

FIRST FLIGHT

by James M. Ward

It was dawn on the high cliffs of Sancrist Isle, but there would be no sun today. An oily blanket of clouds covered the sky as far as the eye could see. Storm winds blasted the three figures with great gusts of cold and rain. "Dragon weather," Gunthar Uth Wistan shouted over the roar of the gale as he helped his young squire mount Sirdar, the bronze dragon.

The weather chilled the new Knight through his armor and underclothing. The tabard of the Solamnic Order of the Crown was pinned to his body by the wet wind. It was a great honor to bear the Knightly crest, but none of it helped against the bone chilling cold. The Knight checked his wargear carefully. He set the crystal ball Fizban had given him into the place made for it on the saddle. The Arrow of Enemy Detection and the Healing Ointment were stashed in a bag for quick retrieval. As he finished his preparations he looked up and watched his lord a moment.

Amun could sense the great leader grew weary of sending young Knights to their death in a hopeless cause. The campaigns went poorly. The Knights fought a losing battle-being pushed further and further back by the deadly forces of the dragonarmies. Draconians and dragons invaded all the lands of man.

"Tonight we will toast victories," the youth was smiling as he finally buckled the last strap of the dragonsaddle in place. Amun gripped the magical dragonlance tighter in his hand. "I will live by the Oath and the Measure. You've taught me much these three weeks, my Lord. I'll find the enemy dragon scouts that have been directing the draconian armies." The young man added quietly, "Do not fear for me, Lord Wistan".

"By the Measure, you are a brave one. Sirdar! You take care of this one. Do you hear!" Gunthar spoke to the dragon and stepped away from the pair. The bronze leapt into the air, and climbed on his great wings. "Three weeks," Gunthar muttered to himself as the great dragon rose out of sight. "Three weeks. I trained as a Knight twenty years before I saw my first battle. Paladine, what have you got us into! Now, I'm sending children out to do men's work."

The sky lit up with sheets of lightning and a wall of rain poured from the heavens. Gunthar wondered what this might portend for the young man and dragon he had sent off. He ran towards the tents and small buildings of the Solamnic outpost, wishing he could take the place of the young man he had sent out to face probable death that day.

(007)

Traveller, welcome.

Since you are reading this, you must be the chosen, in search of the Sword of the Dragon, Eternity.

This is Arqua the divine, Realm of purity and peace.

This is what you must do.

All four elements must be in their absolute state.

This may require you to use one element to produce another from the raw ingredients that you have found.

Take the four elements to the Ring of Eight and place them correctly. They will conjure the presence of the Hafaza.

When you look upon the face of Tishtrya, take up the elements again and combine them.

Remember that what pleases us, often pleases the divine also, and consider which of your senses is as yet untouched.

When the scent of success sweetens the air, you will achieve your mind's desire.

(052)

Claude Florentine

Entry, the morning of the 15th of January, 1330 ad.

The Temple of the Morning Star.

No fewer than twenty two acolytes have entered the Tower since our efforts began two weeks ago, with only one returning in the intervening time. This man – Thomas – swore that he had met with someone within the Tower who named himself the Gardener. Thomas swore to the Power that this 'Gardener' aided him in his escape only moments before the gibbering madness of the Ire fell upon him. This experience has had an adverse effect on the man. His body could be used to sate the hunger of the One Power if he proves to be of no further use to us. Goats and poultry can be expensive and sometimes ineffectual.

Of the testimony of Thomas concerning the existence of this Gardener, I must say that I am sceptical. Whether what he saw was figment or truth, I cannot say but Belial reliably informs us that the last of the Gardeners perished at the Fall of the Stone. I must take his word as truth.

(057)

Claude Florentine

Entry, the evening of the 15th of March, 1330 ad.

York Library.

The Tower is as useful as is dangerous. Once this was not the case, but as I am one of the few who has travelled there and onto other Realms in the pursuit of the Order's goals and lived, I can say with all sincerity that the crossings are fraught with all kinds of hidden dangers, even with Minions to guide. The Ire is constantly present within the Tower whether distant or near. Its unnerving ability to hunt and devour those who come to its place is astounding. I refer to a manuscript that I have had sent from France concerning the travels of a Magician from the last century. There is no mention of any Gardeners or of the Tower's past-carnation, the manuscript being only a fragment of a much larger body.

"At first the dark and within; I heard the fetid laughter of the souls of the Ire. It came at once upon me like a storm charged with rage and gibberous song; hypnotising and calling for sweet perdition. I ran for I knew the tales of this forgotten place. I ran and stumbled upon the cracked pave of the Tower but it was always there, here and beyond, there and always, its face looming from the shadowy depths. From whence and where did this thing come? I knew as I fell upon the cold stone, the face of death smiling down..."

(060)

Claude Florentine

Entry, 19th of June, 1521 ad.

Temple of the Morning Star.

The great Power of the Shards has appeared to us. Thankfully, though Abaddon's reasons are his own, he has divulged the secrets of the Shards and Seals within the Chamber of the Soulstone.

It is holding something back, I know it. I have confidence in this Power yet.

Something disturbs Belial, though again he is reticent. No matter how much I think that I know him I am forever abated in my belief by his petty shows of secrecy.

Speaking unto him, we have agreed that it may be for the best at this time if the two do not cross paths. Belial is more than convinced of this.

Of the Tower, Abaddon has revealed much. The name Raysiel has appeared in our conversation much and this Power appears to have place and dominion within the spiritual realm of Raquia for some reason. Abaddon has informed us that Raysiel is a neutral Power like himself with the Agency of imprisonment and freedom over those that transgress certain laws.

I must speak with this Power called Raysiel at some future point but a device for passage into Raquia – his realm – is beyond my sight. Abaddon will disclose sites and locations of these and all other devices but I feel the cost of bargaining will be high. I fear I must agree to its terms all the same. The Egyptian mask and other devices I now keep secure from the others. With this act I can be sure that only I may tread the paths of the Tower unless permission is asked personally by others.