



The Stones of Home

Rowan

Utting

What Cost Freedom?

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# Del Diaradh Bae Hiar

Melce Vur Sivrel?



Denniav Elcenturaph

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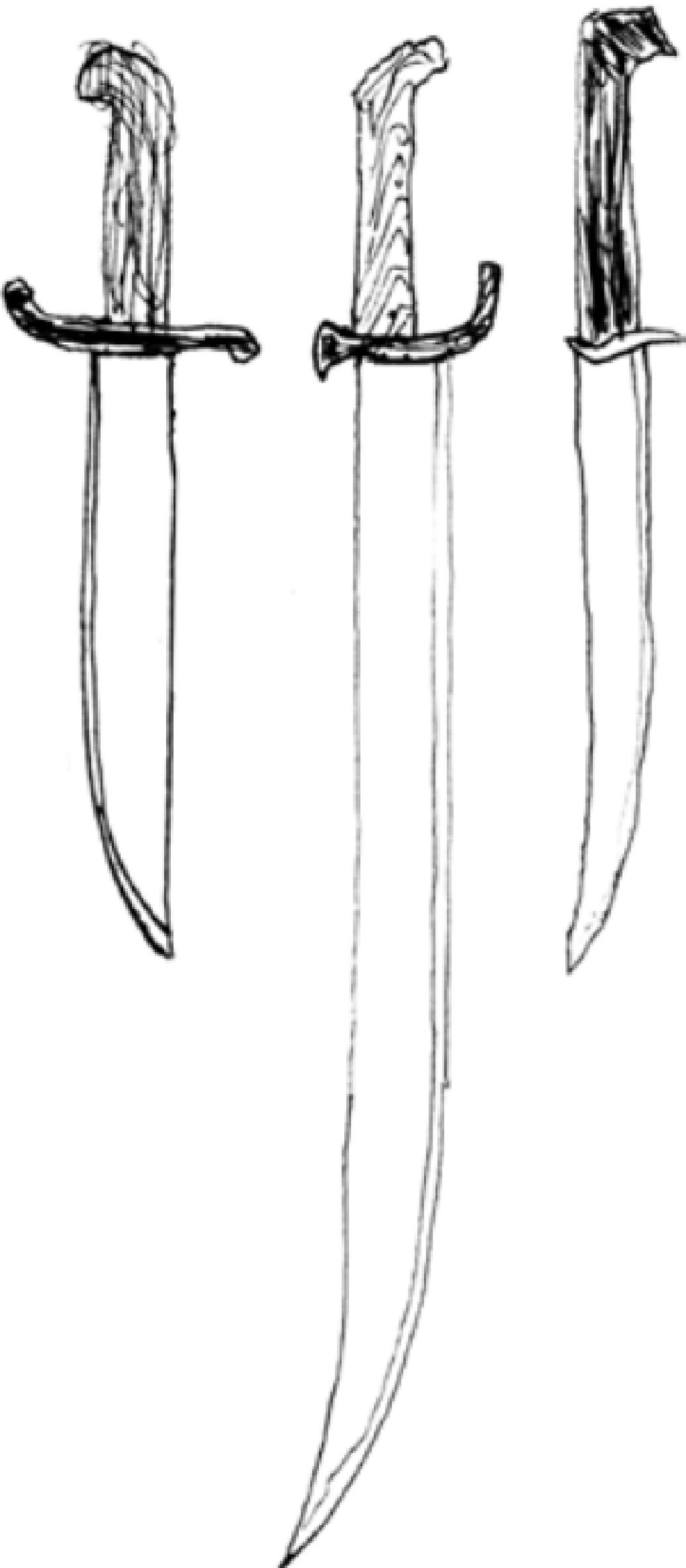
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## **Characters, in alphabetical order.**

Áed Galchobar / Pheh-Tzil	First Mage
Aegradin Thalota	Mage of Secrecy
Ailimessa Sambrinne	Mage of Transformation
Andeitlan Leigheass	Mage of Pain; Reversed Mage of Healing.
Aonneas	Previous Mage of Solitude
Atojili Jurlassin	Mage of Energy
Beathur Virinyf	Mage of Life
Belhiga Uiscalann	Mage of Ocean
Bolhovangr Daltyriae	Mage of Solitude
Bullda	Adult male dragon
Caltann	Elf scout and warrior; son of Halentul.
Ceannaire Tearmann	Mage of Fire and leader of Haven; usurped by his apprentice.
Connor Bjornsson	Narimalan fisherman
Cragillahan Arylto	Mage of Stone
Daltyr	Druid
Danfai Arylto	Previous Mage of Stone, father of Cragillahan.
Danzill	Elf, chief of Duinn.
Dryadaera	Previous Mage of Trees
Dréoch Lachen	Previous Mage of Dragons
Etteria Arbanarraswn	Reversed Mage of Ocean; Causer of the Great Flood.
Fingal	Giant
Fotar	Werewolf scout
Fraganni	Elf, chief of Guravai.
Futhuulkor Tinnryf	Apprentice Mage of Fire
Galhaea	Ipus' favourite dragon
Gelarth Arylto	Prev. Mage of Stone; Danfai's twin.
Grafa	Werewolf, previous chief, father of Nalgar.
Gyirocan	Apprentice Mage of Blessing
Hakurir	Werewolf scout
Halentul	Elf, chief of Caihi.

Harhounn, Arnahel, Skunak, Var, Vel	Dragon; offspring of Galhaea and Bullda.
Ipus Lachen	Mage of Dragons
Jarhild Aroulssen	Mage of Metal
Arga, Éla, Emmann, Hwala, Jundar	Pups of Rittaun and Fotar
Karantié Alatr	Elf, bride of Pheh-Tzil.
Kerhai Altfar	Elf, chief of Dürfilennalai.
Kinanha	Tigerwolf
Kyanna Alatr	Elf, wife of Kerhai, mother of Karantié.
Larrook	Dréoch's favourite dragon
Lone	Stone tigerwolf
Lotar	Werewolf, Fotar's brother.
Massira Vuthalanne	Mage of Blessing
Melzann	Elf; Goblin-Human go-between.
Muirtevonn Portadiam	Mage of Mind-Control
Nalgar	Werewolf Alpha/Chief; remembered as Sun-Summoner.
Narit Ocurti	Mage of Sight
Narlugar	Son of Nalgar
Pheh-Tzil / Áed Galchobar	First Mage
Rittaun	Werewolf, mate of Fotar.
Rorgnar Willussen	Mage of Trees
Suahikaien Melquivae	Mage of Trickery
Taliesin	Dragon that sung
Tara	Young Narimalan Ipus
Thalsoninsolan Sebanarraswn	Reversed Mage of Stone; Sinker of Atlantis.
Torak	Werewolf scout
Tsigaltau Selvhinn-garthull	Mage of Flight
Twiolefr Bjornsson	Apprentice Mage of Healing
Vennkarl	Elf, warrior, adviser and friend of Halentul.

*The Stones of Home*



# Prologue

Around 150 Years Ago

A frantic knocking awoke Massira Vuthalanne, the Mage of Blessing of the Irish Haven. Half-asleep, she cast her mind out, seeking whoever it was that had roused her. She saw the intensity and the fear in the mind before anything else; the shock of such powerful emotions jolted her to complete awareness. She hastily dressed, threw on her dark red cloak, then opened the door. The town seemed to be burning, and her apprentice was standing there, wild-eyed with panic.

"What's happening, Gyirocan?" she asked the lanky young man.

"H-Haven... it's under attack!" he stuttered.

Immediately, Massira cast her mind again, but this time to the hill at the centre of Navan. There was fear and pain, anger and hatred, all so strong that she gasped in horror.

"We must leave. Now." She noticed a sword in his trembling fingers, and reached into a cupboard to fetch her own shortsword, 'Varigash', the name of which meant 'until the end'. Although she was a pacifist, she knew how to wield a blade, and kept this as a last resort.

Together, they ran across the bridge, and to her dismay a massive plume of smoke billowed into the sky. To someone that didn't know about Haven, and this one in particular, this wouldn't've been so bad—but to Massira, it was as plain as writing in the sky. Ceannaire Tearmann, Mage of Fire and Leader of the Irish Haven, surely must be dead. Otherwise, he would have tamed this blaze. She saw her own apprentice stumbling behind her, and thought about Ceannaire's apprentice. He would be dead, too, but this didn't upset her too much; there was something wrong with him. Ceann had

taken pity on him because of a vicious wound down his face, but even so, Massira had never trusted him. She hurried on when Gyirocan had caught up.

Outlined against the sky, Massira saw a dragon, and her heart leapt. Ipus Lachen must be here; she and Massira were both musicians. Singers. They used their voice to carry their magic. She finally reached the fighting, and there was Grafa, the Werewolf Chief, towering over and fighting with a dozen people- a dozen vampires, Massira corrected herself, as she noticed the almost-uniform blonde hair. They all had vicious sabres, and a couple of them had shiny new cartridge-firing revolvers.

All this new technology surely bodes no good for Haven, thought Massira, as she half-cast her mind to try and find other Mages. She found Atojili Jurlassin, Mage of Energy, fighting- no, it can't be! The traitorous wretch! Ceannaire's apprentice, Futhuulkor Tinnryf, had picked up his master's staff, and was battling the Mage of Energy, who was worn out and struggling to survive. Her cloak was being scorched, and her magic was unfocused; Futhuulkor used Ceannaire's staff to block every swipe of her long Japanese sword, and then Massira saw the most horrible thing: He pinned her against the wall with the end of it, and shouted in Elvish: "Myargu, ach-mal dir!" Massira, knowing this meant 'Fire, kill her!' turned her head at the last second, tears streaming down her face. She would have fared better to watch it happen, though, because she saw a shape on the floor. A shape that had a knife protruding from its chest. A knife which transfixes a long, grey, and now bloodstained beard. Only one man in Haven had a beard like that, and when she saw the firelight reflecting off the shine of his bald head, she knew for certain: Futhuulkor had killed Ceannaire Tearmann. The leader of Haven, Mage of Fire, and whom Futhuulkor had been apprenticed to.

Massira ran into a building, mind reeling with shock, and saw two more Mages— Andeitlan Leigheass, the Mage of Healing, and Beathur Virinyf, the Mage of Life. Both were bearded and rather old, the latter more so, and she was about to call out to them when she heard Andeitlan laughing. It was a horrible thing, that wormed its way into her brain and filled her with fear, freezing her like a rabbit. As the Mage of Healing laughed, Beathur fell to the ground, writhing. Massira tentatively cast her mind out, to sense Andeitlan's magic, and to her horror his mind appeared as an enormous chaotic mass of red sparks. His magic had been Reversed! She fled outside, fearing that she couldn't trust anyone.

She crouched down behind a bush, and once more, Massira cast her mind in search of other Mages—but this time it was to avoid them. Narit Ocurti, the Mage of Sight, was nearby, and too late, she sensed Narit's mind roaming too. She returned to her head, just soon enough to see Narit running towards her. Massira raised her sword, ready to fight, but the Mage of Sight directed Massira's gaze to her sheathed cutlass with a worried gesture, indicating that she intended no harm. The Mage of Blessing half-lowered her sword, but still keeping it at the ready because she feared that it was a trap.

"What's going on, Mas?" whispered the Mage of Sight frantically, crouching down beside her.

"I have no idea! Gyirocan woke me up, and we ran over here, and..." Massira gasped in horror.

"Rit, have you seen him?" she pleaded with her fellow Mage.

"I'm so sorry..." Narit pointed towards the main building of Haven, at the top of the hill. Pinned to the wooden beam was Massira's apprentice, slumped lifelessly around the blade that kept him standing. His own sword was still in

his hand, the point of it resting on the ground. The Mage of Blessing sobbed into Narit's shoulder, crying for the passing of the young man who had been like a son. The Mage of Sight let her cry for a while, but sensing the impending danger urged Massira to her feet.

"We need to get out of here; we can mourn later," she said, and the two Mages sprinted towards the forest, in an attempt to seek refuge with the elves.

An enormous explosion shook the night sky, and Narit turned back to look. The main building of Haven was now rubble and a cloud of smoke, but because she was still running, the Mage of Sight tripped into a ditch, spraining her ankle. She yelled in pain, and Massira immediately went about attempting to heal it. She knelt down, murmuring words of power over the twisted foot, and more explosions happened behind them.

"Look out!" yelled Narit, seeing burning chunks of stone crashing to the ground around them.

The Mage of Blessing looked up, but it was too late. Before either of them could move, an enormous flaming twisted chunk of metal silenced them forever.

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Grafa lifted his muzzle to the sky, and howled. Death was everywhere, and he was badly wounded. His howl said to his pack that they must retreat, that this was no longer a safe place. His mate was hiding in a small cave in which his family often used when visiting Haven, and he howled for her as another explosion shook the earth. The entrance to the cave had fallen in, and although his mate had made it out, only one pup survived. She bundled him up in her arms,

and they ran. More of their pack joined in as they ran, until five dozen werewolves, most of them injured, were fleeing from the burning Haven towards the forest.

A young elf, having barely reached adulthood, sat in a tree, his eyes alert. He was only forty-nine years old, and tonight was his first lookout duty, as his father had decided he was ready. The buildings of Hiarvhan were burning, and being destroyed, and he was not the only elf in the trees. His eyes were the sharpest, though, and it was him that first spotted the pack of werewolves sprinting towards the trees. In his mind, it was all so clear: the werewolves had destroyed Hiarvhan, and were now coming to slaughter the elves, for no greater reason than that the dog-warriors disliked them.

“Del burun-tsakai lu nalgar!” he shouted down to the warriors beneath, and the message spread like wildfire: the werewolves are attacking! The alhai, or elvish warriors, readied their weapons, and as the werewolves reached the trees, the young elf launched the first dart, hitting the largest ugliest werewolf squarely in the chest.

“Caltann, ban cal!” shouted the leader of the alhai, congratulating him, saying “Caltann, great throw!”

The surviving werewolves whimpered and fled through the scrub, some of them blindly running into the hidden line of elves, flailing around them with their large claws, driven by fear and terror. The larger werewolves realised that it was an ambush, and sought revenge for their fallen pack-mates.

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The sun rose to a smoking bloodstained battlefield. The buildings of Haven had been obliterated, and corpses lay scattered all around. The streets were piled with dead

vampires and werewolves, as well as the occasional human, and large piles of charred debris. Groups of vampires were looting everything in sight, and a few had made it into the lower part of Haven, which housed many magical artefacts. At the edge of the forest, scores of werewolves lay dead or dying, and a few dozen elves in a similar state had been carried back to their main camp.

A small group of werewolves had survived the onslaught, and escaped through the forest to a large underground cave system. They were perhaps a quarter of the werewolves that had been in Haven, and less than half that had fled. Patrols of elves now roamed the edge of the forest, attacking any werewolves that they saw, so the survivors started to live underground.

Futhuulkor Tinnryf had destroyed the Irish Haven, and started war between the werewolves and elves, but this was not enough. He realised that he should have timed the attack a little later, so that all the Mages would have been present, but it did not worry him. He instructed the Mage of Mind-Control to cast a major spell, one that would affect every remaining Mage of this Haven for a century, and bestowed unto him a gift and a curse: a weapon so powerful that it drove him insane. When the spell was cast, affecting the memories of the Mages, he set about searching for the second half of this weapon, vowing to himself not to stop until he could control the world.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

### **The Howl**

Fire blazed in a circle around a large hole, dug in the dirt floor on the edge of the cavern. The werewolves were howling a chant and banging on drums. Beside the pit stood Nalgar, Lotar and Torak, the latter two holding Fotar's body. Nalgar raised a troll-bone over his head, and then with a tremendous howl, cracked it in two. The howl seemed to linger in the air, almost as a colour—an amber light wafting from his mouth. Nalgar lowered the two halves of the bone to the fire and a new rhythm emerged from the chanters. The flames danced up the bones, and Nalgar raised his arms to cross the flaming bones above his head. Lotar and Torak lowered the body into the hole, then picked up two half-bones each. Once they ignited them, an amazing three-person juggling ceremony began. Burning bones flew through the air, then each wolf picked up a second, unbroken bone. They all used it as a club, bouncing the flaming half-troll-bones, then more bones were added by the chanters. Two dozen bones flew through the air, and suddenly the chant changed, became more intense, and the bones flew higher and higher. The chant stopped, and the lights in the air disappeared. Charred and scorched bones fell back to the jugglers, and each wolf ended up with eight bones. They laid them around the edge of the hole, then jumped over the fire. The flames spread to the hole as the chants and drums started up again, then went out, leaving only the edge of the hole burning. The howlsong ebbed, then ended.

Nalgar stood up on a raised platform, with Rittaun on his left and Lotar on his right. They each held one of her pups: Emmann and Hwala, the youngest two. All the other

werewolves were sitting on the lower ground, along with Jundar, Éla and Arga, the other cubs of Fotar's hearth. Nalgar started a beautiful howl, full of sadness and nostalgia. Lotar and Rittaun joined in, and the drummers started a quiet rhythm. The howls spoke of a friend, a brother, a husband. Three voices became one, and amber light shone at their mouths. It drifted out, and slowly, a shape was forming in the air, first faint as a shadow, but gaining strength. Fotar stood before them, a glowing apparition, and the pups joined in the howl, adding their innocent joy at seeing their father. Then, the howl changed its tone; Fotar slowly faded and the light seemed to turn red. A picture of a goblin appeared, red with hatred and blood. The pups whimpered, and Nalgar changed the colour of the howl. Green and blue filled the air; a meadow, and a blue sky. All the werewolves marvelled at his imagery. Nalgar howled of freedom, of sunlight. He was the only werewolf that remembered the outside world; he was a cub in his mother's arms when they fled from the elves. Now, he was almost a century and a half old, and was ready to see the sky for one last time. His howl hung in the air, and the half-remembered scent of grass hung in his nostrils. Nalgar was unconsciously pouring joy into his howls as his memories came flooding back to him, and then with an aggressiveness that only werewolves can pull off, he poured his hate of goblins into the howl. Joy and an urge to fight echoed in the caverns, and a love for his people built up in the sound. The image slowly became brighter, and turned into a white star with four points. Brighter and brighter it grew, with all of Nalgar's raw, emotion-filled howls, of love, of joy, of hatred, of bloodlust, until it exploded, with a sound of broken glass and the purest echo of a crystal wineglass. Silence reigned in the caverns for a moment.

Then, Nalgar said, "These underground caves have been

our home for 150 years. But once, we had a different home. A home filled with light, where grass grows and water flows. That home we had, it's gone now. But there are places like it. We shall fight the goblins and the vampires, and the elves will help us to repay killing our kind. I am an old dog, far older than most. But I remember the smell of grass, the feel of wind, the warmth of sunlight. The howls I have given you are only a taste of marvels of the surface world. I would feel my fur in the sun, one last time before I die."

The following howl was one of the loudest things the Mages had ever heard. The wolves were pouring all their appreciation and agreement into it; their desire to see the surface and their will to fight.

"Mages!" yelled Nalgar, beckoning them forward. "How soon do we fight?"

"A month, no more," replied Cragillahan.

"Torak! How long does it take to get to the surface?"

"For one wolf, a day. For three hundred, including mates, pups and belongings, most of a month."

"Werewolves! Prepare yourselves! The sky beckons!"

The Mages were alone with Hakurir, who was leading them through the tunnels to the surface. Tsiga and Cragill had worked together to seal all the caves that the werewolves didn't use, so that the goblins were unable to attack Veranduratur. The werewolves had started to prepare for their new life that they were sure awaited them on the surface, and Hakurir was leaving markers so that the other werewolves could later follow.

"You're in the main route now. Follow it until it branches into two paths and take the left one. There should

be a chute going up. Cragillahan, make the tunnels wider and smoother so that werewolves can use them."

Hakurir handed something to Tsiga.

"Here's the troll-tooth. May you all reach the surface in safety."

The werewolf scout bounded back down the twisting caves.

"Why did you want a tooth, Tsiga?" asked Rorgnar.

"For the handle of my goblin sword. It's almost the exact shape; if I can fit it as a pommel, this sword will be far better."

Cragillahan stopped in the centre of the path. He breathed out, then placed his hands palms-downward with the fingers splayed out. The walls of the cave grew further apart, and the sharp stones on the ground sunk into the floor of the cave, leaving a smooth surface. "Let's go," he said, after inspecting his handiwork. The chimney to the surface had crude footholds and handholds chipped into it. With his dagger, Cragillahan made them far deeper and larger, and also added some more. Tsiga flew up past him, and when he reached the top, he yelled down to Rorgnar, "Can you hurry up? There's thorns here!"

Once all the Mages were up, and Rorgnar had cleared the spiky bushes, they looked out upon a large field. The sun was setting, and a small brook ran through the meadow, meeting a larger stream by the edge.

"Where are we?" asked Ipus, looking around in wonderment.

"I'm not sure, but everything here is beautiful," replied Cragill.

“Well, I’m going to call the dragons. Don’t disturb me,” she said, taking off her backpack. She started singing, an amazing song wafting through the air, completely unlike the quick verse Cragillahan had heard her say at Twio’s hut.

*When the meadows burn  
And the creeks run dry  
That is when we’ll part  
Under an ash-filled sky.*

*When the magic leaves  
And my dragons die  
Those will be the times  
That my heart will cry.*

*When the sky goes dark  
And our deaths are nigh  
I will miss my friend  
The final dragonfly.*

*But in these dark times  
The end is not yet here  
So flap your lovely wings  
And now take to the air.*

*Above the verdant hills  
You have naught to fear  
Protect us from the night  
My dragons now come near.*

“That is the most beautiful and sad song I have ever heard. Your voice is more powerful than your magic,” said Cragillahan.

“My magic *is* my voice, and vice versa. I speak to the dragons, I sing to them, and they love me.”

“I can see how that could work,” said Cragill, a long-forgotten love of music suddenly flaring up in him.

Ipus sat down beside her backpack, getting out some food. “Let’s eat,” she said, biting into the bread. The others sat down, and she handed the loaf around. Cragill sparked a fire on a flat rock, and shaped it into a large dish. Rorgnar left the fire to fetch something, and came back holding a rabbit.

“I love this place. There’s food, water, and beauty—all the necessities of life.”

He unsheathed his beautiful Elvish knife and skinned the rabbit, which was then roasted over the fire. Cragillahan and Ipus fell asleep side by side next to the fire; Tsigia and Rorgnar laid down their heads on the opposite side.