

We pick back up, still in the throes of the battle against each other.

Dorinda takes a sniper rifle shot at Darnit and strikes. Izar feels a slight gust pass him and then Darnit is pushed over. His whole body goes limp and he drops to the ground.

Hrothulf regains all his faculties and his eyes are no longer purple, and he wonders what's going on.

The skeletons are still there though.

Ego casts *shatter* right in the midst of the three skeletons. The one who was on fire is toast. The one next to Izar has his skull pop off his head, then his bones crumble into a pile and the skull lands on them. The last skeleton makes his constitution save, and seeing his bones shattering away from him, grabs them frantically putting them back in place. But it isn't enough to save him and he crashes to the ground, intact but dead.

Izar looks down and somehow Darnit is still breathing, though shallowly.

Hrothulf, with new-found clarity and a large unawareness of what's happened in the last 45 seconds, snaps out of it. He looks over and sees Darnit appears to be dead, or at least mostly dead, and he yells, "Hey y'all, what in tarnation's going on here?" He runs over to Darnit—the goo is no match for his strength and determination as he stomps violently through it—and starts to give Darnit whatever form of rudimentary CPR training he received in culinary school. For a solid two seconds he wonders if he blew out his lungs, but somehow the compressions seem to be working.

Izar: "Gliton what do you want? Are you not entertained?"

Gliton: Well this game is simply testing your loyalty.

Ego: To who?

Gliton: Indeed. To *whooom*.

Izar casts the healing spell from the shell stored in the bracelet for Izar, Darnit, and Hrothulf, each receiving 20 hp.

Darnit comes to and puts his hand on his chest, and sees his own blood from teh bullet of Dorinda.

"She shot me!"

Then he bursts into blue light and blue veils away.

The cage descends. Ego sprints toward it hoping for healing but the flames dissipate as soon as her hands reach around one of the bars and she slams to the ashy ground at the feet of Hrothulf's sister, Hildegard.

Ego, deflated, starts to get up and puts a hand up to Hildegard. "A little help?"

Hildegard easily pulls her up with one hand.

Brecca: "What is going on, young Prince?"

(As a reminder, the last thing Hrothulf heard after turning down Slenn's offer was a Vardum knight saying, "Sir I do not think this is wise" to Slenn, as he pushed Hrothulf down into the Ash Hole. The ones in the cage have a little more life than before.)

Hrothulf: Dear comrade I'm not sure what this place is. It is some sort of bizarre realm we have been cast into by my foul brother. Although it appears to have something to do with the god Gliton of fire and chaos, who as it happens spoke to us mere moments ago.

Brecca makes it clear he did not hear any voice, but he sympathizes that battle-weary folk can certainly hear things. "But what matters is that you're here and we're reunited. I was cast here by Slenn as a whim. It seemed he was attempting to discern this new power he had acquired. As I was falling the coldness felt like the icy claw of death itself and I thought sure I would simply perish here."

Hrothulf's siblings echo the same sentiment. After Brecca had fallen each of them were offered a make-shift throne with Slenn and each refused, only to be cast down here.

Hrothulf is encouraged that they all turned down Slenn.

Hildegard shares the story with a lot of anger and a clear sense that she seeks some kind of retribution against Slenn.

Hrothgar is torn. He thinks Slenn is captivated somehow by another power and has been driven to this. He just can't imagine that the atrocities he's committed are his own.

Wiglaf is just sad, still lamenting that their father did not get a proper send-off after his death. He died from a brain sickness, but Slenn had the body burned and turned into the abominable crown he wears. He is sad and despairing. There doesn't seem to be any stopping Slenn. What he wants he just seems to get.

Hrothulf: "In all y'all's dealings with him did y'all ascertain any clues as to how he might be stopped?"

A couple theories emerge:

Wiglaf: "No, he can't. We don't know what's taken over him."

Brecca: "He was ambitious before, but when these knights showed up they seemed to have poisoned him, and they gave him the power. It was uncanny the way this tower was built and this robotic army was manifested. Everything happened so quickly on the heels of your father's death, things just moved so quickly. But if you can somehow wrest what power was given to Slenn by these knights, perhaps he can be conquered, perhaps he can be saved."

Depending on the sibling, they all see justice for Slenn differently.

Hrothulf: "Indubitably. I suspect that somehow there may be a key to defeating my brother down here in this place. One of my brother's companions suggested this might be a bad idea, sending all of us down here. As to what that might be, I cannot tell."

Hrothgar: "Well as its rightful king, whatever it looks like when we get back to the castle, we follow you now."

The three siblings and Brecca give a militaristic salute and they all give a forearm handshake, and when they do the lava flow under their skin flows together.

Hrothulf takes the moment to make introduction and share capabilities and so on, since whenever we get out of here we're going to need to get things done.

Ibi brings attention to the blue tethers, saying, "Excuse me, what is this?"

Ego: "That's probably what's keeping us alive. It was given to us by the god of water and life himself, Thiton."

As Ego is being introduced she feels a little embarrassed, as she's in Slaad form here, unable to shapeshift. The others notice for the first time that there's now a pulsing green glow from her forehead.

She touches her forehead and focuses on the gem, and mutters, "Gliton why is it like this here?" She hears the war.

Gliton says to all of us, "I suppose it's about time for round two. I just wonder will you always do what the gods tell you to do. It seems all it took was a mere suggestion from me and you were ready to kill one another. It's interesting that you've made it this far."

Dorinda: "It seemed like much more than a mere suggestion. You coerced our comrades and left us little choice."

Izar: "Their eyes were purple. We don't mess with that."

Gliton: "Ironic."

Izar: "Well, right."

Gliton: "Rest assured I among all the pantheon know how to say 'No' to the gods. Maybe you should try it sometime."

Dorinda says, "No." She's a little pissed in her own mechanical way.

Emerging from the ashes nearby is a billowing cloud, and as the cloud dissipates what's left behind is a giant steel circle.

Gluten: "It seems as though you need to find your way out of here. But do hurry. My vanguard is on its way."

At which point, on our blue chest tubes, there's a rush of orange light that cascades out from the clew, and we all gain 25 hp.

The circle is a massive wrought iron wheel of a sort. It has a hub in the middle and thirteen spokes connecting the hub to the out wheel. The wheel itself has a diameter of 20 feet and the thickness of it is roughly $\frac{1}{8}$ of a narwhal. It is resting on the ground. Opposite each spokes are little platforms on the rim of the wheel like steamboat paddles, and each has symbols that look familiar to us. Irregular polygons of increasing numbers. A triangle, then a quadrilateral, and so on.

The Salamander with Ibi doesn't speak common, but he's gesturing to the southwest part of the map and we see 8-12 purple flickering lights in the distance 200-300 ft away.

The timeline of the people who are here can piece together who came down when. It's possible some were cast down after Ibi. The Salamander guard wasn't intended to be sent down, but he was trying to defend his Prince. Brecca knows he was a test subject. He was the first to be sent down as a test for his "loyalty to the crown king".

We stand up this wheel, as we did when we were in the ember pit before. He stands up easily, probably weighing 8-9 pounds. It's one of the few things that has not been hot on Magnus. It feels like cold wrought iron. Dorinda and Ego together spin the wheel Price-Is-Right-style. We are spinning it east, away from the purple lights. But this time it doesn't spin in the air, it rolls. Though it's rolling east at a good clip, the purple lights are gaining faster.

Now they are close enough that we can see outlines of ember cats that are significantly larger than the ones we encountered with Wren.

We distribute some weapons to the others. Wiglaf is given the plasma rifle. Ibi is a diplomat, not battle trained. Ego slaps her dragon ouroboros armor belt around Ibi. Dorinda gives the guard her curved blade. Ego gives the gold sword to Hildegard. Izar and Dorinda holds the light crossbow and force blade out to the Salamander guard (Chi'ssek), and with glee he takes them both. "I want that back!" Dorinda makes a point of saying.

Izar: "P.s.: go for the eyes."

Hrothulf is wondering aloud whether anything down here might be able to help us. He's wondering why the Vardum belt thought this was a bad idea. A line comes to mind thinking about the Vardum knights: When Bruno was abducted, and he sent the key that would become Kozmo, on there was some audio files that included the Vardum saying they've infiltrated some of the elemented temples and corrupted them.

The wheel is rolling with a physics that's disproportionate—faster than we'd expect for the amount of force we're giving it.

As we've slowed to divvy stuff, the cats have been gaining.

Dorinda and Izar both recognize something about these. They are different from the ember cats. Izar recognizes them from when she first met Hiare, whose mom fought off three of these to save her baby. These... are displacer beasts.