

John Scott

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"Day of the Dragons"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 6 June 1983

Tiamat rears her ugly heads again as our band wends their way through a dense forest. Suddenly appearing overhead, she chases the group through trees and brush and bushes. Hiding inside hollow trees confuses her, but doesn't get rid of her-- Presto accidentally accomplishes that by pulling a chest full of treasure from his hat--and treasure is what Tiamat loves above all things.

Eric flings the treasure into a clearing on his shield, which returns to him, and the treasure attracts Tiamat. She grabs the chest and takes off for her lair--a greater success than the band had hoped for.

They make their way cautiously through the woods, coming to a peaceful looking lake. They pause to drink and wash up--when another dragon rears its head right in front of them!

But this dragon is different: He's a bronze dragon and he can talk! He tries to convince the group that he is harmless and good--and gives a pretty impressive demonstration of his magic abilities in doing so. He turns himself into a very cute and cuddly giant koala, which finally wins the troop over. Thus, Gerus the Bronze Dragon becomes their friend.

The good will doesn't last long, though, for while Gerus is still in the form of the koala, another dragon, this one a deadly green dragon attacks from the air--and carries away Bobby and Diana in its iron-grip claws! The green dragon is gone before

Gerus can reassume his natural form. Hank and the others are ready to take off after their friends, but Gerus talks them into waiting...

"Listen to him," the Dungeon Master says, standing on the water a distance out into the lake. Attacking a dragon in its lair, he tells them, is a tricky business at best. It will be necessary to obtain some special fortification first--which Gerus can help them find.

Gerus is reluctant to tell them how to find the special help the DM mentioned. It will cost them a friend! The band is willing to chance it to rescue Bobby and Diana.

Gerus directs them to a part of the wood where the Dyrads live. The Dryads, he tells them, can provide a flower called Dragon Bane which dulls the senses of most dragons except the very good ones.

They have a little trouble finding the Dryads--the wood creatures disguise themselves as trees, and can only be seen when they want to be seen. Eric is leaning on just such a tree when the Dryad there decides the time is right. He falls over as the tree disappears and the pretty sprite appears in its place. He's embarrassed, and the Dryad finds this charming.

She agrees to help the impatient heroes, and gives them the Dragon Bane...but only in exchange for Eric. And unless they return the Dragon Bane in one day, Eric will be turned irrevocably into a tree to dwell forever in the Dryad woods.

Eric doesn't like the idea, but peer pressure leaves him no choice. He stays, and the rest return to Gerus with the Dragon Bane. The magic flowers have no effect on the good dragon, and he flies them to the Green dragon's lair, where Bobby and

Diana are captive.

Beyond providing transportation, Gerus cannot fight the green dragon or otherwise interfere. The heroes are on their own and perform a rescue--with the help of the Dragon Bane which slows down but does not disable the evil dragon.

All looks good and Gerus is preparing to fly the band back to the Dryad when yet another dragon attacks, this one a dreaded black dragon. Gerus is involved this time--in self defense, the only way in which he can lawfully fight another dragon. He holds off the black dragon so the band can run for it. Two more black dragons loom on the horizon and Gerus is certain to be killed saving his new human friends.

Time is running out on Eric, though. He has already begun to sprout branches and roots--and he'll be lost to his friends forever unless they return soon...

Hank and the others know this, and it leaves them no choice but to abandon Gerus to the black dragons. Sheila thinks otherwise, as does Bobby, and they rush back to the scene of the fight despite Hank's orders to the contrary. To further complicate things, they've taken most of the Dragon Bane with them! Hank decides that he and the rest had better get to the Dryad and talk her into accepting the single blossom they have left in exchange for Eric's return.

Meanwhile, the daring duo assist Gerus. Bobby throws the weight of his club into the balance, distracting the black dragons, while Sheila drapes Gerus with her handful of Dragon Bane. It's all Gerus needs. He out-maneuvers the black dragons, and flies up, away from them.

Hank and the others, meanwhile, have their hands full. They cannot convince the Dryad to accept the single flower in exchange for Eric. Eric is looking more and more treelike--and more and more unhappy. Hank knows that they will soon have to head back the other way to rescue Sheila and Bobby--and heroically offers himself in exchange for Eric, making Eric promise he'll see to Sheila and Bobby's rescue. Eric agrees, the Dryad agrees, and it looks like Hank is going to be turned into a vegetable when Gerus flies into scene with the two obstreperous heroes on his back--and the Dragon Bane draped around his neck. The Dryad is licked--and both Eric and Hank are freed of their obligation.

The band--Gerus included--shows no mercy in kidding Eric about his tree-branch arms and root-feet, much to Eric's chagrin and their (and our) amusement.

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"Spell of the Ice Wizard"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 6 June 1983

Hotly pursued by what seems to be a horde of Gibberlings, with Venger's own Shadow Demon urging them on, our band of heroes run for what seems to be miles. They climb into foothills, then into higher mountains, running into a group of Gibberlings here, evading another group there.

Finally, the Gibberlings give up the pursuit--and for good reason: The band has passed the snow line. They are in the outer reaches of a very frozen mountain range.

Pulling their garments closer around them, they move forward. They must continue into the mountains for behind them lies the innumerable and hungry horde of Gibberlings.

The Dungeon Master steps from behind a snowdrift--dressed in warm furs. The Ice Wizard, he tells them, may provide some clue that will help them escape--and perhaps bring them closer to home.

It is not long before they meet their first yeti--a surprise visit indeed! The band scatters, outrunning and outsmarting the fierce snow beast. Hank, Sheila and Bobby evade the monster with Bobby bringing down a piece of the glacier, Hank melting it with a well placed arrow, and the giant ice block re-freezing with the yeti inside it. It holds the beast long enough for the three heroes to circle back and find their friends.

What they find is incredible--Diana and the others have figured out how to ride the great, prehistoric mammoths that inhabit the region. And the big beasts make first class transportation!

The only problem with riding the great woolly things is... there's no way to steer them. And once aboard, our band of heroes must ride to the end of the line.

The end of the line is Glacier Peak, the home of the Ice Wizard. The Ice Wizard knew of the presense of the kids, and summoned the mammoths to bring them to him.

It seems the Ice Wizard has need of their services: His power is dwindling and can only be replenished by means of the North Star--an ice-blue stone of magic properties.

Normally our band wouldn't merely be doing such big favors for perfect strangers, but the Ice Wizard is virtually holding them hostage. They cannot return the way they came--the Gibberlings lie that way. They cannot find their way out of the frozen tundra unless given the secret passes by the Ice Wizard. And they'll never find out what he can tell them of their own, home world unless they help.

They have no choice but to mount their mammoths--which the Ice Wizard tells them how to control--and to seek the North Star. It sounds simple...

But between the Ice Wizard's Glacier Peak and the ice cave where the North Star is to be found are Ice Lizards and the Frost Men who currently possess the North Star.

An attack by ice lizards deprives them of their transportation--for mammoths, despite their size, are easily frightened by flying creatures. The last bit of the trail is covered on foot--finding the ice cave to be a dwelling of the Frost Men.

Sheila's talents come in handy at first. She manages to

reach the North Star--but she's captured and frozen by the Frost Men. It takes some cunning--and a few well placed arrows from Hank's bow to melt enough ice to flood the Frost Men from their lair, free Sheila, and obtain possession of the North Star.

With the North Star in hand, the Ice Wizard is already regaining his power--and magically whisks the band back to his Glacier Peak just as the Frost Men recover from their flood enough to surround the band of heroes.

The Ice Wizard keeps his promises--giving them a map out of the snowy mountains, and information about their home world. The information is disappointing though: The Ice Wizard cannot transport them home, even at full power (much to Eric's frustration), but he can give them a glimpse in the window of ice--enough to reassure the heroes that home still exists, if only they could reach it!

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"Master Thief of Baal-Dur"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 6 June 1983

Our band of heroes find themselves in a strange town--on a misty night on streets that would be dismal at best, even on a bright day. They are in the town of Baal-Dur, a hamlet which has forgotten what a bright day looks like.

The Dungeon Master appears, nearly frightening all of the already edgy band out of their wits. He warns them that thieves can be both honorable and dishonorable, bad and good in this world. He disappears, leaving the band disturbed--and set to take themselves out of town as quickly as possible.

A fast exit is not to be, though. A hooded figure beckons them to follow. He knows a place, he says, where they can stay in safety until morning. The band doesn't want to follow--but the hooded figure convinces them that he is a friend.

He takes them to a tavern where there are just a few individuals huddled over their tables. The dark men pay no attention to the new guests, and the warm fire begins to put our heroes a bit more at ease.

Too much at ease, perhaps...No sooner are the weary wanderers dozing than their host slips off his hood--revealing himself as the arch-devil Dispater. He beckons and the evil thief Fox Fingers silently and skilfully relieves the band of their magical weapons.

The band is suddenly alerted by Uni's nudges and whines--too late. Their devices are gone and they are surrounded by

Dispater's men-at-arms. There's a wild melee as our heroes try to defend themselves with the implements at hand--pots and pans and the like. They're unsuccessful against the armed men and they are taken captive---but not before Sheila manages to escape with her magic cloak (the one thing Fox Fingers missed), and not before Presto, who hid during the entire scene manages to escape notice of his absense.

Hank and the others are shackled and led off, Dispater's reward for helping Fox Fingers. As for the evil thief himself, he's off to Venger with the magic goods to collect his reward.

Neither Sheila nor Presto knows the other has escaped. Sheila steals out of the tavern while Presto merely hides until the others have gone. Presto's without his hat, but he could still cast a spell or two, if he knew how.

Presto finally gets up the courage to sneak out of the tavern into the alley. He's carefully making his way, trying to avoid discovery when he runs into something, someone!

It seems that Presto is caught--but it's only Sheila. They're overjoyed to find each other and hatch a plan to recover the magic implements.

Sheila knows she's no match for Fox Fingers, and Presto reminds her that there are good thieves, too. They set off to seek a "good" thief.

The rest of our band are being taken farther and farther away--and farther and farther down into Dispater's realm. The dim region is filled with all sorts of horrible looking shades and zombies. The captives try an escape--and wind up imprisoned in a box of ice conjured up by Dispater himself.

Sheila and Presto are having somewhat better luck. They learn from an old woman of the Master Thief of Baal-Dur, called simply "the Master." If he's inclined, they're told, he may help them--and if the reward is great enough.

They find the Master Thief, and he listens to them long enough to become intrigued. He's mildly interested in taking on a protegee--Sheila--but he's more interested in getting the best of Fox Fingers and steeling his stash of precious gems. He agrees to help them find and outsmart Fox Fingers in return for their help in stealing the evil thief's jewels.

The Master knows a short-cut on the path that Fox Fingers has taken, and it's a short cut, indeed. It takes them right to where Venger is waiting for his mercenary thief to hand over the stolen magic weapons. Master Thief shows them how to evade Venger and set a trap for Fox Fingers.

Dispater is, during this time, setting up the ritual that will irrevocably make the captives his servants. Diana has figured out a way to use her gymnastic ability to get over the wall of ice. She grabs a large hammer and tosses it back over with tremendous difficulty. Hank, Eric and Bobby together wield it to break a hole in the ice wall and escape.

The ensuing chase is on-going while...

Fox Fingers is diverted by Sheila using her magic cape. The Master Thief meanwhile steals the magic weapons...and the keys to Fox Fingers treasury. He's got what he wants and fades into the night. Sheila and Presto are on their own. Presto, for a change, pulls out the right stuff--a race horse to take them swiftly on their way. They head off after their captive friends.

They arrive in Dispater's realm just as their friends are about to be re-captured. With the magic implements back in hand, the band is able to escape the men-at-arms and render Dispater's efforts to stop them useless.

They stop briefly to rest once they're a safe distance from Baal-Dur and from Dispater's realm. They've escaped Venger's evil plot once again--and Sheila demonstrates a little trick the Master Thief taught her by pinching Eric's favorite argyle socks--the last vestige of his earthly clothing--right off his feet!

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"City of the Githyanki"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 6 June 1983

Venger himself, astride his steed Nightmare, has cornered our heroes at the base of a sheer rock cliff. Even Diana's gymnastic abilities cannot scale the wall. The band succeeds in tripping Nightmare and throwing Venger from the nasty horse's back. It's not much, but it gives them enough time to make it to an opening in the rock face.

The opening is a tunnel which disappears into the dark depths beyond. Sheila, Hank, and Presto cautiously move down the tunnel to see what lies ahead, but not cautiously enough.

The tunnel rapidly drops steeply down, a chute from which there is no return once you begin the descent. The three scouts disappear in the darkness...shouting warnings to their comrades not to follow.

The three left behind are in a dilemma. They know there is danger, but they cannot simply abandon their friends. Diana and Bobby want to charge ahead anyway while Eric argues against it pretty steadfastly. Into the middle of their argument steps the Dungeon Master.

Venger, meanwhile, is satisfied. He has them all right where he wants them. He will not, himself, venture into the tunnel. He knows better. Instead, he sends the Shadow Demon to ensure that the heroes meet the fate they should meet at the bottom of the chute. Shadow Demon goes about his work.

The Dungeon Master, meanwhile, advises the three not to follow their companions--they have more important work to do.

Hank, Sheila, and Presto must face the dreaded City of the Githyanki alone, but Diana, Bobby, and Eric can find them an unlikely ally, the one alone whom the Githyanki fear. DM disappears into the shadows as he arrived as Shadow Demon passes.

Shadow Demon feels a presense, but Diana, Bobby, and Eric hide in the shadows, and the Demon passes on.

The three must find the unlikely ally, the one the Githyanki fear, and they must do it quickly! Their quest leads them to Ringlerun, a good wizard, who agrees to accompany them--not to the City of the Githyanki, for even he cannot venture there--but to the ally they seek. He leads them to a great underground cavern and points out the ally: the horrible Mind Flayer, Sorren. An unlikely ally indeed!

Sheila, Hank and Presto, however, could use any ally, considering the trouble they're in. The City of the Githyanki is a dismal little hamlet built around a foreboding castle ruled by the Lich Queen, an ugly, cadaverous witch of tremendous power. They've managed to remain undetected, despite some close calls, but they can't get back up the chute.

And they may not even remain undetected for long...Shadow Demon is going about his evil master's bidding, and has gone to alert the Githyanki and their hideous queen of the intruders' presense. It isn't long before a general alarm is sounded, and the Githyanki are out in force searching for the trespassers.

Ringlerun cannot directly interfere with the destinies of others, but he can play tricks on evil creatures. He assumes the form of a Githyanki and presents himself to the Mind Flayer, Sorren. Sorren is incensed, but Ringlerun convinces the creature that

he is there only to betray the Lich Queen and Sorren's sworn enemies, the Githyanki. Sorren accepts this with relish...it gives him reason enough to attack the Githyanki, which he can control by telepathy if he can avoid the magical power of the Lich Queen.

Ringlerun's done his part. He warns the trio of the power and treachery of the Mind Flayer, and tells them that their best weapon against him is a bright light--which Sorren detests. Diana, Eric, and Bobby swallow their fear and follow their "unlikely (and unknowing) ally into the tunnel.

Hank, Presto and Sheila are using every power they possess to stay just a half-step ahead of their pursuers. Hank has cleverly worked it so the bands of Githyanki wind up pursuing themselves for a beat. But that won't last long, and the little band are running out of tricks.

They suddenly find themselves cornered by Githyanki, and no tricks of any kind will work this time. They're captured and taken before the Lich Queen herself. The disgusting cadaver of a witch freezes them with a mere wave of her hand while she considers what she will do with them once she finds out who sent them and why.

Sorren makes his slimy way down the chute into the City Below. The Githyanki he encounters first are taken completely by surprise. They haven't seen Sorren in centuries. Diana, Bobby, and Eric meanwhile correctly deduce where their friends are, and set out to rescue them. They distract the Lich Queen by sounding the alarm that the Mind Flayer has arrived. She marshals her powers to meet Sorren, and releases her hold on the humans.

They find a secret stairway from the castle up to their own level and follow it. They're aware before long that they are being pursued--and the faster they run (they can only go in one direction) the faster the footsteps behind them rise and fall.

They reach the surface, prepared to see the Githyanki--but instead face Sorren himself. Sorren reaches out with mind-waves, nearly paralyzing the whole band, but Diana manages to squeeze out the words to Hank: Fire an arrow, a flare arrow, quick!

It takes a superhuman effort, but Hank does it--and the brilliant light freezes the angry Sorren. It's not permanent, but it's long enough for Ringlerun to "detain" Sorren while they escape.

Escape they do, thankful for Ringlerun's good magic, and thankful to be leaving the City of the Githyanki.

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DUNGEON AND DRAGONS

"The Crystal Forest"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 5 June 1983

After narrowly escaping a swarm of giant bats, our heroes find themselves in a thoroughly dismal looking forest. It's burned out, charred, dead. But there are people there...people of the once beautiful Crystal Forest who have lost their magic powers.

They cross the border into the forest at a run--feeling a strange tingling as they do so. When they attempt to turn back the way they came, once the giant bats have gone, they find they cannot. There's an invisible barrier. Like it or not, they are in the forest to stay.

The Dungeon Master appears--on the other side of the barrier, since he cannot penetrate it willingly--and explains in his usual cryptic fashion that all living things love beauty. It's simply that the idea of what is beautiful and what is not varies from person to person--or from monster to monster, as the case may be.

The band is forced to go into the forest to seek their escape. When they learn of the Forest People, they learn that Venger had once tricked one of their kind, Nestor, into stealing the source of their beauty and power: the Crystal of Light. Only its return can restore the Forest to its life and beauty--and lower the barrier that keeps them prisoner in the dead woods.

But Nestor, with his treacherous deed, has turned evil, and guards the Crystal of Light in Nestor Caverns. He is himself guarded by the Wyvern--a dragon-like, deadly beast.

Our heroes are not looking to do good deeds for the deed's sake. They just want to get out of the forest! Pushed forward by their need to free themselves from the enchanted prison, they seek Nestor's Cavern and the Wyvern.

They set a trap for the Wyvern--and it works for the moment. Wyverns, however, do not often work alone, and this one is no exception. Our band is surprised to find another Wyvern behind them! They hide inside the entrance to the cave where the huge Wyvern cannot get at them--but Bobby and Diana cook up a little scheme to go after the second Wyvern themselves so the others can go about their mission.

They're gone before Hank and the others can stop them. Diana and Bobby draw the second Wyvern off all right--right after them like the vicious, angry creature it is! But even Bobby's club and Diana's staff and gymnastic abilities are no match for the beast, and things look very bad for the two impetuous heroes.

Hank and the others, faced with the choice of letting Bobby and Diana meet the Wyvern alone or going on with their freedom mission, make the obvious choice: help Bobby and Diana.

The unexpected attack from the others takes the Wyvern off guard--a nice reversal for our heroes. They bind the Wyvern with some of Hank's magic arrows--and hurry into the cave to recover the Crystal of Light before the two captured Wyverns can screech for assistance from their gruesome brethren.

Obtaining the Crystal of Light is no easy task: They must find their way through the maze-like tunnels, only to confront Nestor's 'pets', the Doppelgangers.

The Doppelgangers can form themselves into the likeness of any humanoid creature--which creates havoc for our heroes. A Doppelganger-Hank gives foolish orders, a Doppelganger-Presto malignantly pulls unwelcome creatures out of his hat. And a number of Doppelganger-Nestors confuse our heroes as to the identity of the real Nestor.

Uni comes in handy here: She can detect which are the real Doppelgangers--and shies from them as she would never shy from her friends and companions. The band uses her to detect the real Nestor, once they realize her sensory ability.

Having detected Nestor, they are able to subdue him. He's a weakling; his only strength deriving from the evil of Venger and the Doppelganger body-guards. Once Nestor is captured, the Doppelgangers would not attack our heroes, and the band can carry out their mission.

The only step remaining is to return the Crystal of Light to its pedestal in the forest. The band has to split up for this so they can continue to hold Nestor as captive and hostage and simultaneously restore the Crystal. The tactic works, Nestor's power is gone, and the forest is returned to its crystalline beauty.

Our heroes have unlocked their prison, and have made valuable allies in their below-world adventures.

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"The Mines of Minosia"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 5 June 1983

We open with our band narrowly escaping a band of mercenary trolls by ducking into a secluded cave. It was the right move--for the trolls and for their employers, the Mine Ogres. But it looks pretty bad for our heroes as they are surprised, disarmed, and dragged off by the Ogres to work in the Mines of Minosia.

They descend deeper into the earth than anyone would dream possible, and are confronted by the horrible sight of dozens of captives laboring to mine the precious metal Norgacite--the metal which gives the Master of Norg his magical powers.

The band of heroes must regain their own magical talismans and escape--and all they have is Presto and his hat (it didn't look like a weapon, so the Ogres didn't take it from him.) He tries to cast a spell on the Ogres to put them to sleep. He fails, but he did succeed in casting an unexpected spell--the spell of darkness. All the lights in the mine go out, leaving our heroes visible only by the heat of their bodies (visible to us as dim red figures).

They find their way to the weapons, reclaim them, and start out of the cavernous mines. They're almost out when...

A vicious band of Troglodytes attack. But they're not after our heroes; they want the Mine Ogres and the valuable Norgacite. Our little band could simply avoid the attackers except that the Troglodytes have infra-red vision, and can see in the dark. Their only hope is to delay the Troglodytes long enough so that they can escape. Hank orders the others to run for it while he does just that--with Bobby (and Uni) disobediently staying with him.

Diana leads the others out, pursued by two Mine Ogres through the Minosian swamp which surrounds the Black Castle, the domicile of the Master of Norg. Sheila and a reluctant Eric create a diversion which throws them off the trail.

Suddenly, there is a terrific cheering from the mines. The two Ogres realize that the Troglodytes have won the battle and they rush off to the Black Castle to warn their Master.

It looks pretty dim for Hank and Bobby if the Troglodytes really have won, but it's pointless for them all to rush back to the mines to save them. Diana talks them into seeking the solution in the Black Castle itself--a course nobody seems to like.

Finally Sheila volunteers her stealth to get into the castle alone while the others stand guard outside.

In the Castle, Torbolt is listening angrily to the two Mine ogres. He is a giant Warlord, able to use the magical Pool of Vision which is powered by the Norgacite. He already knows of the defeat at the Mine and plans to use the Pool of Vision to direct a counter attack.

Sheila overhears this--and plans to use the Pool of Vision herself to locate Hank, Bobby and Uni before the Ogres can muster their attack. She uses her stealth to evade Torbolt and get to the Pool. In it she sees many visions--for the Pool responds to its user's thoughts. She sees visions of home, then clears her head and concentrates on the Mine. Finally, she finds Hank and Bobby--in chains, captives of the victorious Troglodytes.

Sheila, in her impetuous fashion, decides to return to the Mines alone. She finds Hank's and Bobby's weapons and, with Uni's

help, returns them to the captives. They escape from their bonds, fight their way past two Troglodyte guards, and go to join the others hiding near the Castle walls--only to find them confronted by Mine Ogres and by Torbolt himself.

Bobby uses his magic club to bring down a portion of the Castle wall--right between the band of heroes and the threatening Minosians. They use the time this buys them to escape--and to get as far away from the Black Castle and from the Mines of Minosia as they can.

Sheila starts to tell the others about the visions she saw in the Pool, but refrains, not at all sure of what she really saw. She just files it away in her quiet fashion for future use. It's been one close call after another, but they've escaped--to continue their journey.

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"Yugol and the Curse of Stone"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 5 June 1983

Our band of heroes is being chased by a dreaded Gryphon onto a slender rope bridge. There is no way to go but across--the drop is thousands of feet! The Gryphon catches up...chews through the rope...the bridge collapses, and it looks like a quick end to our story.

Diana's gymnastic ability saves them from destruction, though they are left clinging to the bridge now dangling from one side of the chasm. They climb up to safety--and to a meeting with the Dungeon Master. He gives them a charm against stone (though no one can figure out why they need such a charm,) and warns them to stay together if the charm is to protect them all.

They find themselves in the Land of the Tolpits and of their king, Yugol. Yugol, it turns out, has been turned to stone by the evil sorceress Skylla, but the curse, and the peril for our heroes, doesn't stop there.

Part of the curse is that whatever Yugol looks at also turns to stone. Surrounding his little stone body are "statues" of other unfortunates. He is stone so he can't close his eyes and protect his people. All he can do is talk in a very muffled voice--and weep. This would present no danger for our charmed heroes but for Sheila, impetuously running ahead to "scout" for the band, out of the protective circle of the charm, and into Yugol's gaze. Sheila turns instantly to stone!

The rest of our heroes must now seek the dreaded Skylla and reverse the spell to release Sheila and Yugol. They quickly reach the border of the Land of the Tolpits--and find it guarded by a Sandman.

They soon learn that the charm against stone does not work on the Sandman's powers, and Eric and Bobby are put to sleep. They're not hurt, but the sleep is irreversible for a definite period of time. Diana, Hank, and Presto must move on without them.

As they approach Skylla's tower, they run into her henchman, the Gargoyle. Hank, Diana, and Presto are prepared to fight if they must (since Presto can't seem to pull anything helpful out of his hat) but they are no match for the Gargoyle alone. It seems pretty dark when the Gargoyle inexplicably turns and runs--into the winding staircase leading up to Skylla's tower.

The tower is a narrow, cave-like dwelling, with a feeble old woman sitting by the hearth. She seems kindly and lulls Diana and Presto into relaxing, though Hank remains suspicious, on guard. She entices them to sit with her and when they do...she turns into her natural form: Skylla, the beautiful, evil sorceress.

Skylla materializes a glimmering, golden cage around them, trapping them, and leaves the Gargoyle--waiting in the shadows--to guard them.

In the meantime, Eric and Bobby wake from their induced slumber and fly on Eric's shield to Skylla's tower--not without some comments

from Eric about his having to save the day. They surprise the Gargoyle, Presto manages to trigger a release on their enchanted cage, and together they imprison the Gargoyle in his own mistress's trap.

Skylla returns just as our heroes are about to sneak their way out of the chamber, flies into a rage, and begins the Stone Curse. Presto, in a panic, holds up the tiny charm, covering his eyes, and the curse magically is deflected by the charm back at Skylla--who turns to stone from her own Curse.

Having defeated Skylla and broken the Curse, they high-tail it back to the Land of the Tolpits to find a tremendous celebration with Sheila and Yugol returned to normal. Hank lectures Sheila about running ahead and not listening to the Dungeon Master and Sheila, with her fingers crossed, promises never to do it again.

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

"Janapurna and the Stallions of Hokar"

Story Premise by Richard Merwin - 5 June 1983

Our heroes are running--not from human or half-human antagonists this time--but from two fearsome, winged stallions. They're black and evil looking, and their breath withers anything it touches.

They run into a little clearing in the rather craggy, dead looking terrain, in which rests a smallish hovel. They creep up to investigate and see only an old man bending over a cauldron. The old man gives them refuge, and just when all seems well...

The old man shows his true form, changing himself into Kelek, the evil wizard and lacky of Venger. It's all too sudden, too swift for the band of heroes to do anything about it--and Kelek works a magic spell that winds them up on another plane!

Our heroes don't realize what's happened yet. They all still look normal to each other, but they are in a different place--no longer the hovel, but instead a charred, dead looking wood. And the only other thing that's different is that Bobby and Uni are missing.

But that's only the immediate, obvious difference--for the remaining band can hear Bobby and Uni calling for them--and they're not far away. Their voices sound close enough to touch them, but they are not in sight.

They yell for Bobby, but he can't even hear them--so either Bobby's in another plane, or they are...

The voice of the Dungeon Master joins them--for he cannot join them in the flesh. They are on an astral plane, meaning they are spirits who cannot be seen or heard from the real material world. Presto finds this fascinating, but nobody is amused. They are farther from home than ever--and they must find their own way out of the astral plane.

They wander for a beat, searching for some clue, some way out. It isn't long before they hear, rather than see, their clue. A haunting, ethereal song lilts across the barren hills. Hank, Presto and Eric find themselves "enchanted" by it--almost hypnotized. And when several Zombies cross their path, the three boys are uninterested.

It's up to Sheila and Diana to rescue the boys from certain destruction, which they do, using their magic implements.

The two girls have to virtually drag their male companions onward. They cross a murky stream and the hauntingly beautiful song becomes more distinct--and the three boys fall even more under its spell.

Bobby and Uni are meanwhile trying to find a way to either get into the astral plane or to rescue their comrades from it. He decides, in true Bobby fashion, to face Kelek directly and get him to release the spell. He fails in this--not being anything near a match for the evil wizard--and winds up in a cage until Kelek decides what to do with him. Kelek ignores the "mere unicorn".

While Bobby is getting himself in trouble, the band of astral plane captives find the source of the siren-like melody: the

beautiful enchanted princess Janapurna. She's under the spell of another of Venger's evil minions, the sorcerer Hokar. Hokar is long since dead, so there is no recourse there.

The boys are truly enchanted by the beautiful princess, each trying to impress her in their own way. And they don't have to look far to find a way to do just that.

The winged, death-breathing Stallions of Hokar--the very same stallions that chased them into Kelek's grasp--are the key to both Janapurna's and our heroes' dilemmas. The stallions can traverse both the material and astral planes--anyone riding them can do the same. It's the way out for our heroes, and will break the spell on Janapurna.

Our five heroes find and barely manage to tame the terrifying horses and ride them with Janapurna out of the astral plane.

They must still find Bobby and Uni, and that means they must face Kelek. Uni turns up, frantic for Bobby's safety, and leads them back to Kelek's hovel. Janapurna distracts the wizard while they free Bobby, and gives Presto time to snatch a magic spell from Kelek's spell book. It works, much to Presto's amazement and the wizard is rendered the powerless old man we first saw.

Janapurna returns to her people, bidding the band farewell. Hank, Presto, and Eric, though released from her song's spell, are still humorously "enchanted" by the Princess (much to Bobby's disgust and the two girls' poorly disguised jealousy.)

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