

ReFUSION

Tale of the Oracle

by
T. James Belich

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CHARACTERS

SHALLA (F)

Who in this tale portrays:

TROGALLA, first of the oreads
LARSYLYS, first of the great cats
GRINISHRA, queen of the dragons
HAKOOP, of the changelings
A GRYPHON, Ouway's elder
MALOWAY, of the dryads of the Eldest Wood
A DRAHK, of Jorvay's people

HATRESH (M)

Who in this tale portrays:

LIAMB THE LIGHT
RHIHANSA, a great cat
ELOHN, leader of the dryads of the Eldest Wood
A HUMAN, of the plains
AN OREAD, of the northern kin
ARDALE, lord of men
JORVAY, king of the drahk
YEVRAH, of the changelings

COLDASH (M)

Who in this tale portrays:

UNAYN, first of the dryads
EL'NORAN, first of men
WINDHAIL, first of the gryphons
OUWAY, a gryphon
THRENGAL, king of the oreads
A HUMAN, of Ardale's men
RESHAL, human warrior of the plains

E'DEL (F)

Total Roles: 4 (2 Female and 2 Male)

Production History

ReFUSION was first performed in the Bethel College Black Box Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota on October 2nd and 3rd, 1998. It was directed by Brian Laurelle House with the following cast:

SHALLA	Kimberly Treague
HATRESH	Cory Tiesel
COLDASH	Jaron Burdick
E'DEL	Katherine Juul

Running Time

Approximately 80 to 90 minutes

Technical Requirements

There are no fixed technical requirements for ReFUSION; the sets, lights, costumes, and so on may be as simple or as complex as desired. One or two large trunks are recommended for use as minimal set pieces (see SETTING below). While most of the objects referred to in the script may be mimed, the suggested props are listed below.

Suggested Prop List

Oracle of Wisdom (separates into 5 pieces)

Dagger or small sword

Acting block (black)

Swords (2)

Small chest filled with treasure

SETTING

A group of three traveling PLAYERS (of humankind) have arrived to share the tale of the Oracle of Wisdom. The acting space contains various props and costume pieces used by the PLAYERS to portray their various roles. One or two large trunks, used to carry the PLAYERS' belongings from place to place, can also be seen. In addition to their role as storage devices, the trunks also function as minimal set pieces, providing the PLAYERS with physical objects to stand on top of, hide behind, or use in whatever other creative ways may aid in the telling of their tale. Before they start their story, the PLAYERS wander about checking the placement of their props and costumes and mingle with audience. A signal from one of the PLAYERS prompts them to begin.

HATRESH: In the beginning there was LIAMB, and his light alone shone forth into the darkened void. And LIAMB decreed that in this void there should form a world without a name. "For this world shall be under my name, and no other shall give their name to any land within it until a great sacrifice is made unto mine."

SHALLA: And so into this new world LIAMB the Light placed five races and gave to each their special gifts. First in the nameless world LIAMB made the dryads, people of the trees and forests, hills and valleys. (*HATRESH creates a dryad from COLDASH.*) And LIAMB gave them the gifts of wisdom and long life so that they might guide all other races in his will.

HATRESH: (*To COLDASH*) "You, Unayn, I create as first of all living beings within this world." (*COLDASH kneels to HATRESH.*)

COLDASH: "All hail LIAMB! Creator of all underneath the sun and all above! Let your voice be always in my ear and I shall heed it well."

SHALLA: But LIAMB knew that his voice would often be but dimly heard within the world, and so he created the Oracle of Wisdom. (*HATRESH creates the Oracle of Wisdom and presents it to COLDASH.*)

HATRESH: "Let this always be a light to show your way. So long as the races I create remain whole, so shall this oracle. Take heed that it is not broken! For though it may again be reforged, its days would not then continue without end."

SHALLA: Next LIAMB made the humans, the first of which he called El'Noran, and gave to them the gift of wonder. (*HATRESH creates a human from COLDASH.*)

HATRESH: "For though their lives shall be the briefest of all, they shall be capable of the greatest joys."

COLDASH: Following the humans came the oreads, a strong and sturdy people, carved from the living roots of the mountains. (*HATRESH creates an oread from SHALLA.*) The art of all crafts was in them, most of all the fashioning of the stones and metals from the depths of the earth. (*SHALLA kneels to HATRESH.*)

SHALLA: "To you, LIAMB, we offer all the works that shall be made by our hands."

HATRESH: "Use them well, Trogalla, and see that your hands turn to no evil task." For LIAM knew where evil would first be born into the world. LIAM the Light then made two last races: The great cats and the wingèd gryphons, and to both he gave the gifts of speech and reason such as the other races possess. (*HATRESH creates a lion from SHALLA and a gryphon from COLDASH.*) "To the great cats, most of all the lions, king of beasts, I give the dominion of the wilds and all the lesser beasts therein. To the gryphons I give the dominion of the sky, and all other

creatures in the air shall be under them." (SHALLA *and* COLDASH *kneel to* HATRESH.)

COLDASH: Windhail, first of gryphons...

SHALLA: ...and Larsylys, first of cats, also pledged their allegiance to LIAMB. "The cats of the mountains and all the beasts of the wild are yours."

COLDASH: "And so are all the untamed skies which we shall fill to the world's end!"

HATRESH: Thus LIAMB placed his five races of light into the world and gave to each the warning that they should follow the dryads, whom he had placed over them. "For they, in turn, shall heed my wisdom through the oracle I have given them."

SHALLA: When all the wonders of the world were crafted, LIAMB rested and returned to his place between. Thus the history of the world began.

COLDASH: Now there was of yet no evil in the world, and the five races grew and prospered, remaining as one in friendship.

HATRESH: But in the living heart of the mountains, where the oreads dwelt and fashioned great works beyond words, the heart of one grew troubled. (SHALLA *is seen forging the first blade.*)

SHALLA: Laboring deep in earthen forges, Trogalla toiled over a work not in the wisdom of the dryads, but always in the fears of LIAMB the Light. "For why should we craft only what the minds of the dryads devise? There are shapes and designs that even they with their oracle do not see."

HATRESH: So it was in the mountain depths that Trogalla strayed to darker thoughts. (SHALLA *admires the finished work.*)

SHALLA: With a purpose that even he did not suspect, Trogalla forged the first blade. Discontent grew within him, gnawing at his heart, and a hunger began to burn for which none yet had a name.

HATRESH: "It shall be called envy. And from its seed a dark tree shall grow, its shadows long."

COLDASH: El'Noran, the first of men, perceived the shadow on Trogalla's heart. "Your thoughts are troubled, my friend, what brings you to this sadness?"

SHALLA: "Five races LIAMB formed beneath the sun, but he gave the Oracle of Wisdom to only one: The dryads. All other races have been placed under their thumb!"

COLDASH: "The dryads have been given their part in this world, as we have. We are not slaves. All races have been made equal in the eyes of LIAMB."

SHALLA: "But not treated so! Why should we not be free to consult the oracle as the dryads are? Must LIAMB speak to us only through them?"

COLDASH: "Be wary of where such thoughts may take you. We have been friends since the beginning, and I fear the shadow which now creeps upon your heart."

SHALLA: "If you are my friend, then aid me now. Let us consult the oracle for ourselves and learn firsthand what wisdom it holds."

COLDASH: "Whatever you wish to ask the oracle, Trogalla, why should the dryads not consult it in the proper fashion? Or do you have questions you do not wish for them to hear?"

SHALLA: (*Angry*) "My questions are my own! How do I know the dryads shall not hide the oracle's true answer from me?"

HATRESH: Long El'Noran sought to dissuade Trogalla from this path, but the oreads are as firm as the stone they hew. Once their mind is set, there is no altering it.

COLDASH: "If you must consult the oracle for yourself, then do it. But go at your own peril. Friends we may be, I shall not break this law with you."

HATRESH: Trogalla found the Oracle of Wisdom in the Eldest Wood where it lay unguarded, for none yet suspected treachery. Greed awoke within Trogalla and he coveted it.

SHALLA: "For why should it not be time for another race to be the keeper of the oracle?"

HATRESH: (*Loud and bold*) "Because the will of LIAMB the Light is against it!" (*Silence*)

COLDASH: A hushed silence fell over all the world, for all knew that a sacred law had been broken. Unayn knew this to be true as the oracle's voice reached him from afar. (*COLDASH becomes UNAYN and rushes into the oracle chamber.*) "Who dares consult the oracle without due right?" (*He sees SHALLA.*) "Speak, Trogalla, why have you done this?"

SHALLA: "I desired no more than to speak to the oracle with my own voice."

COLDASH: "Any answers you sought we dryads would have divined for you. Why then do you break LIAMB's one commandment?"

HATRESH: Trogalla gazed deep into the oracle, consumed with desire for the wondrous object before him.

SHALLA: "It is mine, I shall keep it!" (SHALLA *stands between COLDASH and the oracle, brandishing the blade.*)

COLDASH: "The oracle belongs to all. Depart from this place in peace and you shall be forgiven."

SHALLA: A cold and evil light came into Trogalla's eyes as Unayn spoke, and in that moment he knew the purpose of the blade he had wrought. (SHALLA *stabs COLDASH.*)

COLDASH: "Cursèd be you, Trogalla, for you have forever slain the peace between our peoples! You have shed the first innocent blood. May LIAMB deal justly with you!" (He *"dies."*)

HATRESH: "The peace of my new world has been shattered! With this act the five races of light shall be split asunder and with them my oracle!" (HATRESH *breaks the oracle into five pieces.*) "Five pieces for five races it shall be. Take one, Trogalla, in payment of your deed."

COLDASH: Trogalla obeyed, but the object of his desire had now become his bane. (SHALLA *picks up one piece of the oracle, but the touch is painful.*)

HATRESH: "It shall always cause you pain, and no rest shall you find until at last it is taken from you. For one day it shall be reclaimed and the oracle shall be whole again."

SHALLA: "Curses to you all! A curse upon all the races of this unnamed world!"

COLDASH: With those words Trogalla departed. He passed out of the memory of living things and into legend. (COLDASH *becomes EL'NORAN.*)

HATRESH: (To COLDASH) "You had no part in this, El'Noran, but you knew Trogalla's mind and said nothing."

COLDASH: "Forgive me, LIAMB, for my silence."

HATRESH: "There shall often be mistrust between men and dryads, but since you have repented, often shall you call each other friend. But not so the dryads and oreads! They have been deeply sundered this day and that rift shall be deep."

SHALLA: The dryads buried Unayn in the middle of the Eldest Wood and upon that spot grew the most beautiful tree ever seen. Reaching towards the stars above, it shines day and night with a silver light.

HATRESH: "There it shall stand until this world comes to an end. Though many may forsake my light, this reminder shall always remain."

SHALLA: But more was to grow from Trogalla's treachery than the Great Tree.

HATRESH: "The darkness in Trogalla's heart shall now take a mortal form and walk upon the earth." (HATRESH *creates a dragon from SHALLA*.) "Envy and greed shall have a face, and it shall be called dragon!"

COLDASH: So was born Grinishra, first of dragons. With twisted, hoarding hearts they would desire the destruction of all things fair and good.

SHALLA: All mortal races the dragons loath and despise, but most of all the mountain race that gave them birth.

HATRESH: "Begin your hoard, Grinishra, with the cause of your beginning." (SHALLA *takes one piece of the oracle*.)

SHALLA: Grinishra took one piece of the oracle to her mountain lair while the rest were scattered and lost.

HATRESH: The five mortal races, broken, went each to their own regions, living apart. "But still I shall not forsake them utterly." (HATRESH *creates a changeling from SHALLA*.) "The changelings immortal I place into the world as guardians." (To SHALLA) "Watch over them well, for you are my eyes and ears in this world."

SHALLA: "We shall, and may there be many merry games ahead!"

HATRESH: "There shall be, but not for some time to come. Five races of light I made, but through this world's fall they are now matched by races of darkness."

COLDASH: LIAMB the Light grieved for the world he had made, as darkness settled upon it, but had it not in his heart to bring the world to an early end.

HATRESH: For hope still remained. LIAMB the Light had decreed that one day the Oracle would be made whole again.

SHALLA: And so began the World Unnamed! (The PLAYERS *take a bow*.) Lords and Ladies, welcome! We are the Players of LIAMB, here to share with you the tale of the Oracle of Wisdom. And though we are but humble players, we ask that you allow your imaginations to soar and your eyes to see beyond the narrow confines of this stage. Shalla by name am I, and these my companions are Hatresh and Coldash.

HATRESH: We have traveled far to recount this tale and pray it shall not fall unwelcome on your ears.

COLDASH: In the dark times that followed the first days of the world, the story of the oracle was often forgotten amidst the wars that grew between the five races. Many years passed before any thought to look for the oracle again.

SHALLA: During this time Grinishra the dragon grew in strength as she learned to bend the oracle piece to her twisted purposes. Its power was still great, if much diminished from the whole. *(COLDASH becomes OUWAY, a gryphon.)*

HATRESH: And so it was in these dark days that Ouway, a young gryphon, learned of the oracle and desired to reclaim the piece held by Grinishra.

COLDASH: "For it is not right that a tool of such light should be wielded by so wicked a creature!" *(SHALLA becomes an older gryphon.)* "Somehow, it must be taken from her!"

SHALLA: "You are young, Ouway, while Grinishra is strong, dark and cunning. How do you hope to defeat her?"

COLDASH: "I do not know, but does that mean I should not try?"

SHALLA: "You are impetuous, but you do not lack courage. Go, and take this wisdom with you: Do not seek to overcome Grinishra with might, and do not spurn whatever help may come to you."

COLDASH: "I shall remember your words." *(HATRESH becomes RHIHANSA, a great cat.)*

SHALLA: Ouway's journey led him through the territory of the great cats, and it was there he met Rhihansa.

HATRESH: "What brings you here, stranger? This is no place for a half-cat such as yourself."

COLDASH: "Noble feline, I am on a journey of great importance and therefore ask that this infringement be forgiven. I shall soon pass through your territory and will cause no trouble to your people."

HATRESH: "What errand could bring you into our lands? The way you travel leads to nowhere but the desolate realm of the dragons. What purpose could you have there?"

COLDASH: "One of my own concern and no business of yours."

HATRESH: "If it transpires in the feline realm, it is always our business. How can I be sure your intentions bear us no malice? Our races have often been at war. If you desire safe passage, then be so kind as to state your purpose."

COLDASH: "Very well, but believe what I shall tell you, for I intend no deceit."

SHALLA: So Ouway told Rhihansa of the tale of the oracle and his mission to regain the piece from Grinishra.

HATRESH: "I have heard that tale before, but am amazed that you mean to confront Grinishra! Let it never be said that the gryphons lack in bravery!" (HATRESH *bows to COLDASH.*) "Noble half-cat, I am called Rhihansa." (COLDASH *bows in return.*)

COLDASH: "Ouway. Is passage granted?"

HATRESH: "Free passage, no. Your courage I admire, but even that may be found in the dark realms to which you are bound. Yet your errand is one I would not wish to hinder. And so I shall not, for I shall journey with you. Two shall better stand against Grinishra than one. Let it never be said that the courage of the gryphons outshines that of the feline folk!"

SHALLA: Mistrust ran between them both...

COLDASH: ...but Ouway remembered the words of his elder. "'Do not spurn whatever help may come to you.' So be it then, and may this alliance prove a fruitful one." (SHALLA *becomes GRINISHRA.*)

HATRESH: Rhihansa counseled that their tactics be based on cunning and stealth rather than brute strength, and so when they arrived at Grinishra's lair Rhihansa marched boldly before the dragon, saying, "Greetings to you, O mightiest of creatures! Great are many, but none inspire more awe than Grinishra, queen of dragons!" (While they stand before the dragon HATRESH is calm and still, while COLDASH, more nervous, makes quick, darting movements.)

SHALLA: Rhihansa's words pleased Grinishra greatly, for the dragons love flattery almost as much as gold. "Welcome, noble flatterers, to my great realm. It has been long indeed since cat or gryphon came willingly to my door, but those who came, I enjoyed. What brings you here?"

COLDASH: "Many are the tales told of the great Grinishra, but none do justice to the sight I see before me! I have seen dragons a plenty, but none to rival you!"

SHALLA: "Your skill in words is much to be admired, but such worthy praise can quickly become tiresome. However, I am not yet hungry, so speak on. What tales have you been told of me?"

COLDASH: "How countless times you have laid waste the armies of our two peoples."

SHALLA: "You are small."

HATRESH: "And we have heard how your great hoard fills every corner of the mountain caves, no greater treasure to be found anywhere in the world!"

SHALLA: "That is truly said."

COLDASH: "And your speed, I am told, rivals that of the very winds themselves!"

HATRESH: "So they say, and to see you is to believe all these tales and more!"

SHALLA: "You are either the bravest of your kinds to come to my door, or the most foolish. But whatever you may be, you have my attention. Why have you come?"

HATRESH: "Great and magnificent Grinishra, I can see that nothing is hidden from your thoughts. It is true that more than just the tales of your splendor have brought us here."

SHALLA: "I thought as much."

HATRESH: "And you were not wrong, as I am sure you never are."

SHALLA: (*Suddenly suspicious*) "If the tales of my hoard have lured you here, then know that no one who enters my lair unbidden ever comes out again."

COLDASH: "We would not dream of crossing your threshold uninvited, O great Grinishra, or even looking upon your hoard without permission."

SHALLA: "Then for what reason are you here? Speak plainly. Your flattering words grow more irksome."

HATRESH: "We seek but a simple favor."

SHALLA: "What sort of favor? And shall it be to my benefit or yours?"

COLDASH: "I seek the honor of challenging the mighty Grinishra to a race!" (SHALLA *laughs.*)

SHALLA: "A race? Against me? Surely this must be a pathetic jest! Have you not yourself said that I fly faster than the wind?"

COLDASH: "I am certain that I have no hope for victory in such a race, but to race Grinishra and lose would itself be a great honor."

HATRESH: "And then we could witness your tremendous speed firsthand and spread the tale far and wide!"

SHALLA: *(To HATRESH)* "And what purpose brings you here, wingless one?"

HATRESH: "Every race must have its judge, mighty queen of dragons, and as such do I humbly offer my services." *(He bows.)* "We cats are many things, but most of all fair and equitable."

SHALLA: "Cats are many things indeed, most of all sly and cunning."

HATRESH: "But even we cannot hope to match the dragons in such qualities."

SHALLA: *(Darkly)* "Meaning what?"

HATRESH: "Merely that the cats are but poor creatures when compared to the dragons, your greatness."

SHALLA: "And let that not be forgotten. I have had little amusement as of late, and such a race would perhaps provide some. But I wonder if your motives are truly so benign. Are you not here to spy out my lair? Or perhaps to distract me while some great army invades my realm?"

COLDASH: "If such were our goals, I am certain that you would have seen through the thin veil of our treachery the moment we arrived, so great is your unwavering genius." *(Suddenly doubtful)* "Unless the tales told of you are but exaggeration."

SHALLA: *(Angry)* "They are no such thing! Rather what you have heard is a mere shadow of the truth! I could smite you in a moment were it my wish, and your entire realm could I circle in two heartbeats!"

HATRESH: "Such a feat we would love to witness!"

COLDASH: "We would not wish to bring back a poor account of your supposed glory."

SHALLA: *(Still angry)* "Supposed glory indeed! Very well! I see the doubt in your eyes, and it is plain that is why you are here. You do not believe the tales told of me!"

HATRESH: "It does seem unlikely that any creature could be *that* great and magnificent."

SHALLA: "Disbelieving vermin! Behold now the greatest in all the world! You shall have your race, gryphon, to the northern border of the mountains and back. And after I defeat you I shall have my dinner!"

HATRESH: And so Grinishra tore into the sky followed by Ouway. Rihansa watched as they sped north, Grinishra pulling further ahead with each passing moment. Rihansa remained motionless until he was certain that Grinishra was too far away to spot him even with her sharp eyes. He then crept softly into her lair, and while Grinishra's hoard was indeed large, soon found the object of his quest. The oracle piece was Grinishra's greatest prize and sat on a pedestal in a place of honor. Rihansa took the piece and exited as quickly and quietly as he had come. All that remained now was to get as far away from the cave as possible before Grinishra returned.

COLDASH: The tales told of Grinishra's speed were no mere fables, and it was not long before Ouway also lost sight of the dragon. Once he did, he abandoned the race and, like Rihansa, traveled as far from Grinishra's lair as he could.

SHALLA: When Grinishra finished the race, she returned to her cave and was disturbed to see no sign of Rihansa. "Where has that sneaking cat gone to? If he has dared to cross the threshold of my lair I shall eat him alive. That race has made me very hungry indeed."

HATRESH: With growing suspicion, Grinishra entered her lair and at once knew something was wrong. Then she saw it, the empty pedestal, and the entire scheme was clear. *(SHALLA roars with fury.)*

SHALLA: "A plague upon the cats and gryphons! You shall regret this transgression. I shall make your races pay for this with blood!"

COLDASH: For days the mountains echoed with Grinishra's roars and the night skies burned bright with her flame. In time her rage subsided, but it was not forgotten. She was the oldest of all living beings, save Trogalla, and would live long still.

HATRESH: So she returned to her lair and began to plot her revenge.

COLDASH: As for Rihansa and Ouway, they returned home in honor, for a great victory had been won! *(SHALLA becomes the elder gryphon.)*

SHALLA: "Grinishra's power shall be severely diminished without the oracle piece. It shall be long before she troubles us again. You have done well, Ouway." *(To HATRESH)* "As have you, Rihansa. Our two races each owe you a great debt. The quest to rebuild the oracle has begun."

COLDASH: "More than that begins today, for this shall signal a new friendship between our peoples. As Rihansa and I have discovered, there is much we have to offer each other."

SHALLA: The oracle had been meant from the beginning to bring peace, and that day it began to do so again.

HATRESH: In time, Rihansa and Ouway became the leaders of their kinds and the friendship between them grew. Today their alliance is so deep that by many they are accounted one people. "But now that we have obtained this piece of the oracle, what shall be done with it?"

COLDASH: "In the beginning the dryads guarded the oracle. It would be only right to return the piece to them."

SHALLA: So Ouway flew to the Eldest Wood and there presented the piece of the oracle to Elohn, their leader. (*HATRESH becomes ELOHN. COLDASH kneels to HATRESH and presents the piece of the oracle to him.*)

COLDASH: "Years ago this was taken from the dryads. Together cat and gryphon have reclaimed it from the claws of Grinishra and now we return it to you."

HATRESH: "The tale of your bravery has reached my ears, and I commend you for it. I willingly receive this gift and pray that it shall not be the last of such gifts to come to me. Return to your people and continue to guide them in the ways of LIAMB the Light."

COLDASH: "I shall, and may our friendship with the dryads be rekindled this day!"

SHALLA: Ouway returned to his home in the mountains while Elohn pondered how the rest of the oracle was to be found.

HATRESH: "Such is a task beyond my wisdom, but not LIAMB's."

SHALLA: The piece of the oracle long used by Grinishra for feats of darkness was now turned by Elohn to a work of the light. (*HATRESH crafts a black, cube shaped stone.*) Crafted by an art now lost, Elohn made the Questing Stone and set upon its smooth surface these runes:

HATRESH: "He who in great adventure partakes,
Ask and I shall an answer make,
To guide you to the path of right,
If your quest be done for none but light."

COLDASH: Elohn placed a piece of the oracle's wisdom into the stone in the hope that it would reveal where the remainder of the oracle lay. Many came to question the stone about the quests before them, but on the subject of the oracle it remained strangely silent. (SHALLA *becomes* MALOWAY.)

SHALLA: Until one day a young dryad named Maloway came to consult the stone. She had no knowledge of what quest lay before her, and so she simply knelt before the stone and asked, "To what place does LIAMB send me?" (HATRESH *speaks as* LIAMB THE LIGHT *through the Questing Stone.*)

HATRESH: "East and south a war doth brew,
On the plains 'tween races two.
Go there and behold their prize,
Wisdom just beyond their eyes."

SHALLA: The stone spoke of the eastern plains upon which dwelt mainly the race of men.

COLDASH: But north of the plains, in the mountains, dwelt the oreads, and the two kinds often warred over the wealth of precious stones and metals in the foothills.

SHALLA: Long had it been since any dryad of the Eldest Wood had traveled over the mountains and so it was a strange country Maloway entered. She continued on for several days, earning strange looks as she passed through the towns of men. (HATRESH *becomes a human.*)

HATRESH: "What brings you to this land, stranger? For if I do not mistake you are one of the dryads, the tree-people."

SHALLA: "I come from the Eldest Wood. I follow the rumors of war."

HATRESH: "Continue this way and you shall find it. But why does war between humans and oreads interest you? Your people and the oreads are great enemies, it is said. Do you come in the aid of men?"

SHALLA: "I am not here to take sides in your battles." (HATRESH *regards* SHALLA *carefully, attempting to discern how much to say.*)

HATRESH: "Follow this road to the sea. The sound of swords will guide your way. But I would not tarry here. Your race is not much trusted in these parts."

SHALLA: Maloway thanked the man. She soon found the war she sought. (COLDASH *becomes* THRENGAL, *king of the oreads, and* HATRESH *becomes another oread.*)

COLDASH: The king of the oreads saw Maloway first as she approached the battlefield. He could tell this was not one of his human enemies, so he bade his archers to hold their strings. (*To HATRESH, pointing towards SHALLA.*) "Bring the stranger to me. I desire to know why she has entered the realm of war." (*HATRESH crosses to SHALLA.*)

HATRESH: "Halt, stranger, and declare your business! These are the fields of war, and the domain of Threnal, king of the oreads."

SHALLA: "I am Maloway, of the dryads."

HATRESH: "One of the tree-folk? That bodes not well, I fear. Do you come in friendship or in war?"

SHALLA: "Truly I declare to you, I am not your enemy."

HATRESH: "That remains to be seen. Our king commands that you be brought before him." (*HATRESH brings SHALLA to COLDASH.*) "Here is the stranger, sire." (*To SHALLA*) "Our king, Threnal son of Thome." (*SHALLA kneels to COLDASH.*)

SHALLA: "I greet you, King Threnal. I am Maloway, of the Eldest Wood."

COLDASH: "What errand bears you so far from your land, Maloway? Do you come to aid our human enemies?"

SHALLA: "I come neither as your enemy, nor as enemy to the race of men. My errand remains hidden even to myself. I was told only to seek a place where two races fought upon the plains."

COLDASH: "Who gave you these instructions?"

SHALLA: "They came from the Questing Stone, made from one piece of the Oracle of Wisdom."

COLDASH: "Then another piece has also been found?"

SHALLA: "Another?"

COLDASH: "The humans we fight unearthed one of the oracle pieces within the borders of my realm. We know this thing to be an object of great power and will not suffer the humans to keep what is rightfully ours."

SHALLA: With those words Maloway understood towards what end she had been sent to this place.

HATRESH: "What is to be done with the stranger, sire? She has seen our camp. If we release her, she may betray us to our enemies."

COLDASH: "Long have our two peoples been estranged, Maloway, but today I offer you the chance to become our friend. We are a people greatly skilled in crafts, as you surely know. Were you to help us retrieve our piece of the oracle, you would be richly rewarded. What say you to this?"

SHALLA: "I shall do all in my power, King Threngal, to restore the oracle piece to its rightful guardians."

COLDASH: "Then it is agreed. Go to the human camp and learn what you can. They will not suspect that you are in league with us, believing us to be enemies. Return and tell us all you can about their camp and where they keep the oracle shard."

SHALLA: "I go as you command." Taking her leave of the oreads, Maloway crossed the battlefield and considered what to say to the leader of men. (*HATRESH becomes ARDALE, leader of men.*)

HATRESH: "Halt, stranger, and tell me who you are. For if I do not mistake, you come from the camp of our enemies."

SHALLA: "I do and from their camp I bring news of planned treachery." (*She bows to HATRESH.*) "Maloway, of the dryads."

HATRESH: "I am Lord Ardale, chief of men. You may tell me your news."

SHALLA: So Maloway told Ardale how the oreads had promised her great wealth if she were to help them seize the piece of the oracle from the humans. "But I promised only to restore the piece to its rightful guardians. I did not say that was the oreads. When Threngal finds I have deceived him he surely shall look for other ways of stealing the oracle piece from you."

HATRESH: "Do you offer us your aid?"

SHALLA: "I would gladly protect the oracle piece for you. I promise that none of your enemies shall lay hold of it."

HATRESH: "Oreads and dryads have been enemies since the beginning. If you are their enemy, then I shall count you as friend. Serve us well and we shall give you twice what they have promised. You will find the oracle piece in that tent. Keep watch over it tonight."

SHALLA: "I will do as you bid, Lord Ardale." (SHALLA goes to the tent and night comes. HATRESH and COLDASH, as humans, sleep.) When night came, all the humans slept soundly, save for the watchmen. When all was quiet, Maloway took the piece of the oracle and secretly left the camp. "If they have no prize to gain, perhaps neither side shall fight. The oracle piece I shall bring back to the Eldest Wood, where it rightfully belongs."

COLDASH: Maloway spent the night nearby and waited to see what the dawn would bring. But her flight from the human camp did not go as unnoticed as she had hoped. (COLDASH wakes HATRESH.) "Lord Ardale, the dryad has fled the camp!"

HATRESH: "What of the oracle piece?"

COLDASH: "She has taken that as well!"

HATRESH: "Treachery! This was her plan all along, no doubt. She was in league with the oreads after all and now they have our prize. Sleep, my friend, there is nothing to be done now. But come the morn the oreads shall pay dearly for this."

COLDASH: Come dawn, great messages of war flew between the human and oread camps as they prepared for battle. Each side believed the other had used Maloway for their own ends.

SHALLA: "In the name of LIAM, what have I begun? My deceit has not taken away their reason to fight, rather it has strengthened their resolve! I thought only to bring peace between them, yet all I have done is further the cause of war. What shall I do now? To return home is no victory. The piece of the oracle I bear carries a great stain. For all the differences between dryads and oreads, I have followed in the footsteps of Trogalla. To return what I have taken, nay stolen, likewise shall avail no one. Whoever I returned it to, still would the war go on. Alas that I ever came upon this quest! Whatever I sought, I have found only futility and despair. Two roads from which to choose, yet I have nowhere left to go. Each is filled with blood." (HATRESH has become LIAMB THE LIGHT, but he remains silent and motionless. To HATRESH.) "For what purpose did you send me here? I can no more change what is to come than one grain of sand can halt the coming of the sea! They will fight, and I can do nothing." (Silence) "Then let them fight. Let them come and find me here." (SHALLA sits in the center of the stage with the oracle piece.) "Let either side slay me as chance will have it. At least they shall have a prize to win. I deserve the death that waits for me."

HATRESH: (Unheard by SHALLA) "You came to do nothing." (Silence. HATRESH becomes ARDALE and COLDASH becomes THRENGAL. They approach SHALLA and each sees the oracle piece.)

COLDASH: "That is ours. It was found in our land."

HATRESH: "But found by us."

COLDASH: "That makes you little more than thieves. It is our property. Return it."

HATRESH: "You shall have it only over my spilled blood."

SHALLA: "And neither of you shall have it save by mine."

HATRESH: "You have proven yourself to be nothing more than a thief and a traitor. But I shall give you this chance to yield up the oracle piece to me and be gone."

SHALLA: "I would rather die here with it. Fight, if you must, and let he who is most noble claim the prize I have unrightfully stolen. Whatever claim you each have, I have none. But may the peace that follows this battle be a lasting one." (HATRESH is astonished by SHALLA's reply.)

HATRESH: "What nobility is this! Gladly would we kill for this treasure, Threnal, but here is one who would die for it! Such is a sentiment truly worthy of he by whose hand the oracle was made." (HATRESH kneels and offers his sword to SHALLA.) "I and all men under me surrender this battle to you, Maloway. The oracle piece, Threnal, is yours."

COLDASH: "She has betrayed us both, Ardale."

SHALLA: "For my deceit I ask forgiveness."

COLDASH: "Were you one of my subjects you would be condemned to death for such a crime."

SHALLA: "And that punishment I accept." (COLDASH draws his sword.)

HATRESH: "Must we have more blood? Let humans and oroads be friends again."

COLDASH: "Humans and oroads, but she is neither."

HATRESH: "Then as we are friends, spare her life." (Pause)

COLDASH: (*Grudgingly*) "The war ends. Not through your deceit, Maloway, but through your courage. You would willingly give me your life, and in return I yield the oracle piece to you and your people. Use it well and do not forget the mercy shown to you this day."

SHALLA: "I shall remember." (SHALLA kneels to COLDASH.) "And I thank you, King Threnal."

HATRESH: So the oroads and humans became friends again and together they fought off many of the evil creatures of the northern plains and mountains.

SHALLA: Maloway returned to the Eldest Wood where the second piece of the oracle was joined with the first. However, when questioned about the rest of the oracle, the Questing Stone would say no more. (HATRESH *becomes* ELOHN.)

HATRESH: "The stone was made from but a piece of the oracle, even it cannot tell all. We must but wait, for remainder of the pieces shall be found when least expected."

SHALLA: Elohn spoke more rightly than he knew, for at that moment, far away, a discovery was made. Deep underneath the southern mountains in the underground land of the drahk, another piece of the oracle was found. (HATRESH *becomes* JORVAY, *king of the drahk.*)

COLDASH: The drahk are the twisted descendants of Trogalla, though long since has Trogalla passed out of even their memory. Like the dragons, the drahk are great lovers of gold and jewels.

HATRESH: Jorvay, king of the drahk, cared not for the oracle's purpose. He cared only for its beauty. "This shall be the drahk's greatest treasure, and we shall keep it forever."

COLDASH: Jorvay hid the piece of the oracle deep within the mountain caverns, in a place he alone knew. There he went in secret to gaze upon its radiance, telling no one of his treasure. (SHALLA *becomes* GRINISHRA.)

SHALLA: But few things are secret from the great dragon Grinishra. Long had she searched for another piece of the oracle, brooding over the piece once stolen from her. So when she learned the drahk had found a piece, Grinishra summoned Jorvay and ordered him to come before her.

COLDASH: Jorvay quaked with fear, for this above all things he dreaded. The drahk owed Grinishra a tribute from the best of their wealth, and Jorvay feared that Grinishra would demand the oracle piece.

HATRESH: "It is mine, mine forever. I found it, and not even that dreadful worm shall wrest it from me."

COLDASH: The journey to Grinishra's realm was a long and dangerous one, but Jorvay dared not refuse Grinishra's summons.

SHALLA: "Welcome Jorvay, king of drahk. Your tribute is due."

HATRESH: "Great and glorious Grinishra! Forever shall the knees of the drahk bow to your splendor! In token of our esteem, I present to you this offering." (HATRESH *presents SHALLA with a chest of gold and jewels.*)

SHALLA: "Your esteem is pathetic indeed if this is the best you have to offer me."

HATRESH: "But magnificent Grinishra..."

SHALLA: "I desire my revenge, not your pitiful tokens of favor. But there is something you have which does interest me."

HATRESH: "Anything you ask, it shall be yours."

SHALLA: "The Oracle of Wisdom."

HATRESH: "I have never heard of such a thing."

SHALLA: "Do not lie to me, you know of what I speak. You have found a piece of the oracle. Come now, tell Grinishra the truth."

HATRESH: "I found it, it is mine."

SHALLA: "Yours? Do you refuse me?"

HATRESH: "No. Please, let me keep it. I will give you any other treasure!"

SHALLA: "You have no other treasures I desire. But I am in a merciful mood. I shall make you a bargain."

HATRESH: "Oh thank you, great and generous Grinishra! All my kingdom would I give to keep this wondrous thing I have found."

SHALLA: "I shall let you keep it, if you do what I ask."

HATRESH: "Anything!"

SHALLA: "The cats and gryphons stole another of these things from me and ever since I have waited for my revenge. I would attack were it not for their alliance with the dryads. Their arrows can pierce even a dragon's skin."

HATRESH: "But surely not yours, unstoppable Grinishra."

SHALLA: "Silence, fool, and listen. This is what you will do: You and your people will tunnel under the Eldest Wood and invade. When the cats and gryphons go to aid

their friends, the dragons shall descend upon them all. Then my revenge shall be complete, and I alone will rule these mountains."

HATRESH: "And I can keep my treasure?" (SHALLA *nods.*) "It will take many months to dig that far. Years, perhaps."

SHALLA: "If I must, I shall wait a thousand years. All that matters is that you are not discovered before you are finished. You know what will happen if you fail me."

HATRESH: "Of course, mighty Grinishra."

SHALLA: "Then begin your work."

HATRESH: "At once, O kind and merciful Grinishra!" Jorvay departed gladly, believing his treasure to be safe.

SHALLA: "Pathetic creature. Keep your treasure for now. When my enemies are defeated I shall have their pieces of the oracle, and yours as well."

HATRESH: So King Jorvay returned to his realm and the drahk began their long labor. All the while Grinishra waited.

SHALLA: Our story now turns to a human warrior named Reshal who lived on the southern plains, far to the east of Jorvay's kingdom. (COLDASH *becomes* RESHAL.)

HATRESH: For some time the humans of that region had been plagued by the pillaging centaurs. Thrice had they set fire to Reshal's town, and it was all the humans could do to prevent the centaurs from destroying it utterly.

COLDASH: "Our town is small and our numbers far too few to hold the centaurs off forever. A greater power than us is needed."

SHALLA: Reshal had heard the story of the Oracle of Wisdom and decided that it alone had the power to protect his people.

HATRESH: And so he set out to find a piece of the lost oracle, hoping that his path would reveal itself.

COLDASH: "After all, it could be anywhere, and so wherever I go there must be a chance I shall find it." (SHALLA *becomes the changeling* HAKOOP.)

SHALLA: "That all depends on what you are looking for." (COLDASH *looks around, but cannot see* SHALLA.)

COLDASH: "Who is there?"

SHALLA: "That all depends on who is asking." (*COLDASH draws his sword.*)

COLDASH: "Be you friend or foe, show yourself!"

SHALLA: "And make myself easier for you to attack?"

COLDASH: "At least say if you are a friend."

SHALLA: "I am, if you look for one."

COLDASH: "I do. Will you show yourself or no?"

SHALLA: "I shall, and you do not yet realize what a gift that is." (*SHALLA shows herself to COLDASH.*) "I am Hakoop, of the changelings." (*She bows to COLDASH.*)

HATRESH: Stories are told through all lands of the strange beings known as changelings, but few mortals have ever beheld their kind. It is said they are beings of magic as immortal as the mountains and as unpredictable as the seas.

COLDASH: "If the tales men tell be true, then I say you are both friend and foe. I know not if I should rejoice at this meeting."

SHALLA: "You should! For more shall come from this than you yet know! I know what it is you seek, Reshal of men."

COLDASH: "You seem to know much about me."

SHALLA: "But of course! You will find little that the changelings do not know. I have been the whole world over a hundred times and more."

COLDASH: "Then you are swift of foot indeed!"

SHALLA: "I ride the four winds and what they hear I know. You seek part of the Oracle of Wisdom."

COLDASH: "Can you tell me where it is to be found?"

SHALLA: "I have a more important question: Why do you seek it?"

COLDASH: "To protect my people."

SHALLA: "Ah yes, from the centaurs. Foul creatures they are, the worst of men and worst of beasts together. Still, it is a high prize for which you strive."

COLDASH: "I shall undertake whatever quest I must to save my people."

SHALLA: "A noble sentiment indeed, but quests can be so long and tedious. I have something much better in mind, a game!"

COLDASH: "A game? I would have thought this a matter far too serious for games."

SHALLA: "I do not mean games as you would think of them. A changeling game is for real, and much depends on whether you win or lose. But first we shall need another player." (SHALLA *claps her hands twice.*) "Yevrah!" (HATRESH *becomes YEVRAH, another changeling.*)

HATRESH: "Here, Hakoop! What merriment shall we make today?"

SHALLA: "This human seeks a piece of the oracle."

HATRESH: (*With understanding*) "Ah, we play that game at last, do we? I have been waiting for it." (HATRESH *examines COLDASH.*) "This is the mortal? I would not have picked this one, but then you are a better judge of their kind than I."

SHALLA: "He shall do."

HATRESH: "Ah, but shall he win? That is the true question."

COLDASH: "The sooner we begin, the sooner you shall find that out."

SHALLA: "Then begin we shall! This is no test of strength, so your sword will do you nothing."

HATRESH: "Rather it is a test of wits."

COLDASH: "Tell me the rules."

SHALLA: "We shall each offer you a path towards the oracle. One in the right..."

HATRESH: "...and one in the wrong."

SHALLA: "You must decide which to take."

COLDASH: "That is all?"

SHALLA: "It is enough, and not so easy as it might appear."

COLDASH: "Let me hear the paths you offer."

HATRESH: "The game begins. I offer you the path of kingship! With a piece of the oracle you could bring order and peace to your people. You would become the greatest warrior of men, destroying the centaurs utterly. All would fear the sound of your name."

COLDASH: "Such has been my hope! My people are not weak, but we are few. The oracle piece would give us the strength we need."

HATRESH: "It would! But there are those who would try and take it from you, some mighty foes indeed."

COLDASH: "We would still stand firm. Peace does not come without a price."

SHALLA: "Wisely said, Reshal, but you cannot always be certain how high that price may be. Or how much you can afford to pay."

COLDASH: "We must either fight the evil or succumb to it. Do you offer me a better choice?"

SHALLA: "That is what you must decide. I offer you a path of great sacrifice, but with the promise it shall lead to peace... someday."

COLDASH: "Someday can be a long way off indeed."

SHALLA: "More so than you know, for I cannot promise you shall ever see it."

COLDASH: "Tell me what you offer. I will hear your choice, as bitter as it sounds."

SHALLA: "When we give you the oracle piece, you must bring it to the dryads of the Eldest Wood and entrust it to their wisdom."

COLDASH: "I have heard the oracle belonged to the dryads in the beginning, but is their need as great as ours? Are they under constant siege as we are?"

SHALLA: "For now, no, but who can say what the future may bring? Your need is great, but the dryads' right to the oracle is greater."

COLDASH: "And what would I tell my people? That I found a great treasure only to yield it up to others? Why do the dryads not come and find this piece themselves if their claim is so great?"

SHALLA: "They search for it far and wide, but this game is yours, not theirs."

COLDASH: "Then why should they reap the reward?"

HATRESH: "Ah, why indeed? What reward would you gain by undertaking this labor for their sake? The road to the Eldest Wood is a perilous one. The piece of the oracle could belong to you forever."

COLDASH: (*Sadly*) "That would be the price, wouldn't it? One piece forever separate from the whole. The darkness kept at bay but never defeated." (*To SHALLA*) "I shall do as you ask. I fear that however strong one piece of the oracle would make us, there would always be those who would be the stronger. Better the oracle be whole, someday."

HATRESH: "You would give up the chance to be a king?"

COLDASH: "I came to find peace, not a crown. Your path sounds too easy."

HATRESH: "You have chosen well."

SHALLA: "Indeed you have, and we shall make good on our promise." (*SHALLA gives COLDASH a piece of the oracle.*) "Make good on *your* promise."

COLDASH: "I shall. If I had made the other choice, what then? Would you still have given this to me?"

SHALLA: "Yes. It was yours to find, whatever path you chose, but you had to understand where each would lead."

HATRESH: "You were right, Hakoop, he shall do well. A great game is ahead, alas that I cannot play a part in it! Farewell, Reshal of men."

COLDASH: "Farewell, Yevrah." (*HATRESH "vanishes."*)

SHALLA: "I too must leave you, but I wish you well on your journey. It shall be a dangerous one, but you shall have my favor with you."

COLDASH: "It is said there are few things more perilous than a changeling's favor." (*SHALLA laughs.*)

SHALLA: "And it is well said indeed! But what they do not say is perilous to whom. Farewell and make haste! Great things are afoot."

COLDASH: "Farewell, Hakoop, and many thanks."

SHALLA: "To the Eldest Wood! Make haste!"

HATRESH: With that Hakoop vanished and Reshal began his long journey to the dryads. But as Reshal passed through the mountains, he was accosted by the drahk. (SHALLA, *as a drahk, captures* COLDASH.)

SHALLA: For their tunnels were nearing completion and secrecy was more essential than ever. The drahk brought Reshal before King Jorvay. (HATRESH *becomes* JORVAY.)

HATRESH: "What brings you into my domain, human?"

COLDASH: "I do not answer to you."

HATRESH: "You are here to spy on us, aren't you? Who sent you? The dryads? Or perhaps the cats and gryphons?"

COLDASH: "There is nothing in these dark holes worth the effort of spying on."

HATRESH: "There is more at work here than you realize."

SHALLA: "Sire, we found this on the human." (SHALLA *holds up the piece of the oracle.*)

HATRESH: "Give that to me!" (He *snatches the piece greedily.*) "You were taking this to the dryads, weren't you?"

COLDASH: "They are the rightful guardians."

HATRESH: "They shall not have it! Nor mine! And when Grinishra finishes with them..."

COLDASH: "Grinishra is strong, but the dryads are ever watchful. She would not dare attack them openly."

HATRESH: "The dryads watch the sky, but their foes shall come forth from underground. Let the cats and gryphons come to the aid of their friends, if they dare, but we and the dragons shall be ready. With swords from below and fire from above all the oracle pieces shall be ours." (To SHALLA) "Imprison the human. We cannot release him now."

SHALLA: So the drahk imprisoned Reshal in the deepest of their caverns where Jorvay intended for him to remain forever. And there he would have stayed were it not for a friend he had made on his journeys. (SHALLA *becomes* HAKOOP.) "Of all the places I thought to find you, Reshal, the dungeons of the drahk are the least expected. And so here I came first."

COLDASH: "Hakoop!"

SHALLA: "None other!" *(She bows to COLDASH.)* "Now, how on earth did you manage to get yourself here? This is the dungeon Jorvay uses for those who are never going to leave."

COLDASH: "Jorvay has taken the oracle piece, and I believe he has found a second."

SHALLA: "Yes, two for him and two for the dryads. The oracle comes together at last. Soon all four pieces shall be rejoined, but in whose hands they rest depends on which way the coming battle goes. The dragons and the drahk have laid their plans well."

COLDASH: "You know of their scheme?"

SHALLA: "Of course! Why do you think I sent you here? Someone must send word to the dryads. Come! Let us leave this wretched hole." Hakoop quickly led Reshal out of the drahkan caverns and brought him to the northern boundary of Jorvay's kingdom. "Little time remains until the drahk finish their tunnels and attack. When the cats and gryphons come to aid the dryads, the dragons shall fall upon them all and sweep them away in a sea of fire. You must bring this news to Elohn, leader of the dryads, else Grinishra's plot will succeed."

COLDASH: "Again I thank you for your help, Hakoop."

SHALLA: "Did I not say my favor would be with you? Go quickly now! I have done all I can for you."

COLDASH: "Farewell, Hakoop, I hope to meet you again."

SHALLA: "You I shall always remember, Reshal of men."

COLDASH: With those words Hakoop vanished and Reshal made great haste towards the Eldest Wood. When he arrived the dryads at once brought Reshal before Elohn. *(HATRESH becomes ELOHN.)*

HATRESH: "You are tired, stranger, and have undoubtedly made a long journey. We shall give you food and rest, and then you may tell me your news."

COLDASH: "No! It must be told now. There is no time to lose."

SHALLA: So Reshal told Elohn all that he had heard of the plot between Grinishra and the drahk.

HATRESH: "Thanks be to LIAMB the Light for sending you here! But for you, Reshal, this doom would surely have fallen upon us. But now the doom shall fall elsewhere! To arms, tree-folk, to arms!"

COLDASH: Reshal marveled at how quickly the dryads prepared for war and knew that his message had truly changed the course of things to come.

HATRESH: "Rest now, Reshal, for there will soon be much to do. We have sent word to our friends, the cats and gryphons, and they shall join us in our fight against the dragons, once Jorvay and his people are defeated."

COLDASH: "I shall be there when you attack."

HATRESH: "You shall have battle enough when we fight the dragons. The drahk thought to take us by surprise, but now we shall do the surprising." (SHALLA *becomes* MALOWAY.)

SHALLA: When the drahk completed their tunnels they found, to their great dismay, a vast army of dryads waiting for them. Maloway, now a great leader among her people, stood at the fore of the army, ready to lead them to victory. (HATRESH *becomes* JORVAY.)

HATRESH: When Jorvay emerged from his tunnels he knew at once that all his plans had come to ruin. In his moment of triumph, Jorvay had never even noticed that his prisoner had escaped.

SHALLA: "Forward dryads and strike them down! Today is the death of Unayn avenged!" (SHALLA *chases* HATRESH *around the stage*.) The dryads pursued the drahk to the heart of their realm, scattering what few they did not slay. King Jorvay thought only of his treasure, but as he took it from its hiding place he was confronted by Maloway. "You shall go no further, king of drahk, for not even the treasure you wield can buy your life this day."

HATRESH: "O mighty dryad! Spare my insignificant life, for I never desired any harm to come to your people. This was all Grinishra's bidding!"

SHALLA: "Your master's end is also near. You hold two pieces of the oracle. Give them to me."

HATRESH: "Take them, and my life if you must." (HATRESH *gives the two pieces to* SHALLA.)

SHALLA: But as she took the pieces of the oracle, Maloway remembered the mercy once shown to her. "I have what I came for. Go, and never be found again in any of our lands."

HATRESH: Jorvay thanked Maloway for her mercy and fled south with what few drahk remained.

- COLDASH: With the drahk defeated, the dryads, cats and gryphons turned their attention to the dragons. Grinishra soon learned that her plans had been thwarted, but she would not allow her revenge to be taken from her. With a mighty roar she summoned the other dragons and sped towards the Eldest Wood.
- HATRESH: The gryphons and dragons fought a great and terrible battle that day in the skies above the Eldest Wood. Arrows whistled through the trees and the night sky burned bright with dragon flame.
- SHALLA: The dryads and great cats worked tirelessly to put out whatever fires the dragons began, but the Eldest Wood still did not escape the battle unscathed. (SHALLA becomes GRINISHRA.)
- COLDASH: As he watched the battle, Reshal saw little he could do against the dragons of the air. Suddenly, an idea sprang into his mind. Dropping his sword, he picked up a bow and slung a quiver of arrows over one shoulder. He then took one of the oracle pieces and ran to the top of a nearby hill. (COLDASH *holds up the oracle piece.*) "Here is what you want, diabolical worm, come for it!"
- SHALLA: As she flew high above Grinishra saw the object of her desire shining in the night. She dove towards Reshal at a terrifying speed.
- COLDASH: Reshal knew he had only moments and so he quickly took aim. "May LIAMB the Light guide this arrow, and may one be enough!" He let the arrow fly.
- SHALLA: Straight and true it sped towards its target and smote Grinishra upon her forehead. Even still, one arrow would not have been enough had it not been for the great speed with which Grinishra descended upon her prey. Thus from her own greed did Grinishra meet her demise.
- COLDASH: Grinishra uttered one final, deafening roar before crashing to the ground. At that sound the other dragons knew their queen had fallen. They vowed their revenge and took flight.
- HATRESH: The dryads, cats, and gryphons all gave a great shout of victory and there was much rejoicing that night in the Eldest Wood. (*A celebration takes place.*)
- COLDASH: Reshal remained in the Eldest Wood for many months and great friendship grew between him, the dryads, the cats and the gryphons. In time, he returned to his home and became the leader of his people.
- SHALLA: While the centaurs still troubled them, the dryads most willingly lent their aid to Reshal's people. The great deed Reshal had done would not be soon forgotten.

HATRESH: The dryads used the oracle as best they could for the good of all, but they still lacked the final piece. *(As ELOHN)* "It rests with Trogalla, first of oreads, but where he has gone none can say."

SHALLA: And neither can we, for I fear this is where our story ends.

COLDASH: Many have sought Trogalla far and wide, but no sign of him or the last piece of the oracle has ever been found.

SHALLA: Indeed, many fear that Trogalla has passed beyond the reach of mortal kind and that the piece he bore shall remain forever lost.

HATRESH: So we bid you to keep watch, and should you perchance hear tidings of the last oracle piece, send word to the dryads of the Eldest Wood.

SHALLA: For this is our purpose: To share the story of the Oracle of Wisdom with all we meet and to seek its ending. We thank you, gentle friends, for your audience. May you remember well what we have told you. *(The PLAYERS take their bows and the audience applauds. The PLAYERS then begin to gather up their things. E'DEL enters, slowly, dressed in clothes worn from a long journey. She holds one hand to her side, underneath her outer cloak. For a moment she stands and watches.)*

E'DEL: Your story has an ending. Let me tell it to you.

SHALLA: You look tired. Please, sit. *(SHALLA sits E'DEL down. She is exhausted.)*

E'DEL: It has been a long journey, but I have found you at last.

SHALLA: Tell us your tale.

E'DEL: Yes. I come from a great distance. As the years passed from the beginning, some of the race of men journeyed ever southward, past the forest of Dreyham to the edge of a great desert. There they settled and have lived ever since, kept company only by the evil centaurs. There, as in all places, the story of the beginning and the Oracle of Wisdom has been passed down. Many years ago, we heard the rumor of a great battle far to the north. In time the full story came to us and we knew that four parts of the oracle were again in the rightful hands of the dryads. But the fifth remained lost, entrusted to Trogalla all those centuries ago. I decided that I would search for him. *(SHALLA becomes TROGALLA and sits alone holding the first blade.)* For years I sought him without success until, one day, deep in the mountains, I found him, alone and withered by his countless years.

SHALLA: *(Half mumbling)* "...not fair, just wanted to ask a question... nasty dryads, gave me all the blame... El'Noran said I could do it, didn't punish him this way... it hurts, it hurts so... always heavy, can't put it down..."

E'DEL: *(Overlapping)* So he must have spoken for countless years, worn down by his unceasing burden. The treachery he committed was surely paid in full. There was no evil left in that old, bent figure. Only weariness.

SHALLA: "...and the blood, it burns... like fire... so tired, but can't sleep... can't rest, not until someone takes it... don't want it anymore... dryads can have it... want to rest, want to sleep... someone take it from me..."

E'DEL: "I will take it from you."

SHALLA: "...yes, want someone to take it... so heavy, but no one comes to take it... no one ever comes to poor Trogalla..."

E'DEL: "I have come to you. I will take your burden from you." How long it had been since Trogalla had heard any voice besides his own I cannot say. It was some time before he realized he was no longer alone.

SHALLA: "Who is there? I hear voices, but no one is ever there... only Trogalla..."

E'DEL: "I am called E'Del."

SHALLA: "Don't know that name... don't know anyone anymore, they're all gone... gone and left me... no one left but poor Trogalla, all alone... always alone..."

E'DEL: "What must I do to take your burden from you?"

SHALLA: "Can't clean the blade... covered in blood... have to clean the blade before anyone can take it from me... I spilled innocent blood... first innocent blood... can't clean the blade without innocent blood..."

E'DEL: "I do not understand."

SHALLA: "I took a life... must be given one... can't clean it without another life..." *(Pause)*

E'DEL: "Then let it be clean, and yield your burden up to me."

SHALLA: "You will take it from me? I may rest?"

E'DEL: "Yes." *(SHALLA makes eye contact with E'DEL.)*

SHALLA: "I am sorry." (SHALLA gives the last piece of the oracle to E'DEL. SHALLA stabs E'DEL with the blade at the point where E'DEL has been holding her hand to her side.) "So tired, but it's gone now... it's gone and I can sleep..." (SHALLA "dies.")

E'DEL: Yes, Trogalla could sleep at last. His burden became mine. (Silence)

COLDASH: I don't understand. If Trogalla had to take your life to give up his piece of the oracle, then...

E'DEL: ...then why do I still live? While one bears this piece of the oracle, one cannot die. But the wounds are still there. (She removes her hand from her cloak. It is red with blood.) My death wound. But I can bear it, for just a little while longer. (She offers the last piece of the oracle to SHALLA.)

SHALLA: If I take this from you, you will die.

E'DEL: Then I die, and the world's suffering ends.

SHALLA: For a time, but not forever.

E'DEL: It shall be enough. For as long as the oracle remains, darkness shall be banished from the world. Please, take it. This is the ending of your story. I wanted you to know. (SHALLA takes the piece from E'DEL.) It is enough. Let it begin. (She dies. HATRESH speaks as LIAMB THE LIGHT.)

HATRESH: "For this world shall be under my name, and no other shall give their name to any land within it until a great sacrifice is made unto mine."

SHALLA: This land shall be called Edelsha.

HATRESH: "For in the sacrifice of E'Del it is reborn." (The PLAYERS assemble the complete oracle.)

SHALLA: And there was peace.

FINIS

Pronunciation Guide

ARDALE:	Ahr - dale
COLDASH:	Col - dash
DRAHK:	Drawk
DREYHAM:	Dray - ham
DRYAD:	Dry - ad
E'DEL:	E - dell
EDELSHA:	E - dell - shaw
EL'NORAN:	L - nor - an
ELOHN:	L - own
GRINISHRA:	Grin - ish - rah
HAKOOP:	Hah - coop
HATRESH:	Hah - treesh
JORVAY:	Jor - vay
LARSYLYS:	Lahr - sill - iss
LIAMB:	Lie - amb
MALOWAY:	Mal - oh - way
OREAD:	Or - e - ad
OUWAY:	Ow - way
RESHAL:	Re - shawl
RHIHANSA:	Rih - hahn - sah
SHALLA:	Shawl - ah
THRENGAL:	Threng - gall
TROGALLA:	Troh - gall - ah
UNAYN:	Oo - nain
WINDHAIL:	Wind - hail
YEVRAH:	Yev - rah

The Races of the Unnamed World

- DRYADS:** The first race created by LIAMB, the people of the trees and forests also possess the longest lives. A wise and thoughtful people, the dryads are often slow to make decisions, preferring to think through all possibilities carefully. But once their decision has been made, they are swift to put it into action. Their long lives breed long memories. A friend or enemy, once made, is not soon forgotten. They have a strong tendency to trust the other races of light, except for the oreads. They make their homes in the forests.
- HUMANS:** With the shortest life span of all the races, humans are apt to make the most of every moment. They are often quick to make decisions and are seen by the dryads as a very hasty people. Above all the other races they are dreamers. Humans are, as a general rule, mistrustful of the other races, but are closest to the oreads. They are the most adaptable of all races, making their homes in all parts of the world.
- OREADS:** The oreads are a stubborn and sturdy people, the people of stone and earth, who delight in the fashioning of stones and metals. They are an extremely practical people, a trait reflected in their crafts. Although the oreads are capable of works of tremendous beauty, their crafts are nearly always functional as well. The oreads are also very independent, usually having little to do with the other races. They trust humans the most and dryads the least. They make their homes in the mountains where they carve out huge underground halls.
- GREAT CATS:** While the great cats possess the gifts of speech and reason, they have a great deal in common with their dumb cousins, the ordinary cats. They are extremely curious creatures, with all the stealth, cunning and patience you would expect from any cat. They are born explorers. While not always the most eloquent of creatures, the cats are nothing if not courteous. They are also very loyal, almost to a fault. A cat would rather die than desert a friend in need. Many of the great cats live in the mountain regions, although many also live in the forests. Their closest allies are the gryphons, though the amiable nature of the cats tends to put them on good terms with most everyone.
- GRYPHONS:** As half lion, the gryphons share many characteristics with the great cats. However, as they are also half eagle they greatly lack in patience and can be as nervous as the cats are calm. The only race of light gifted with flight, the gryphons are well suited to the adventurous lives they prefer. The gryphons are bold in the face of danger and fear little. To the other races, save their close friends the great cats, the gryphons are a mysterious race. Indeed, the gryphons are usually suspicious of any race other than the cats. The

gryphons live high in the mountain peaks, which tends to isolate them from the other races.

DRAGONS: The dragons were born from the envy and greed of the races of light, and those qualities they epitomize. They are dark, evil, and ancient creatures who care for nothing but themselves and their hoard. While few in number, the dragons are great in size and strength. They take great pride in this, which leads them to be arrogant to a fault. They enjoy being flattered and spoken to in riddles. The dragons detest all the races of light and make use of the other darker races only when it suits their needs. They live in large caves, usually in the mountains.

DRAHK: The drahk are the twisted descendants of Trogalla, though they have little in common with their distant cousins, the oreads. Their behavior more closely resembles that of the dragons. They delight in gold and jewels, but with the intention to hoard. A weak race, they are crafty and devious when they believe themselves the stronger, but are whining and obsequious when at an obvious disadvantage. They dwell in dark, dank holes deep in the mountains and are enemies with all the races of light.

CHANGELINGS: Little is known about the changelings immortal. They were placed by LIAMB the Light into the world as guardians. They are an extremely playful and mischievous race, but their intentions are never malevolent. However, behind their often frivolous exteriors lie beings of extraordinary power.