

THE THIRTEENTH UPHEAVAL



A STORY OF OLD VIRNALIA: BY S. DAWSON

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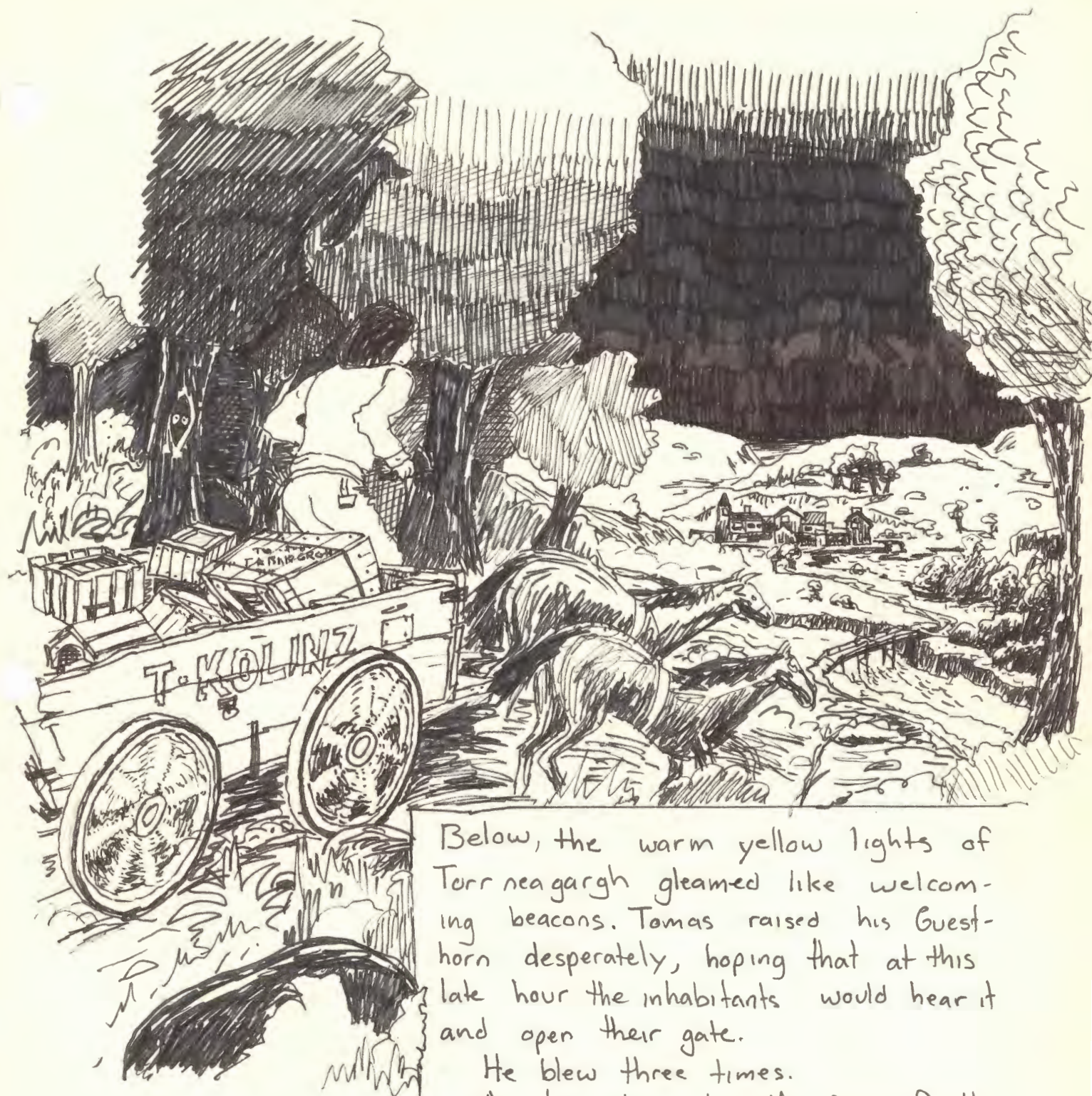
A STORY OF OLD VIRNALIA: BY S. DAWSON

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT. THERE WAS LITTLE RAIN, BUT THE WIND WAS STRONG and gusty. Tomas Kolinz had trouble keeping his wagon on the road. He dared not rest, however; his pursuers were too close behind. He could hear their cries and the baying of their terrible hounds. The horses were nearing exhaustion: they had pulled a heavy load all the way from the main road, up this smaller road. The road was thick with ruts and gulleys, and led mostly uphill.

They splashed across a stream and started uphill. Tomas paused near the top of the hill, just in time to see the evil red torches of the pursuers come down into the valley.

Then they rattled over the top of the hill.

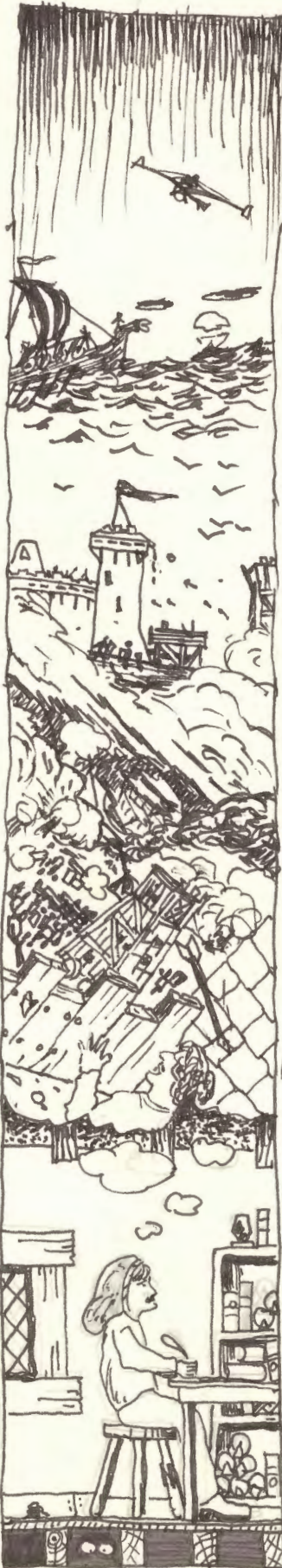




Below, the warm yellow lights of Torr neagargh gleamed like welcoming beacons. Tomas raised his Guest-horn desperately, hoping that at this late hour the inhabitants would hear it and open their gate.

He blew three times.

As he drew breath for a fourth blow, something dark and evil seemed to come at him from behind. The horses faltered in their stride, and stumbled; then darkness claimed all...



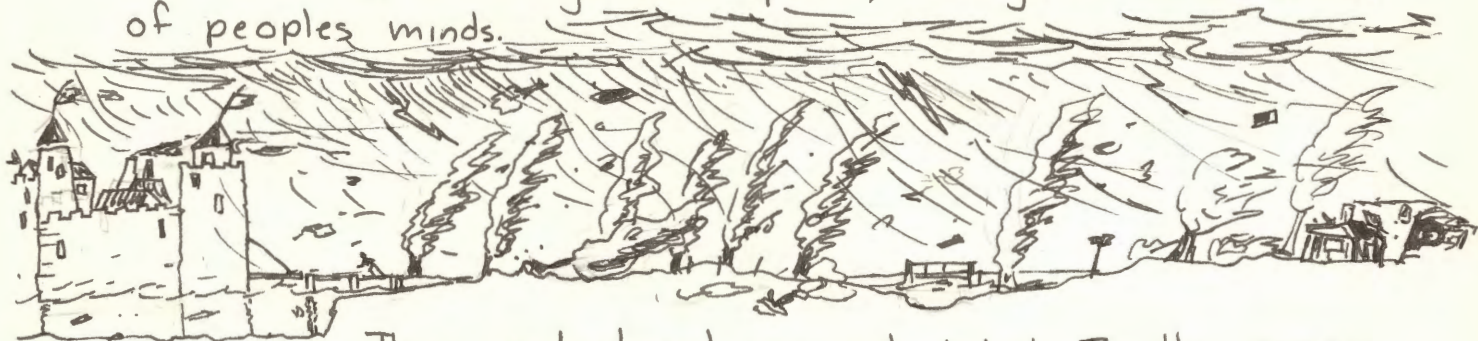
THE TROUBLE WAS NOT NEW, NOR WAS IT RECENT. HISTORIANS IN BESSIMIA HAVE RECORDED A total of twelve times of strife and upheaval, but noone ever dreamed that the thirteenth would begin with a resounding victory....

The year 973 had been a year of unrest and strange happenings. In June of that year, two travellers, Xavier Corrigan and Pierre O'Neary, had set out for Bessimia from the village of Yukon Picket in the far northeast. While on their journey, they had been trapped on a bridge by the infamous 'Flying Army' of the Birds of Death. The two had put up a stubborn defence and had so demoralised the Birds that they had been easy prey to a detachment of the Watch sent out from the nearby town of Sutton-under-Spire. Apparently word of the victory spread among the Birds, for soon after the remnant of the Birds retired to their native Bolgith Swamps, two towns occupied by other Bird armies were recaptured with little injury.

Peace was restored, and even behind the Long Wall the creatures of the swamps were quiet.

The decade that followed was peaceful and prosperous. Things were quiet, but disturbing rumours circulated persistently about the Southwest - the area nearest the Bolgith Swamps. Typical examples included: THE GOVERNOR IS A BOLGITH SPY, and THE MAYOR OF BESSIMIA WAS ASSASSINATED AND IS NOW A BOLGITH ZOMBIE, or even BOLGITH ARMIES ARE NOW DIGGING TUNNELS UNDER BESSIMIA TO MAKE IT FALL INTO THE SEA. None of

the rumours were true (The mayor of Bessimia was alive and well, for instance) but they reflected a minority opinion: it was TOO QUIET. Most people were quite happy, however, and the "Battle of the Bridge" was quickly relegated to the backs of peoples minds.



This contentment was not to last. In the spring of 983 Virnaha experienced unusual rains. Lowlying areas became marshes or lakes, roads slumped into valleys, and buildings were widely damaged; high winds accompanying the rain accounted for much of this. As the cleanup progressed, it was noticed that buildings were inexplicably damaged. One farmers barn in Upper Johnson was shifted off its foundations and wrecked; it was conclusively proved that neither wind nor water could have been involved. Marks of crowbars and strange hoof prints were found near the building, and it was suggested that a gang of ruffians had done the work, using horseshoes to disguise their tracks. People in Upper Johnson remembered its occupation by Birds of Death and were inclined to think that the birds were up to something again.

This feeling quickly became general. People traveling alone in the provinces were waylaid, and their mutilated bodies were found later. Buildings were wrecked in alarming numbers. People went about with weapons handy. Fear spread.

There was no sign of movement from the Bolgith Swamps, however. In June 983 a cautious Watch expedition went behind the Long Wall and found - nothing! The land was deserted! Not a monster to be seen!

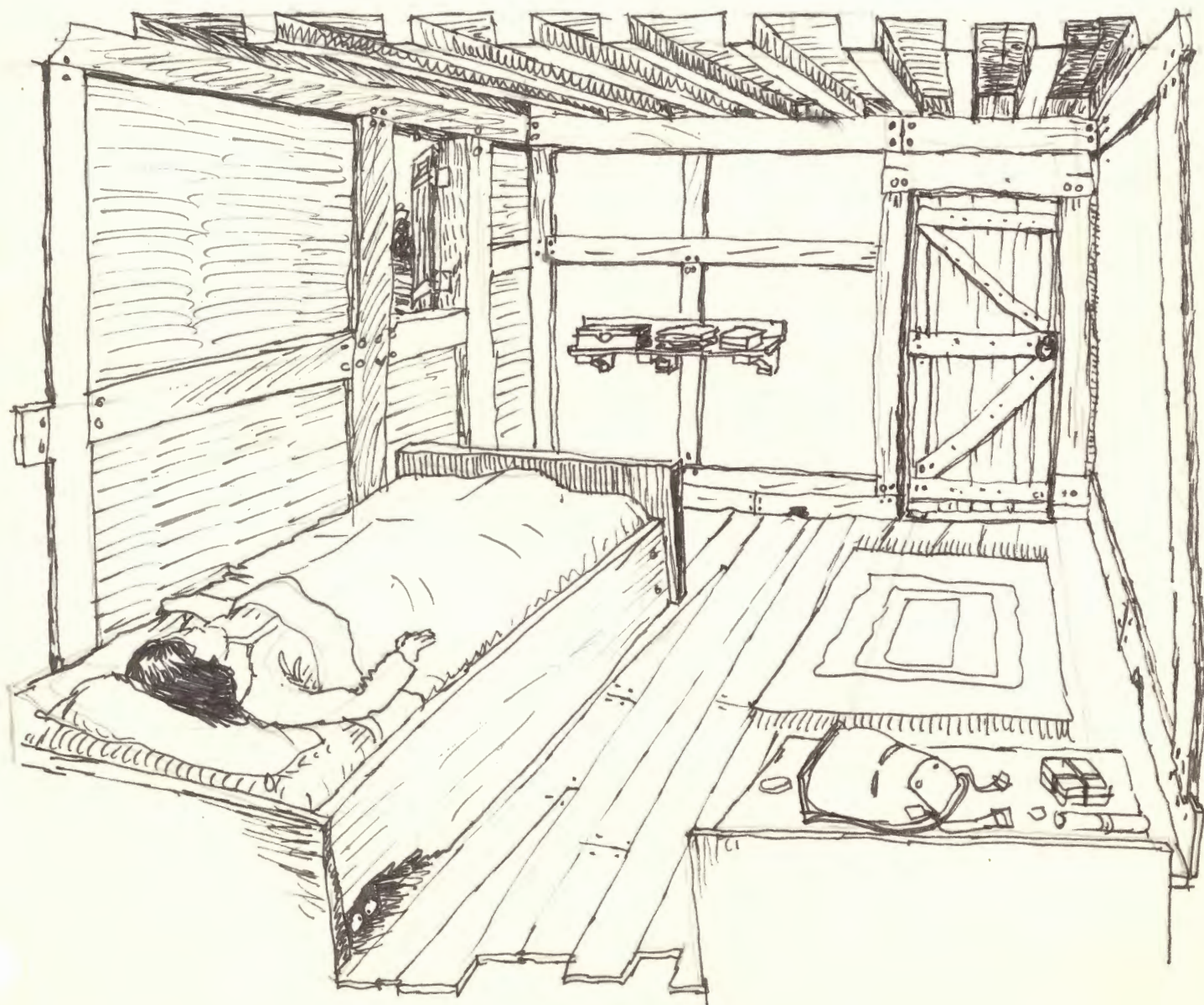
This astonishing news caused a sigh of relief among many people....

Tomas Kolinz

TOMAS KOLINZ WOKE. HE WAS IN BED, IN A SMALL ROOM WITH HALF-TIMBERED WALLS AND WOODEN FLOOR.

He was dressed in strange clothes and he could not see his own clothes. The open window let in plenty of light. Outside, Tomas glimpsed forested hills. There was only one door, which was closed.

Tomass drifted in and out of sleep for a while, then the opening of the door awoke him fully.



"Ah! Glad to see that you're awake!

A short man with fiery red hair

walked in. "I am Dr. Kun. My card—" He handed Tomas a small piece of parchment on which was written

"DR S B KUN, B.Dm., M.Th., B.A.S.O., 12 Sackpull Square, BESSIMIA"

"As you can see, I'm a bit of a specialist: arcane arts and all that. I came to tell some things to you that are fairly important.

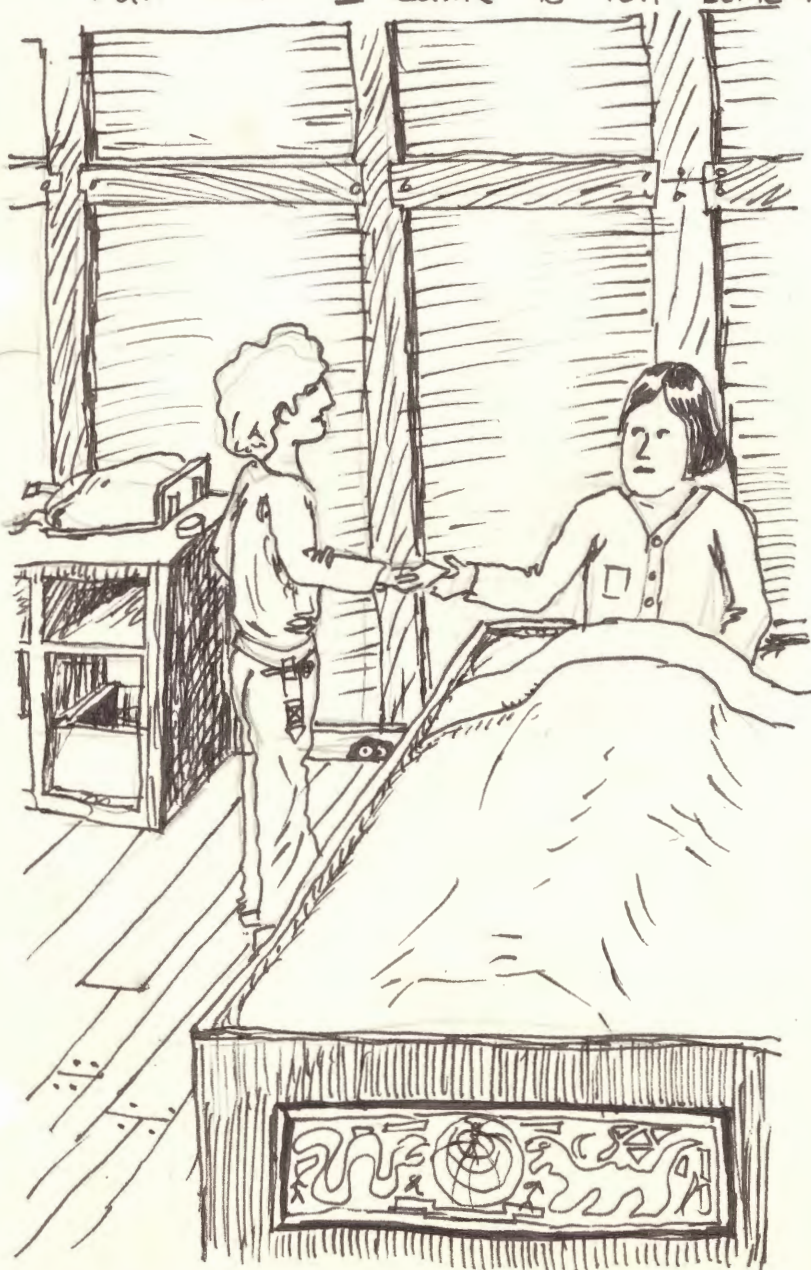
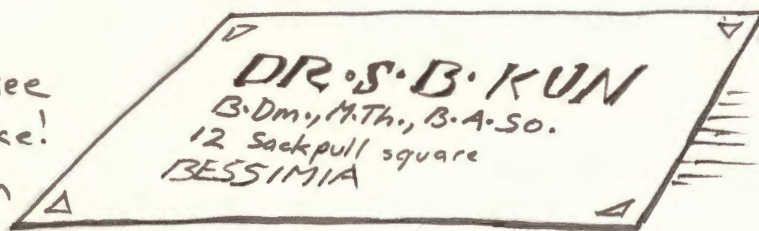
"Apparently the mayor in Bessimia is worried - understandably, with the situation in the provinces being the way it is these days. He thinks you can help, and he wants us in Bessimia by nightfall."

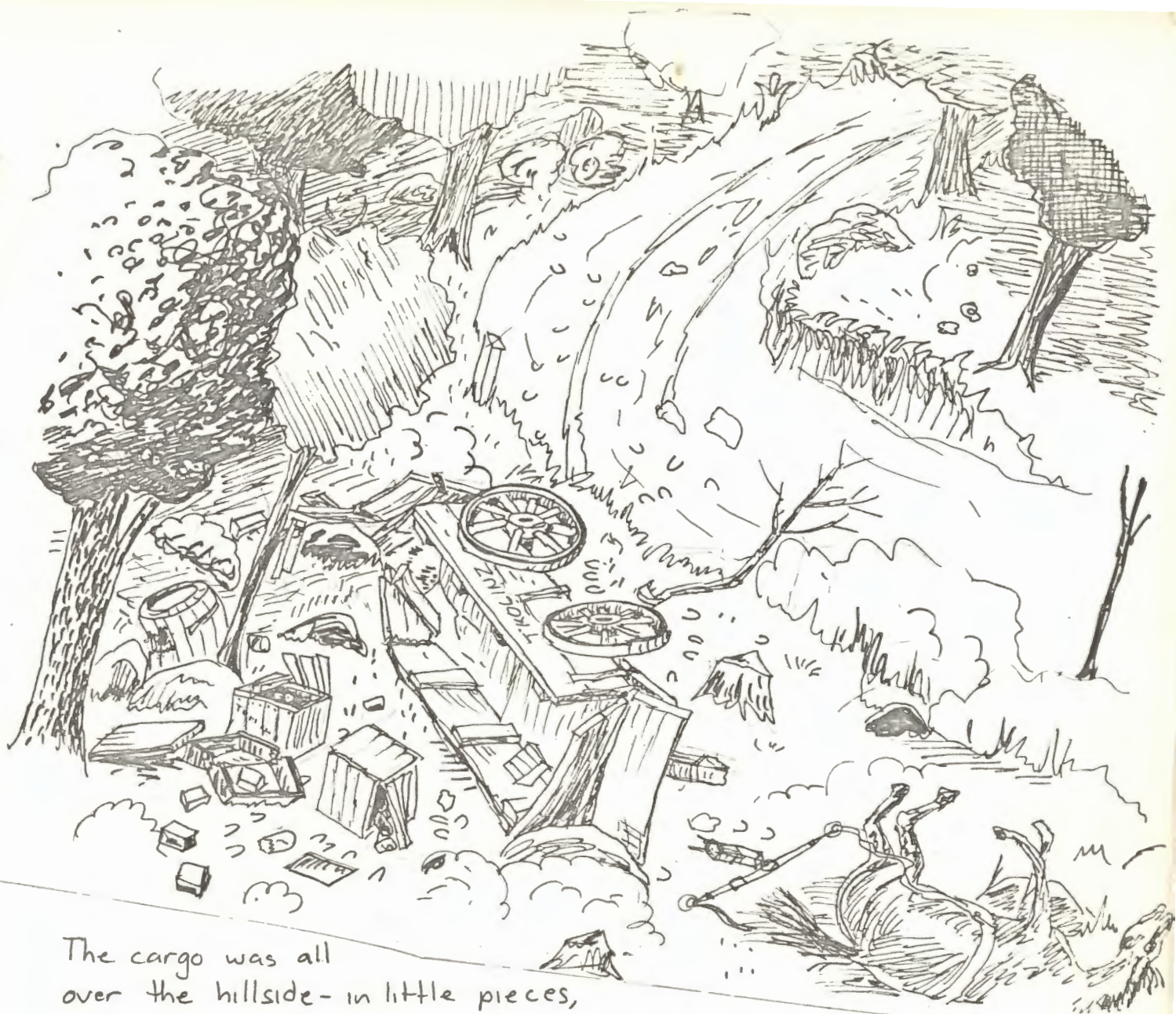
"But what —"

"Oh, don't worry about your health, Mr Kolinz. You're alright. Apparently you came through Friday night's attack with no ill effects at all! Very unusual!"

"And my cargo?"

"A total loss, unfortunately. We heard your horn in the compound here at Torrneagargh - apparently a labourer was working outside, and alerted us - and we rushed out and found your wagon tipped over on the hillside.





The cargo was all over the hillside - in little pieces, unfortunately. Ruined. Your poor horses were both dead - they looked as if they had been terrified. We found you in a bush - evidently that broke your fall and saved your life. There were hoofprints all around - and not of horses either! "

"But who'll pay for it?"

"Don't worry. If all works out, we'll have Bessimie pay for it. Incidentally we're to leave in half an hour. Best get ready."

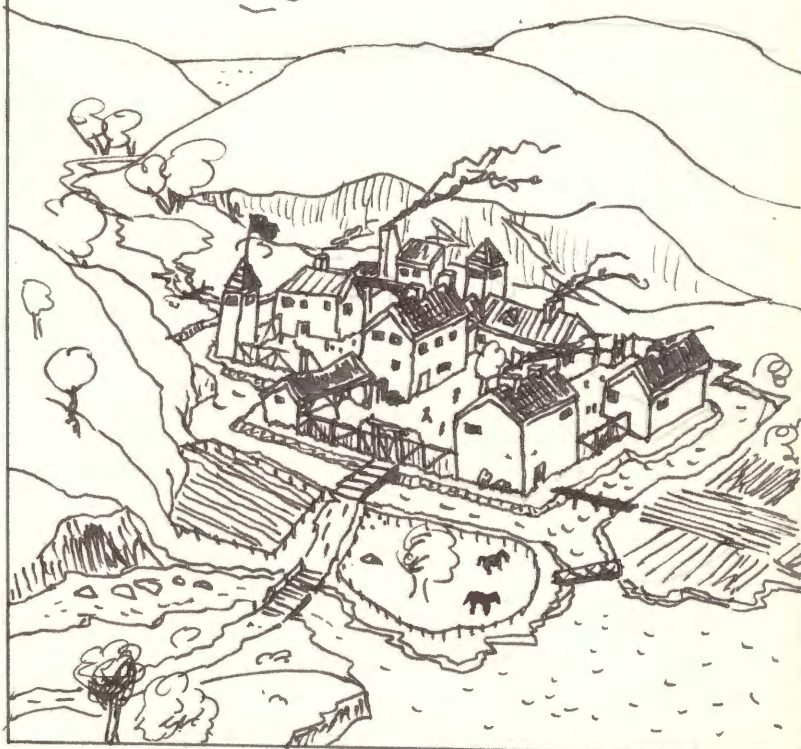
Dr Kun went out. Tomas got out of bed and dressed. He found his own clothes in a drawer nearby but decided to continue wearing the ones he had on. They seemed to be a gift.

Shortly thereafter he went down to get breakfast.

TORRNEAGARGH WAS AN
OUTLYING FARMING

community. Tucked neatly under a cliff, facing south, and sheltered from the winds, it looked down across the lowlands to the southern alps. Torrneagargh was connected to civilisation by a tolerable road which joined the Great North Road about forty miles north of Bessimra. It was far enough from the city to stay out of minor squabbles, yet not too far to help and be helped in times of trouble.

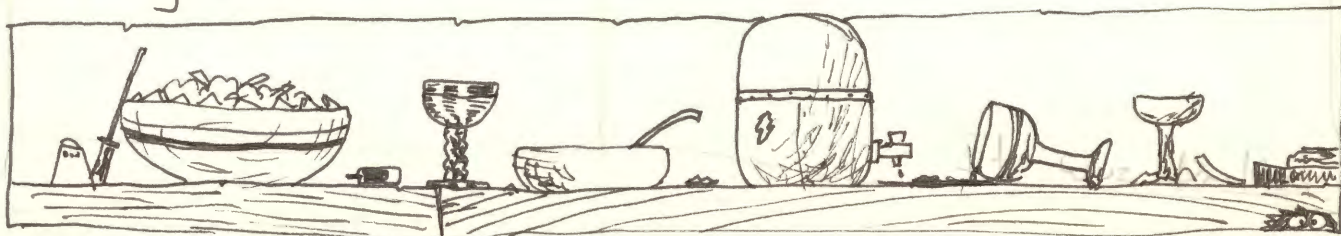
TORRNEAGARGH



IN the common room it was crowded. People sat at table eating and talking; others bustled about. Dr Kun detached himself from a knot of people and went over to Tomas.

"Glad to see you. We'll be leaving in about twenty minutes. I managed to get your wagon fixed; it wasn't too badly damaged. There are other horses we can use to take it back to Bessimra; the headman here has lent us four. Eat quickly. We must be on the road by nine. I'll be out in the compound, packing. Hurry up!" Dr Kun hurried out and several other people went out after him.

Tomas turned to the farmer next to him and remarked, "Strange person, that Dr Kun. Do you know anything about him?"

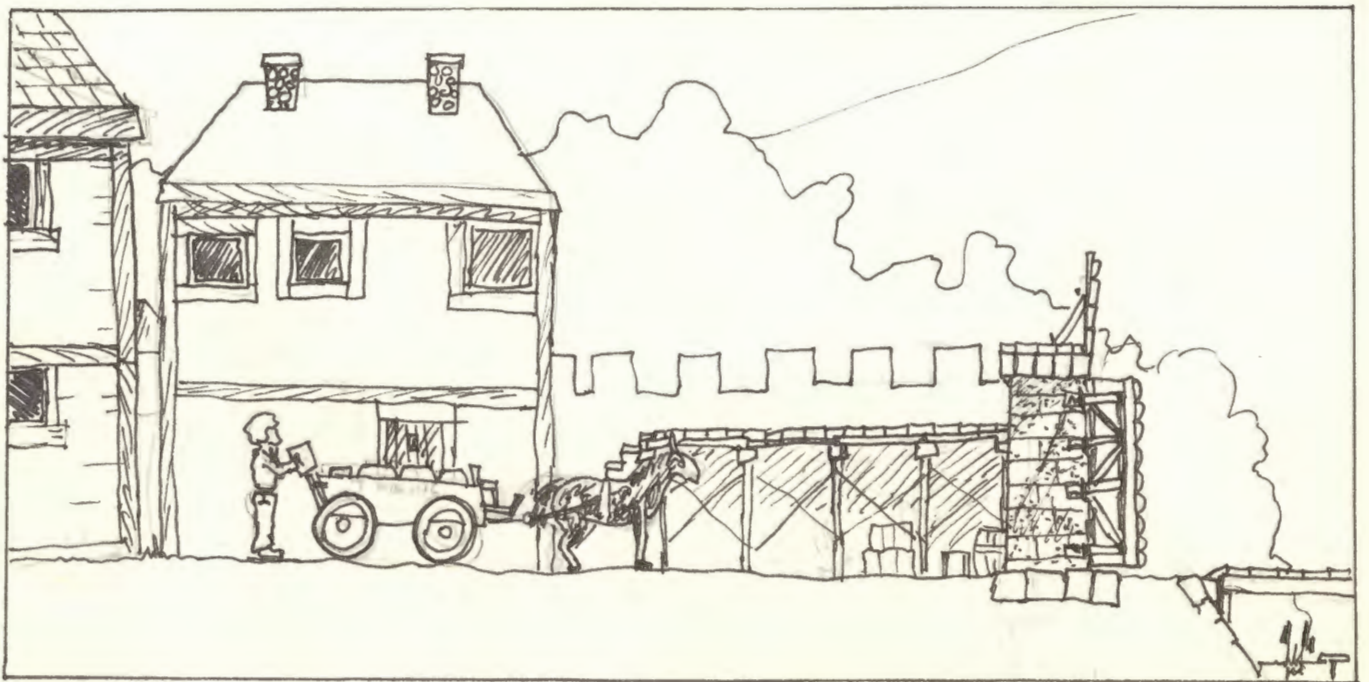


"Not much. I believe he's a councillor or something, in Bessimia. Rumour has it that he has close connections with the Mayor. I know only that he showed up yesterday, in other words on Monday. We had sent a message down to the capital and they sent a posse up to check on this attack thing. Apparently the bigwigs in Bessimia are worried about us. Probably they're afraid we will be wiped out and then they won't get any taxes!"

The farmer laughed.

Tomas turned back to his food. He was well into his dessert (a bowl of gronkberry jam) when a voice behind him said, "Hurry up! We've got to go!"

It was Dr Kun.





DR. KUN, TOMAS, AND THE REST OF THE POSSE WERE WELL ON THE WAY BACK TO BESSIMIA. THEY WERE MOVING fairly rapidly; Dr Kun and Tomas riding in a wagon and the others on a motley assortment of horses. There were a dozen members in all.

Dr Kun and Tomas were in conversation.

"... and after you got out of school, what did you do?"

This was Tomas.

"Well," said Dr Kun, "what most of us did was to apprentice ourselves to a master. I myself was apprentice to my great-uncle, Alibaxer Kun. Greatest sorcerer in Virnalia! A little family bias there, though."

"So B.A.So means bachelor of applied sorcery?"

"That's right"

"What is 'applied' sorcery anyways? Whats the difference between it and theoretical?"

"Well, a theoretical sorcerer designs new spells for specialised applications," Dr Kun explained, "such as custom-built shield-fields for fortresses, et cetera. An applied sorcerer mainly deals with the ordinary door-lock or guard-field type of sorcery. Though he too has to have a bit of creativity. It's like the difference between the guy who designs buildings and the guy who builds them—two different aspects of the same thing."

"I see. What does M.Th. mean?"

"Master of Therianthropy. That's simply a king-size word for skin-changer. The Kun family has always had more than its share of skinchangers: were-wolves, were-bears, were-pelicans,



were-fennecs and so on. Heredity seems to be a major factor in this Me, I'm a were-elk. The talent comes in handy—especially when I want to open a jug and there's no opener handy. Only problem: It mars my antlers.."

They chuckled. Subsequently, after looking ahead, Tomas said, "Isn't that the road's end up there?"

Dr Kun said, "It is. We've only a few miles to go on the other road. Look! You can see the Bessimia Temple tower over the trees. We'll be in Bessimia in the hour. I—"

The ground began to shake....

Trees shook and dead branches fell into the road. In a field nearby a herd of sheep milled about in confusion; after a few minutes the vibration and its attendant low rumbling died away. The only sound was that of startled birds.

With difficulty Tomas got the horses under control. The other members of the party reined in and everyone had a hasty consultation.

"Oh, it was nothing!"

"-Nothing? They've been having them down here all summer! My mother's dishes fell -"

"I'd say, the Birds were up to something again...."

"Birds? Ha! How can a flock of greasy Birds cause an earthquake? Why, they couldn't -"

"Quiet! Quiet!" yelled Dr Kun. "We'd best get to Bessimia. We may be needed!"

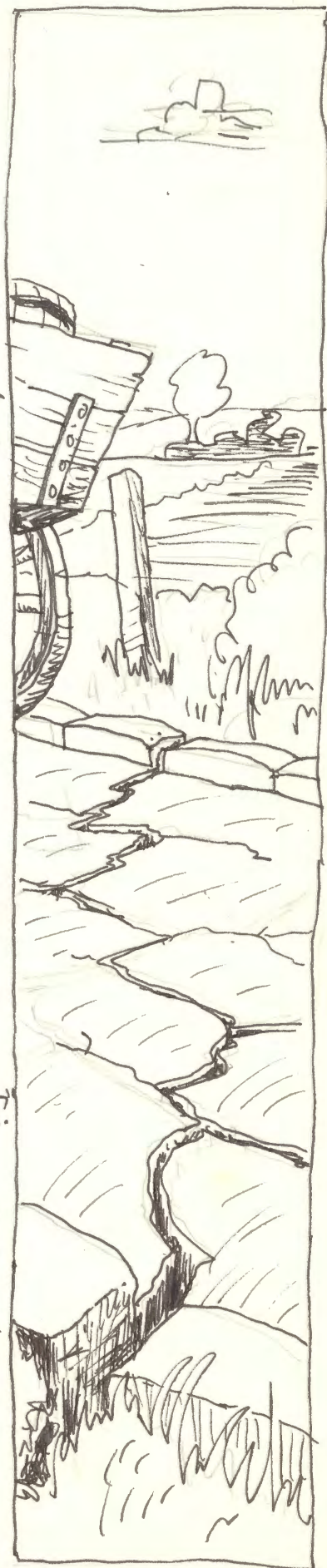
"Needed? Wha -"

"They've got enough manpower down there to sink a battleship! Why would we be needed to repair damage from a little quake like this?"

"You never know what may happen," Dr Kun said. "Now shut up and let's ride. I've an appointment with the mayor - and I'm not to be late!"

Grumbling a bit, the group spurred their horses and moved ahead.

They right at the end of the road, onto the Coastroad. A few hundred feet from the intersection, the road became rough and fissures appeared.





"That's odd! The road wasn't like this when I came up here before my, er, 'attack'." said Tomas. "Usually these are the best-maintained roads on the Island!"

"Could be earthquake damage..." Dr Kun suggested.

"Impossible! That earthquake was nowhere near the strength necessary to ruin a road," one of the posse said.

"But look! See how the damage tapers off behind us and increases ahead! It would seem that the earthquake was much more intense at the centre than it seemed but it got weaker more quickly."

"Worse ahead? Then in Bessimia...."

With a sudden urgency the group moved onwards. They did not get far. A fallen elm blocked the road, and there was no way for the wagon to go through. Dr Kun and Tomas got out, climbed over the tree and started to inspect the trunk to see if it could be moved. They did not inspect much.

At a shout from one of the outriders, they turned around - and stared in shock.

Just ahead, Bessimia, the City of Images, lay in ruins.



IT WAS A GLOOMY MAYOR WHO MET DR KUN AND TOMAS. THE CONSULTATION WAS HELD IN THE HALF-ruined Guildhall near the docks. All the important people who could be spared were there.

The mayor opened the meeting: "Quiet, please! We must get down to business.

This is a day of tragedy. I know many - most - of you are overworked already, but we must work harder to avert the woes to come. Even as we sit here there is another disaster coming - unless we prevent it. Dr Matheson, you can explain.

"An old man got off a battered stool and made his way to the front. "Well, it is this. As you undoubtedly know, we have had tremors all summer. These seem to be extremely localised, rarely affecting areas far from Bessimia. Am I right in assuming that this is true for this quake as well?"

Dr Kun said, "Yes. At the intersection of the Coastroad and the Great North Road, there is hardly any damage."

"As I thought," replied Dr Matheson, "What we found out is that these quakes are artificially produced!"

A babble of confused talking rose in the room. The mayor quietened everyone down with some difficulty.

"We have made tests, and my colleagues at the University are sure that the quakes are emanating from a region about fifty feet down beneath the city. We have no proof but we think that these tunnels were built by the members of a force from the Bolgith Swamps: If there is another tremor fissures may open up - and then we would be very easy to conquer."

"Thankyou!" said the mayor. Everybody began to talk at once, and Dr Kun and Tomas quickly left the uproar.

They picked their way through rubble-strewn streets to one of the few inns that was still standing. It was full, the innkeeper said, there was no room.

The disaster victims had priority. After trying three more inns (only one of which was in fairly good condition), they finally managed to find room in a barracks for members of the Bessimia wall-guard.

That night both men slept badly. They were woken in the morning by the noise of hammering from outside. They dressed, ate some trail-food since there was naturally no inn-food, and went outside. A notice was nailed to the door: TO AID IN RECONSTRUCTION, BESSIMIA IS UNDER MARTIAL LAW. PLEASE OBEY ORDERS. SOLDIERS SHOULD REPORT TO THEIR COMMANDERS.

signed - Tarl Brenton, Mayor of Bessimia.



"Hmmm! I guess they're taking this invasion threat seriously! We'd best go to Watch Command. They may need a sorcerer. You, Tomas, will most probably be welcome. Bessimia needs all the help it can get!" said Dr Kun. They set off towards Watch Command. As they passed the Bessimia Temple, whose tower was now leaning to the south, the ground began to vibrate.

"O no! Another quake!" came a shout from a building.

"I've a very bad feeling about this...." said Tomas.

The more precarious buildings began to sway. The tremor quickly subsided though. They had just got to the Watch Command barracks when it happened.

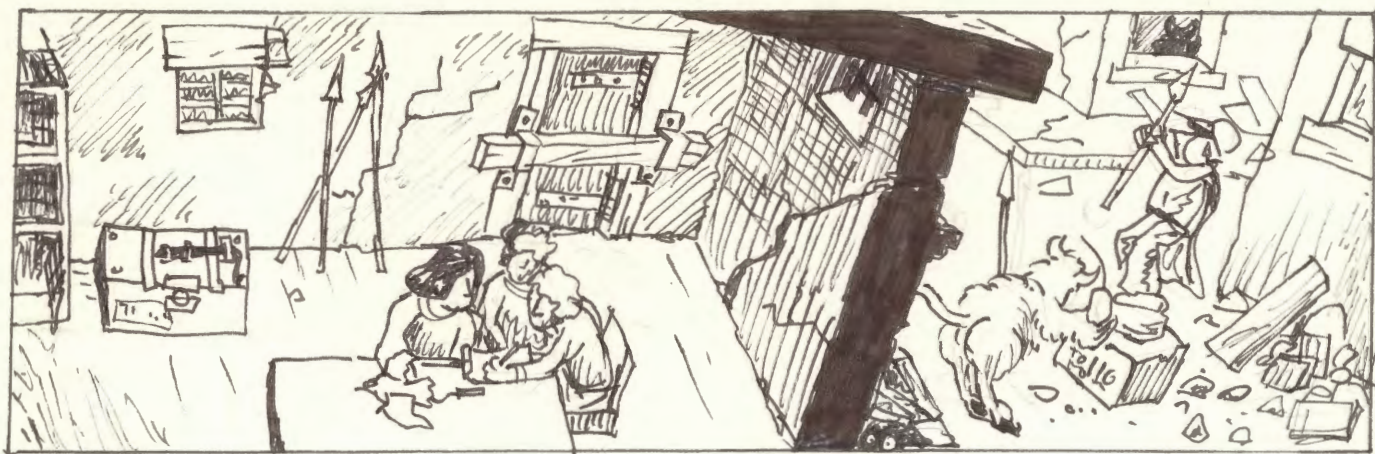
With a clattering noise large numbers of hideous goatly creatures rushed out of fissures, from behind ruins and out of buildings.

"O My God! Torlats!" yelled Dr Kun.

A voice from the Watch barracks said, "Quick! In here!" Tomas and Dr Kun ran into the barracks through a small side door. The soldier who had yelled closed the door behind them.

"Whats Going on? Are we under siege?"





"Torlats! They must have come out of fissures opened by the quakes. We have to get through to the mayor.

Wait! Maybe we can use pigeons. There're some here which we use for messaging," said Dr Kun

"Yes," said the soldier, "I'll get one, along with a message blank." He went to a case on the other side of the room and got a paper, and removed a pigeon from a stack of cages nearby. The bird had a small tube tied to its leg. The soldier wrote out a short message and placed it in the carrier. "How's this? MAYOR BRENTON: AM TRAPPED IN WATCH COMMAND BARRACKS. WILL TRY TO GET TO PALACE. BRINGING T. KOLINZ AND S. B. KUN. SIGNED T. KOLINZ-MELNALIG SR. PVT. Uh, those are your names, aren't they?"

"Yep." This was Tomas.

"Splendid. What are these torlats, anyway? I've had experience with them, but these seem to be different:—larger!" This was Dr Kun.

"Well, these Torlats seem to live in the north of the Bolgith themselves, rather than in the hills to the east. They've been raiding in the past week or so, from the Swamps. They're good fighters but not very intelligent: one man can easily master one. Just a word of warning though—they sing, probably to lure people off to some dungeon or other. Its horrible yet fascinating..... people lured by them don't return!"

The soldier collected his helmet and sword and buckled them on.

"Have you a helmet? Put it on. There maybe Torlat snipers in a few of the buildings."

The soldier, Dr Kun and Tomas spent a few minutes adjusting various buckles, straps and belts on their weapons, helmets and a few stray pieces of armor the soldier had managed to acquire for the group. They moved to the door. The soldier cautiously opened it, and they stepped out. Torlats were all over the buildings nearby, chipping marks, pulling down bits of wall - or worse. Tomas heard, to his alarm, a scream in the distance.

The Torlats did not sense the humans at first. The trio had gotten about thirty yards from the door when a Torlat in the act of chipping an arm from a fallen statue saw them. It let out a keening wail. Torlats began bouncing towards the men.

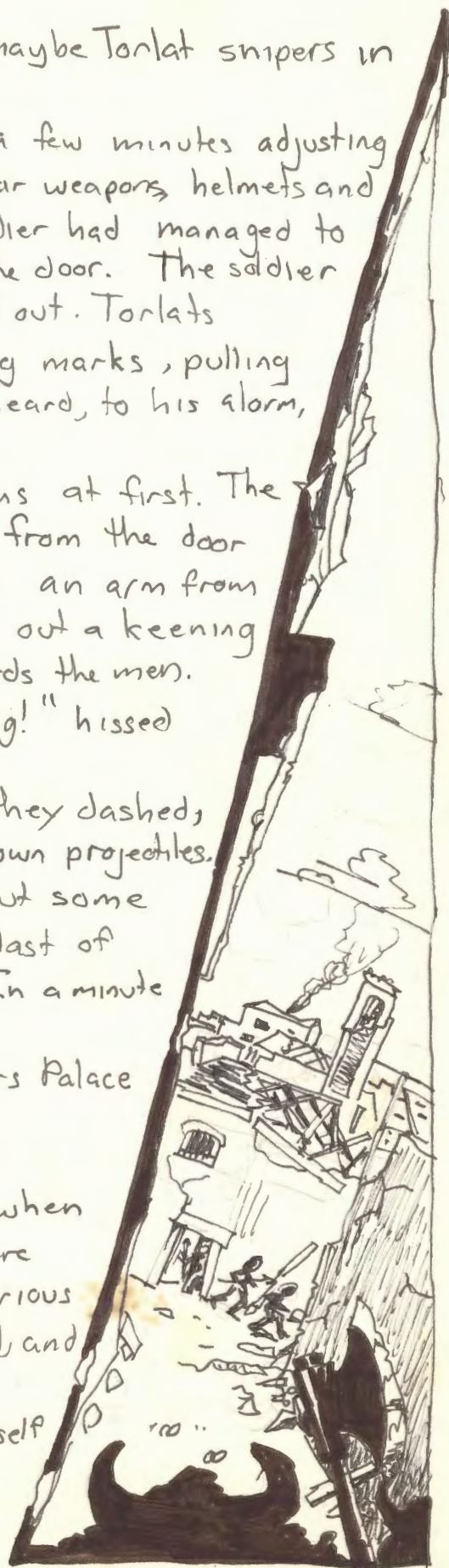
"Run! Straight ahead - the white building!" hissed the soldier.

They ran. Straight up the road they dashed, avoiding Torlats, debris and various thrown projectiles. Several Torlats tried to give battle, but some whacks with swords and a small blast of force from Dr Kun subdued them. In a minute or so they reached their destination.

They were rushed inside the Mayors Palace and taken directly to the Mayor.

Tarl Brenton was in conference when Dr Kun and Tomas arrived. They were led into a room which was quite luxurious but damaged. A crack ran up one wall, and the ceiling sagged slightly.

"Sit down," Tarl said, "and make yourself comfortable."





"We are discussing ways to rid the city of these foul creatures and rebuild it. Tomas, Dr Kun, these are Tom Jenkins, John Mortonsen, and Tomlin Yang."

Dr Kun said, "Howdy. What are the plans?"

"Well," Mayor Brenton said, "as you know, there are tunnels under the city, dug by the Enemy, and something in the tunnels is responsible for the quakes. We have discussed all our plans and there is only one thing to do."

"I don't like the sound of this..." said Tomas.

"We must outfit an expedition to go down in the tunnels and root out this menace to society!!!"

There was a silence in the room.

"And who is going on this expedition?"

"Well, we need an adept, some good strong soldiers and an assistant for the adept. They must be off within half an hour, for if we wait any longer we are doomed. Every minute the Enemy brings in more Torlats...."

He paused and looked directly at Dr Kun.

In a strong voice he said, "I, by the power in me, duly charge Dr S. B. Kun to carry out this mission, and Tomas Kolinz to be his assistant. You may choose up to five soldiers from the Palace Barracks to be your

"... guards. You are to be ready in an hour."

After another silence, Tomas turned to Dr Kun and said, "That's another fine mess you've gotten us into!"

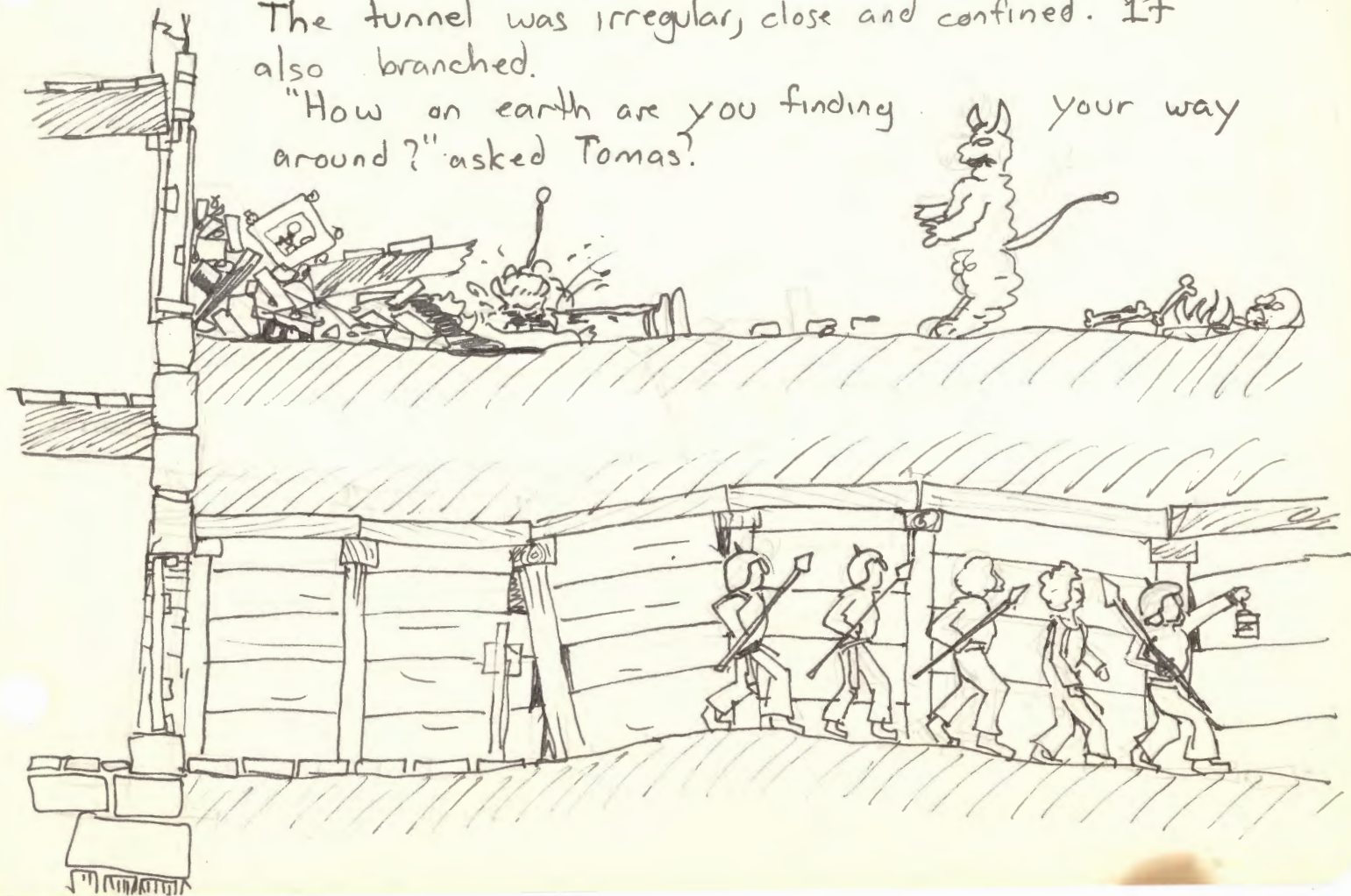
In half an hour the little expedition was ready (there were only three soldiers) and they started. They left the palace and went by an obscure underground passageway to a neighbouring building's basement. The walls were buckled and shifted. In a few minutes they were at a hole in the basement wall of the second building.

One of the soldiers said, "This is a tunnel which we believe leads to the Enemy's passages. We'd better step carefully... there are no end of Torlats and worse down there. We need our energy!"

They moved into the opening, from which a foul air drifted. A soldier went in first, followed by Dr Kun, then Tomas, then the two other soldiers.

The tunnel was irregular, close and confined. It also branched.

"How on earth are you finding your way around?" asked Tomas.



"It's easy!" said Dr Kun. "If you want to find monsters, just follow your nose!"

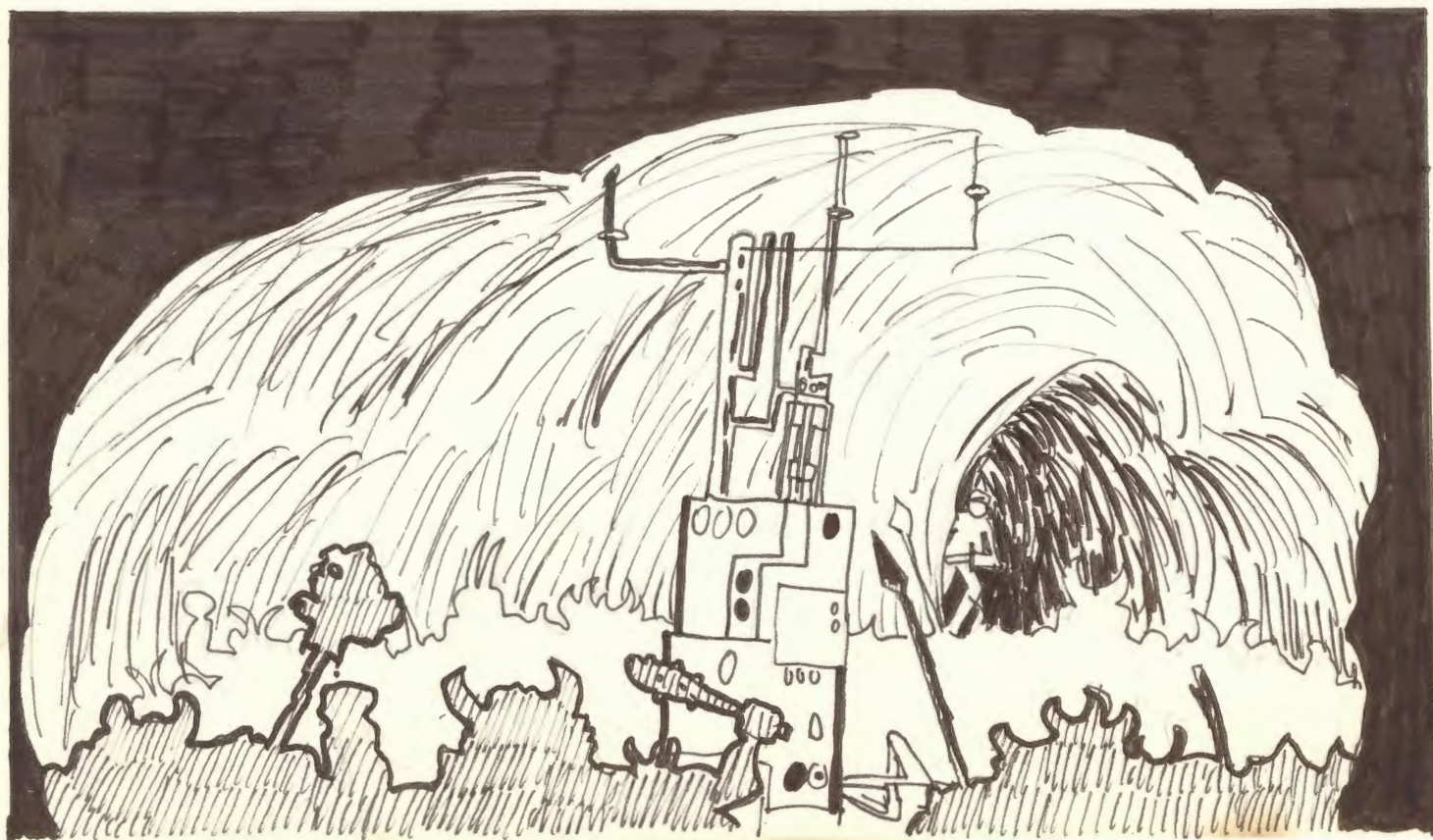
The tunnel air gradually grew fouler as they moved downwards. After a while the tunnel sloped down steeply, then abruptly widened out into a cavern.

There were a lot of assorted monsters (bad, worse and absolutely revolting) inside, grouped around a large machine which glowed and whined. Large pistons and tubes came out of the top and entered the cavern roof.

Dr Kun stopped the group at the entrance. "Shhh! We don't want that lot upon us! That machine must be the earthquake generator! We've got to destroy it! Follow me!"

Dr Kun led the group cautiously around the edge of the cavern. As the monsters were grouped in the centre of the cavern, there was plenty of room for them to manoeuvre around the outside, using rocks and shadows for cover.

At one side of the cave power-cables from the machine entered the wall. The humans headed for these. They had gotten



nearly two-thirds of the way around the cavern when they were discovered. A monster happened to turn around, and it saw them, and it let out a roar. Immediately monsters began to close in on the humans, who ran for the power-cables.

In a second a soldier reached the power-cables and began hacking at them with his sword.

The monsters were within a yard of the soldier when the cables parted.

A blinding flash of light and a roar of thunder stunned the monsters long enough to allow Dr Kun to collect everybody and run for the entrance. They headed straight across the cavern.

Monsters slashed at them; horns, claws and fangs sought their flesh. Tomas barely escaped disembowelment when a monster slashed with a broadaxe.

They gained the tunnel-exit and ran for the surface. A monster-horde boiled after them. In a minute they were through the tunnels and the basement and on the surface.

They ran. Glancing back, Dr Kun saw that only a few monsters had emerged from the building when there was a slight disturbance in the ruins above the cavern. The ground seemed to shift, and abruptly a stupendous explosion tore the ruins apart. Bricks, concrete and stones soared high into the air.

Other explosions followed, wrecking what remained of Bessimia; but the monsters were killed! Torlats keeled over in the streets!

Bessimia was free!



THROUGH A HAIL OF BITS OF DÉBRIS DR KUN, TOMAS AND THE SOLDIERS MADE THEIR WAY TO THE PALACE.

Only a few people could be seen about, but the bodies of tarlats were numerous.

At the palace it was somewhat confused. The explosions had surprised everyone and some people feared another monster attack.

The mayor met Dr Kun and the group just outside the palace. After learning what had happened, he became jubilant.

"Splendid! Just splendid! You're sure the monsters were destroyed?"
"Yes. Nothing could survive those explosions - and as for the infall of débris, well! The monsters from the Bolgith Swamps are dead!"

The mayor spread this news throughout the city and many people celebrated in spite of the deaths from the quakes.

Dr Kun and Tomas were given an 'honorary medallion' which would be placed in the Bessimia Museum, as well as smaller medals to take home.

The three soldiers were promoted two grades, and all were showered with gifts.

In a few years Bessimia was duly rebuilt, and became prosperous again. Surviving monsters fled into the Swamps, and an improved Watch made sure they stayed there. The tunnels, those that survived, were destroyed or flooded, and all was secure again.

within a few years there were few hints that anything at all had happened!

