroes are on their way south to receive the thanks and honors of their friends and family. Geordie Drummond has proven himself for all Gwynedd to see with his victory over the Gryphon.

THE END

ENTER THE ADVENTURE

"You'll be in grave peril, Geordie,"

Lord Camber of Culdi says. "Look." The Deryni points to a crystal globe. Lord Drummond stares into it, but senses nothing. "These fanatics," Camber tells his nephew, "possess magic that counters our Deryni abilities.

They may even be able to—"

With a searing surge of pain,
the crystal explodes...

With

An all-new introductory essay by Katherine Kurtz!

Join the excitement!

Enter the action—become part of the most thrilling, international bestselling Hugo and Nebula award-winning fantasy worlds of all time—with the all-new CROSSROADS™

authorized gaming novels of: LYNN ABBEY's *Rifkind*, *Daughter of the Bright Moon*, PIERS ANTHONY's *Xanth*, STEVEN BRUST's *Ihered of Dragaera*, L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP and

FLETCHER PRATT's *Incomplete Enchanter*, C.J.

CHERRYH's *Morgaine and the Stargates*,

DAVID DRAKE's *Arthurian Tale The Dragon Lord*,

ANNE McCAFFREY's *Dragonriders of Pern*™,

ROBERT SILVERBERG's *Lord Valentine and Majipoor*,
and ROGER ZELAZNY's *Amber*. Non-stop

action from the masters of fantasy—
and the masters of gaming!



A Tom Doherty
Associates, Inc. Book

ISBN 0-812-56421-9