

"Because, you pitiful excuse for a wizard," Attax seemed about to spit. "I wanted to make sure you couldn't refuse." The knife blade released it's touch of Raven's skin. A figure garbed in dark blue emerged from behind the giant, twirling a knife in-between her fingers. Her fingers! *It's a woman!* thought Raven. *A woman assassin?* Raven shook his head in wonderment.

"Oh, meet my other employ. This is Fada. Hired thug." Attax laughed when the wizard's would-be eyebrows narrowed. "Oh stop it, you look ridicules. She's in my service right now and won't harm, kill, mutilate, or whatever, till I say so. Right?" The faintest of nods was Fada's only response. "Right. So don't look so worried Raven."

"What's my part in this Attax?"

"Why, that ridiculously expensive art of yours. What you call.....eh...magic." Attax looked on the verge of spitting. Raven glared at him.

"You don't know a thing about magic." It wasn't a question. "If this is how you planned on getting my help, your doing it wrong." The grin on Fada's face made Raven cringe inwardly. "I mean, not that it wasn't a good idea..."

"Enough Raven. I get tired of listening to you snivel. Do you want in or not?"

"You still haven't told me what I'm getting out of this. An adventure isn't something you usually go searching for." The giant's grin covered his whole face.

"The Diamond Gate." The grin faded and his jaw dropped. "I thought you would be suprised. Your get whatever you want from the treasure room that it is supposedly in. If it's not in a room covered in gold, then I'll think of something."

"How can you be going after the Diamond Gate Attax? No one knows what it even looks like, much less how big it is or even where it is. Doesn't sound like a very good starting spot to me."

"So your in Raven?" Attax put great emphasis on the word 'in'. "Can't tell you much more if you ain't following me." The giant looked down at the table, seeming to consider the wood while his hand scratched small patterns into the table-top. Finally his head raised and he looked directly at Attax.

"I'm in."

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The outside of the Rolling River was dirty to say the least. The walls appeared not to have been washed in quite some time. Pausing to adjust his brown cap, Attax started to trudge down the street, weaving between carts and people. Pausing now and again to let his huge friend catch up, he looked at the town of Catlyn for the 20th

time that day. *Amazing that such a small town would hold so much treasure*. Shops lined both the streets and some were closing down in the late hour. Sounds could be heard from the inn they had just left, although it was hard to identify it with the sounds coming from merchants and the other common rooms and bars.

"What is it Attax?" Raven had come up behind him while he looked around the town. "You getting anxious?"

"No no. I'm just wondering why choose this town to hold the secret of the Gate." He shrugged uncomfortably in his thick woolen coat. "It just doesn't seem right." The giant grinned down at him and rubbed the top of his head.

"Don't worry. Hey if we get in trouble Fada's around somewhere right?" For the first time Attax noticed that Fada wasn't with them. Suppressing a shudder and wondering if he paid her enough, he started off down the street again, this time not pausing to wait for Raven.

"So where are we going now?" inquired Raven.

"Visit a man I found. An old geezer that supposedly traveled with Bael Rindig during his conquest of the western world."

"But that was over 100 years ago." Spluttered Raven. "How could he...of course! Magic! Finally, someone I can relate to in this filthy town."

"Don't get your hopes up Raven. He may just be some old guy trying to get some gold. 'A man with a good story is no different from a thief.' Take it from me Raven, they are one in the same." Raven grunted but had no response. They walked in silence across the street and down a row of shops that showed Knights fighting on the signs, tavern girls singing, and something that looked similar to a tomato. Armoires, Taverns, Grocery stands, all passed by as Attax and Raven walked through the center of the town.

Turning abruptly, Attax led them down a wide alley, big enough for both the giant and the man to walk side by side. Pausing by a wooden doorway partly eaten by bugs, Attax brushed his hand against his coat and came away with a dagger. Raven jerked, then drew his own dagger which would have looked like a short sword to any other man. Prudently putting his hand against the door, Attax pushed it open and dived inside. Head over heels he flipped, just coming short of the old wooden table. Whirling around in a circle, he stopped with the point of his dagger directed at the old man who sat facing him with a puzzled expression on his face. Glancing back he saw Raven finally come through the door. The giant had finally had to go on his knees to get through. Turning back to the old man he sheathed his knife.

"Good to see you Taren." said Attax. "And glad to see no one else with you. At least you kept to your part of the bargain." The old man coughed and cackled, spitting up what used to look like food. Leaning back in his chair he gave a dismissive gesture and two forms in the shadows melted away. Attax's eyes widened and he turned to Raven.

"Did you notice them Raven?" Attax inquired.

"Yeah."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oops." Turning away from Attax with a shrug, Raven concentrated on the old man. He could feel the immense power emanating from the mans inner being, *almost as much as I could hold* thought Raven.

Pulling a chair out for himself, Attax watched warily as the two older men studied each other. The fierce determination of Raven was met my the wise manner of the old man. Attax cleared his throat. Both eyes swiveled and Attax felt suddenly trapped, with no way out.

"Uh, could we continue? Please?" Attax asked tentatively. With a shrug and a nod Raven sat back down, with Taren just a few seconds behind. Suddenly Fada was next to Attax, making Taren curse and rise from his chair, his hands weaving in intricate patterns. Fada's hands had just let go of her knife and Attax watched it visibly slow in flight. Glancing at Raven, Attax saw his eyes slightly widen. Almost a mirror of what he must look like. When he returned his attention to Fada and Taren, he noticed that Fada now stood upside down. *Well, she's not exactly standing* Her bewildered expression told what she must have been feeling. Taren still stood, his hands outstretched. He started to turn them in circles and with each rotation Fada turned slowly in circles, with the dagger in front of her rotating in circles also.

"What is this Attax? I thought you would come alone. Not bring a novice wizard and a hired assassin." said Taren. Raven's eyes bulged and he looked ready to rise from his chair. Attax pushed him back with his hand.

"Deals change. I needed some extra help." Attax raised an eyebrow. "I'd offer you a job too, if I thought it would do any good." Taren gestured offhandedly and Fada flew through the air and into a wall on the other side of the building. Immediately coming to her feet, Fada drew another dagger. This one she kept poised and level at Taren's throat. Taren chuckled.

" 'Fraid that wouldn't help you deary." Taren said. Another gesture and the knife that Fada had thrown earlier sunk into the wall

about a inch above her left shoulder. Her eyes didn't even flicker toward it. She absently pulled it out and stuck it back inside her coat. Taren turned his attention back to Attax. "You would offer to take me along? How would you feel if I said yes?" Attax shrugged. Raven started to say something that sounded like an objection, but Attax quieted him with a stomp on his foot.

"Enough. You want to come with us Taren? Fine. I'll offer you the same I offered Raven. Anything out of the room the Gate is in." Attax folded his arms in front of himself.

"Ah but you forget that I'm the only one who knows where is it is. And let me tell you this. The room that has the Gate in it has rewards that you couldn't even see Attax." Spreading his arms wide, Taren stood up to his full height. "In that room lies the secret of Bael Rindig. The only spell book in the world that has the secrets of Necromancy!" And with that Raven fell off his chair and onto the floor.

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"Amias Gortan. Sounds like a common enough name to me." Attax had finally gotten Raven back into a chair, although it looked as if he was about to slide out of it. Attax continued, "Anyway he's supposedly just a myth." Taren raised a hand to stop Attax from rambling.

"Nay my friend. It was not that long ago that Rindig walked this world. A mere century has passed since his footsteps were heard throughout the land. The footsteps of the greatest necromancer in the world!"

"Uh....necromancy. Raising dead people. Great. Why would you want to do that?" *Besides* he thought to himself, *dead people have nothing worth stealing.*

"Imagine, a great army of men already dead. They can't be stopped because they can't be killed. Except by burning of course."

"Burning?"

"Yes, the fire seems to burn them completely away. Poof, nothing." Taran made a dismissive gesture with his hands. Looking at Raven he continued. "Anyway an army of undead could destroy the greatest forces of earth. Provided there wasn't a great fire or anything." Raven was moving his mouth but no words were coming out. Taran gave him a sniff and turned back to Attax.

"Well, where is it?" asked Attax. Taran swiveled his head so that he was only looking at Attax through one eye.

"I'll tell you when we get close to it. First off, we must go into the Westland. In doing so we must avoid those cursed little beasts the Gnomes. Rotten filth will steal everything you have and then come back and cut your throat, and for no reason except to see you die. Next, we'll have to cross the Dragon Tail Mountains. Having to face sheer rock cliffs in winter is not my idea of a good time so we better start withing the next week." Taran waved his arm in a gesture attempting to ward off flies. "Besides, we may need to pick up someone who knows the passes better than I."

"I thought you had answers to everything Taran," snickered Raven. Taran glared at him, then turned away without answering.

"We set off tomorrow, to search for the Diamond Gate."

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That night, as the party of Attax, Taren, and Raven were dreaming of riches and glory and so forth, a strange occurrence was happening outside Elderban. A power never felt in this part of the world was attempting to take shape. It started out as a sick greenish glow in the dark night sky. It turned a dark blue to match the heavens, then plunged into the earth. The undead began to rise. Reaching from their graves, the creatures rose from the earth, long arms, legs, claws, were freed of the earth but held by their sides, feeling the unknown intensity coarsing through their bodies. Animals, birds, people, all undead were caught up in the strange power. As quickly as it had came, the feeling was gone, blown in the breeze to somewhere else, leaving the broken bodies of the creatures lying wherever they had fallen.

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The next day, when the sun was high in the sky, the party of three set off toward the city of Genta to the East. Taran had a sickley old mule tied behind his house, which he was currently riding. Attax had a lare roan horse, which he wouldn't talk about where it came from. Raven had chosen to walk, since his long legs could easily keep pace with the horse and mule.

They set off in the late afternoon, attempting to cover as much ground before nightfall. Their supplies were modest, as they didn't want to attract attention from bandits and such.

As they began to make camp at the edge of a great meadow that night, Taran began unpacking food and other items out of a

small pouch, things that would never normally fit. That is, if it was a normal pouch.

He produced two rope loops, one of which he wrapped around his mules neck. He then grapped one of the smaller loops off the ground and wrapped it around his wrist. The other two loops he tossed to Attax. Attax put the large one around his horses head, and stood dumbly holding the smaller loop.

"Wrap it around your wrist." Taran said. In example he put his own on. His mule looked up, staring at Taran. It then came over and nuzzled Taran's outstretched hand, scratching his nose against it in the process.

"No chance of them running away now." said Taran, glancing at Attax again. He nodded and turned back to the meager fire while Attax secured his own loop. Raven was busy building the fire, breaking branches with his huge hands, then dropping them next to the small inferno. Taran watched for a while then curled into his blankets. Attax and Raven glanced at each other, an undistinguishable look on each others face, before lying down and falling asleep.

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The night was filled with restless sleep for Raven. Tossing and turning, he once rolled into the fire, which brought a stream of curses from the other two members of the party while he tried to put himself out. After the excitement had died down, Raven sat curled in his blankets again, not falling asleep. He looked at the other two forms, breathing quietly into the night.