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Part One: The hook, the party splits up, the mystery.

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Part Four: An unconclusive conclusion

## Introduction

I am very grateful to Angus and Emanuel Sacchi who preserved these files, and sent them to me when I announced that I had lost them. Since my original introduction seems permanently lost, I will write another for this reposting of "Hostile Takeover" (Originally "The Four-Way Door")

**Editor’s Note**: And special thanks to Darkinterloper (Anthony Morse) for re-rediscovering Parts 1-4 after they were once again lost to the depths of the internet.

**Purpose**

I posted this story originally as a response to an assertion by Brad Milton ( bradmltn@cougar.multiline.com.au ) that psionicists were "not powerful". Brad could not conceive of a powerful psionic villain. I offered to tell the story, and Brad took me up on it, and asked me to tell it from the player's PoV.

TSR's spectacular *Complete Book of Villains* (which I cannot recommend too much) presents another psychoporter villain (even set in Dark Sun, believe it or not) that DMs really should look at, but the psychoporter villain in this adventure uses her abilities and antagonizes the party through very different, more large-scale means.

**PCs and Background**

Early in the adventure, the PCs unfortunately split into two groups:

Group A:

* MARKHAM, 8th level human preserver
* KHANJI, 4th level human gladiator

Group B:

* OLGA, aka "Lady Scorchwater", a human dual-class 5th level water-priestess/6th level preserver.
* BRANDT, Olga's half-elven half-brother, a 7th-level psionicist
* Another PC is relevant to the adventure, although he does not participate in the Fort Ianto portion: Corvin, a 8th-level fighter/psionicist.

For background, let me sum up two previous adventures that tie into this one. Both come from David Cook's *Road to Urik*:

1. The PCs were asked to "encourage" a noble family to send troops to support the war with Urik. They chose a blackmail tack which proved quite effective (though it made them a powerful enemy); they bribed one of the Noble's aides to tell them the incriminating information about the Noble Tyrthiani. All of the above was Dave Cook's idea. The incriminating evidence that I developed was that Tyrthani had hired starving peasants to till his fields, offering them good wages, and then turned around and sold fifty of these volunteers into slavery - to a Vordon Caravan headed to Gulg. The PCs had kept this a secret since Tyrthiani had ceded to their demands.

2. The PCs were asked to gather false evidence and frame someone for Kalak's murder. One of the PC's - Corvin, a Mul F/Psi who had fought in the arena and served in Tyr's guard, was made the King's official "messenger" in this task. This mini-adventure gets only one page in *The Road to Urik*, but I find it completely brilliant (Go, Dave C!). Dave Cook set this up as an opportunity for the PCs to collect bribes from factions aware of the official charade and not wanting to be blamed. Humorously, the messenger refused every single bribe that he was offered (!!!), then told the bribing party that they were not under suspicion at the moment, but that DOTE MAL PAYNE, (Kalak's disappeared former Chief Necromancer) was the chief suspect. The messenger refused the bribes but asked each of the potential bribers to help him gather "evidence" to implicate DMP. Of course, his refusing the bribes alarmed the bribers, and some of them actually did really help fabricate a lot of the PCs' evidence.

I won't go into the details, but the PCs put together such an excellent case that they convinced half the city, and even bewildered some of the people that knew that the investigation was a sham. Corvin's (the chosen PC messenger) singular refusal to take bribes strongly added to the party's mystique and credibility.

Major NPC KEY (spoiler)

Names are hard to follow, so I capitalize names or references to major NPCs:

* IANTO = head of merchant house Ianto, which owns a fort just in the shadow of the mountains below the Tyrian mines (**Editor’s Note**: It has been suggested that this might be Strabo Ianto).
* BERN = son of Ianto, who offers to bring the PCs into fort Ianto via his dream travel wild talent.
* WAXY = VORDON = head of merchant house Vordon, (see *Dune Trader*) (**Editor’s Note**: It has been suggested that this might be Thaxos Vordon).
* HALFLING, Vordon's deadly bodyguard (**Editor’s Note**: It has been suggested that this might be Derlan Watari, Thaxos' halfling bodyguard).
* OLD MAN, a military strategist employed by VORDON to train his troops (**Editor’s Note**: while this is probably an original character, a good fit might be Hintol, a trader for House Vordon out of Tyr that is mentioned in *Thri-Kreen of Athas*, pg 66).
* MOUSY = TROIKA = head of merchant house Troika (**Editor’s Note**: It has been suggested that this might be Asher Troika; while Asher is mentioned as male in *City State of Tyr*, it would be easy enough to genderswap him, or maybe it's his wife taking over after he died somehow).
* TWILE, a street urchin associated with Tyr's Veiled Alliance (see *Veiled Alliance*) An obvious tribute to Les Miserables' Gavroche, Twile does not accompany the PCs in the adventure.
* DMP = Dote Mal Payne, Kalak's former necromancer (see City State of Tyr)

**A Word on Presentation**

Some of you may dislike my choice of format. I will add notes to the DM as I go, but I will not format this as an adventure, since to me it's only worth that effort if I can submit it to TSR, and I have learned from bad experience that the Dungeon Staff will not even look at my work. (If any TSR staff read this, then correct me if I am wrong. If I think I have a chance of publication in Dungeon, I will gladly rewrite it in any format that the editors wish.)

## Part One: The Hook

Towards the end of a gaming session, I presented the following adventure hook:

A PC preserver and psionicist are approached on Tyr's streets by a friendly and familiar urchin-thief named TWILE (see *Veiled Alliance*). TWILE has a "friend" that has lost his mind, will the PCs help? The friend, a 10-year-old boy named BERN, is dressed in nobles' clothes, and claims to be the son of IANTO, the master of merchant house Ianto.

TWILE is trying to help BERN because he hopes to get some sort of reward from IANTO (BERN is obviously from a well-off family). The odd thing about BERN is that he won't open his eyes. He claims that his father's enemy is trying to "see through my eyes" to figure out where BERN is. BERN begs the PCS for a piece of cloth for a blindfold (he is wearing a finely patterned leather jerkin that he cannot tear to make his own blindfold. TWILE thinks BERN is deranged, and asks the PCs to heal him.

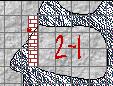
The PCs believe BERN, though, and question him. BERN tells them that fort Ianto, IANTO's merchant fortress in a mountain cave barely south of Tyr's iron mines, was seized last night by troops from a rival merchant house. (Both IANTO and TROIKA export silk.) Mistress TROIKA is a master mindbender, and it is she that is trying to see through BERN's eyes. If she succeeds, says BERN, she will psionically dispatch assassins to his location, to remove him as a witness. TROIKA has already killed BERN's mother; his father, IANTO, is hiding in the fortress. BERN begs the party to help him rescue IANTO.

The players talk to a few templars contacts--some of the PCs are actually political players in the city; see the introduction. The templars explain that outside the city boundaries, even within Tyr's protected lands, merchants’ quarrels are strictly ignored: "If we involved ourselves in every hostile takeover, the merchants would refuse to do business in Tyr." They try to talk to Master Sintha, who represents merchants to the city counsel; Sintha explains that Troika is a new house, has not yet been noticed or approached by the Tyrian merchant's league, and therefore is neither protected by nor subject to the loose rules of the merchants' league. Sintha adds that if Ianto is unable to throw off these upstarts, then perhaps it is time to approach Troika -- after the dust settles. (If the PCs had better interviewed BERN, and had told Sintha about the rust-uniform troops, then Sintha might have taken a mild interest in the fact that Troika was backed by another house, but the rust uniforms would not have pointed to Vordon).

BERN has had some psionic training (thanks to a rich and cautious father who had him enrolled) and as a result has a fair understanding of Psionics. He has no psionic defenses yet [NOTE: this was before I implemented the new psionic rules; TROIKA's contact still worked from a distance]. BERN's only psionic power so far is Dream Travel, which he used to escape the fortress, and wants to use to bring the PCs back in to rescue his father. Bern explains the Dream Travel power to the PCs, and describes an almost sealed-off room in the fort where he managed to hide eight hours in order to use the power and escape.

The players take my hook. Promised rewards and the gratitude of a moderately successful merchant house, the PCs agree to Dream Travel with BERN to fort Ianto to help rescue IANTO, who, BERN says, is hiding in the fort. Unfortunately, the PCs neglect to adequately question BERN about the layout of the fort. We close the game session, and I have two weeks to prepare the adventure.

## The Adventure Begins

The PCs take a room to begin BERN's Dream Travel. BERN uses Esperweed to enhance his ability, and is successful (to be honest I didn't roll it :) ).

The PCs are surprised when they wake up in pitch darkness in a walled-off portion of a cave (area 2-1). BERN says that this was a torture room centuries before IANTO took it over, cleaned it up, and walled off the portions that he did not need.

This was of course BERN's favorite hiding place (he is a 10-year old boy, after all) and his father told him to hide here and dream travel away when House Troika invaded. BERN tells PCs that there are two levels of caverns, and that they are on the lower one; the upper level contains the gate out of the fortress.

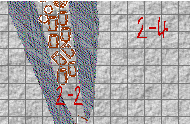
The PCs ask how Troika invaded in the first place and BERN tells them that Troika feinted an impossible frontal assault to draw Ianto troops to the front of the cave-fortress, then somehow got troops to attack from the back of the cave on the first level. These new troops were not wearing Troika livery, but some rust-colored uniforms. Their unexpected attack was devastating and IANTO ordered his own troops to surrender, and ran with his son to hide in the fortress caves. BERN still can't figure out how the rust-troops attacked from behind, but guesses that TROIKA somehow discovered an unknown set of caves that led to one of the caverns that IANTO had walled off.

When the PC's eyes adjust, they see faint flickering light coming from a chink in the wall near the ceiling. It is going to be a tight squeeze to get through. (Good thing that no kreen or half-giants are in this party!) They can't use light for fear of alerting the Troika guards. But climbing, squeezing, and dropping in darkness is noisy!

BERN and two PCs squeeze through; the second PC makes enough noise to alert the guards in the areas 2-3\* caves who pursue them across the cavern, and, sadly, catch BERN (10-year-old legs . . .) The other two PCs get away, but the fortress is alerted, and, you got it, THE PARTY IS SPLIT! Bad news, and definitely not what I had planned as DM!

The other two PCs, who I will call Group B, realized that the best way to get out without alerting more guards (who are pursuing group A) is to peek through the chink and Dimension Door out (thank heavens for well-played Psionicist PCs.) Group B finds themselves wandering around a huge, mostly empty and unoccupied cavern. (The fact that both groups have a preserver that turns them invisible helps evade enemies, but also keeps them from noticing each other and reuniting.)

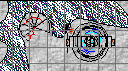
Group B observes Troika troops taking crates of valuable silk down the stairs, past the well, to a large hole in the rock (area 2-2) The valuable merchandise is being put into storage, or as PCs overhear from one of the guards, "out of the way." Out of the way of what?, Group B wonders.



As OLGA and BRANDT ponder this, the strangest thing happens: In the middle of the huge cavern (area 2-4), a blueish doorway appears.

BRANDT, a psionicist, recognizes the portal as a dimension door, but is baffled when four soldiers in rust-colored uniforms rush out both sides of the doorway (towards the north and south of area 2-4). The men seem disoriented for a moment, then regain their balance, and are poised to assist four more soldiers who rush out each side of the doorway.

The first soldiers push the disoriented soldiers in the direction they had come out of the doorway, and return to help the next group. As the soldiers regain their balance, they begin a very brisk march around the cavern; the ones who came out the north side running north, those on the south side go south. Each soldier seems to have some sort of white arm band on one arm -- the ones coming out the north side have the armband on the left arm, and the ones running south have it on the right arm.



Group A finds a huge circular stairway cut into the cave wall (next to a well) at the south edge of the huge cavern (they don't know their orientations, though). They are actually only fifty feet south of group B, but neither group knows this, since both groups are invisible. Group A ignores the well and bolts up the stairs, assuming that the troops have been sent to get them.

Suddenly Group B see the same thing that Group A had seen: the shimmering blue portal, and soldiers helping each other out of both sides (north and south, to help you picture this) of the door.

Group B is very close to group A, but since they are invisible, hiding on the west side of the rock. The rust troops are not looking at them, and are in fact not moving towards them, but north and south along the East side of the barely lit cavern. Group B assumes that the fortress is on alert and that the rust colored folks are coming after them. When a couple rounds go by, and about twenty troops have exited each side of the dimension door, OLGA panics and hurls a fireball at the dimension door, killing eight troops on either side (but only one falls backward through the dimension door). The dimension door disappears. Surprisingly, none of the rust troops that were out of the blast's way stop running forward or even turn to see what the noise and flame flash was; they just keep running forwards, speeding up a little. Although Group B is now visible after the attack blew the invisibility 10' radius spell, none of the rust troops seem to have noticed them standing right in the middle of the cavern. Group B decides to make for the opening to the west, and discovers the well and the large stairway. To their dismay, they notice that the rust troops have run along either side of the cavern and both groups seem to be running towards them (actually towards the staircase.) Group B decides to run up the staircase.

After two full rotations up the staircase, Group B (both characters have strengths under 8) realize that the rust troops are catching up to them, and turn around to fight. BRANDT gets knocked down before he can do anything; OLGA gets off a "flaming hands" spell which scorches the wooden steps of the staircase, and kills the front few rust troops. Amazingly, most of the rust troops ignore both their comrades' bodies and even the live enemies on the stairs, and seem only intent on getting up the stairs as fast as possible. (a few snarl at the PCs to "stay out of the way." Group B notices that the rust troops running up the left side of the staircase have armbands on their left arm, and vice versa. BRANDT tries to probe a passing trooper to ask "what is going on?" but the troopers are moving too quickly. The PCs get knocked down several times as the 20 — so troops rush past them and the bodies of their comrades. The trampling bruises bother them less than the sheer confusion: what are those troops doing?

## Part Two

**House Ianto Fort, Level 1**

**The Puzzle Continues**

At the top of the stairs (1-1), Group A gingerly (and invisibly) explores a very well-lit and very busy first level: the main cavern, the barracks (1-9) and front gate (1-2) to the south, a few doors to the master rooms (1-5, 1-6, 1-7) and a the Mekillot docking area (1-4) and a passages to the north. In the north-east of the main cavern (1-8), an old man in a rust uniform stands holding a quill and book, and watching sand fall through an hourglass, shaking his head furiously. Other than him, everyone on this level is dressed in Troika uniform. After a few minutes, a few sweaty rust troops come panting up the staircase. They rush to OLD MAN and quickly group into two lines. OLD MAN is angry at them, and the troops seem to be apologetic and deferential to him.

Group A continues to watch OLD MAN in uniform arguing with the young rust troops. He reprimands the troops, but eventually is compelled to listen and eventually it is them that are talking and he that is shaking his head. Suddenly more rust troops begin to emerge from a narrow passage (1-4) at the northwest corner that group A had originally sized up as some sort of pantry. Group A is confused by this, but eventually reasons that the "pantry" must somehow connect to another cavern.

[Aside: If the party had thought to get BERN to more thoroughly describe the fortress before going here in the first place, they might have realized that someone had broken through one of the walls that Ianto had made to seal off the cavern. The original caverns were made from a river which gradually over millennia moved further underground — hence the deeper caverns. During the late blue age, the water level of the river had fallen to just below the top of the well on the second level, and these caves were part of a small halfling town. By the mid-Green Age, the river hit an arsenide vein in the mountains, and most halflings had left Tyr'agi to avoid the mysterious deaths of those who drank the waters. The encroaching New Races took over many of the habitations of the halflings, and cleaned up enough water sources for the renamed city of "Tyr" to thrive. But these caverns remained empty until the late Green Age, when the new Tyrian inhabitants used the many snug life-shaped caverns on the second level to hold prisoners and hostages from a long-lasting war — hence the secure doors on the second level. (The gradual poisoning of the prisoners from the water supply was regarded as an incentive for the enemies of Tyr to quickly pay the extortionate ransoms of the prisoners.) Ianto never realized that the Cistern Fiend that he had placed to protect the well also purified the fort water of deadly poisons.]

**Confusion Among the Troops**

The new group of rust troops (over a hundred of them) looks upset and confused; they, like the other rust troops have white armbands on one arm or the other, though they are no longer separate according to right and left. An non-uniformed and unarmed mousy-looking woman also emerges from the "pantry"; the rust troops seem to move out of MOUSY's way as she walks towards one of the master chamber doors at the northeast of the cavern. The OLD MAN follows MOUSY, trying to ask her questions, which she does not answer immediately, intent on getting to the door. MOUSY seems upset, but so does everyone else in the cavern. The rust troops are milling about, trying to hear the story of their comrades who came from downstairs.

To add to the confusion, another set of partially dressed rust troops approaches from a north-west side-cavern (1-9) and shouts at the whole group "Do you want us to drill this loudly when you are trying to rest? " Group A sneaks a peak at the north-west area and sees nearly two hundred sleeping troops, and boxes of food and military equipment.



Still invisible, Group A notes that the three Mekillots secured to the north wall of the cave (1-4) have Ianto brands, not Troika, and that they seem restless. Markham, who possesses animal handling proficiency, gathers that the lizards are hungry, even for Mekillots, and that their food and water troughs are empty. Unfortunately, the Mekillots are well-secured to the west wall.

Group A is just considering how to use this information, when MOUSY walks back out of the master room into the main cavern, accompanied by her dwarven bodyguard who happens to be holding BERN. The OLD MAN exits as well, followed by a very frightening-looking halfling, and finally, a waxy-faced and haired man apparently in his sixties, wearing black and yellow silks. The still-arguing rust troops clear respectfully out of the way as WAXY walks towards another room. Group A quickly moves to eavesdrop, but in spite of the busy, noisy, cavern, HALFLING seems to notice something amiss, and cocks his ear in the PCs' direction.

Group A gathers that MOUSY is TROIKA, the leader of the troops that ostensibly seized Fort Ianto, but that she seems to defer to WAXY, as does the OLD MAN that seems in charge of training the rust-troops. TROIKA, WAXY, and OLD MAN enter another room adjacent to the master room, and the bodyguards stay outside, the dwarf blocking the door, and HALFLING peering around. Suddenly HALFLING wheels and enters the room. Group A realizes that they have been spotted.

Even Khanji realizes that she cannot take on 300 troops plus reinforcements in the next room, so they move back to between the Mekillots and Markham casts Rope Trick. No sooner are they up the rope, when they see (through the Rope Trick "window") TROIKA and WAXY walking up. TROIKA stares, slowly moving her eyes across the area. After a few minutes, TROIKA looks at WAXY and shakes her head. TROIKA and WAXY walk with their bodyguards and OLD MAN to the main room.

**The Best-Laid Plans of Mekillots and Men**

After an hour or so, Group A (Markham and Khanji) plan to cut the Mekillots loose, and then rescue BERN in the confusion. Or so the plan goes.

Markham hangs invisibly from the Rope Trick dimension, and tries to cut one of the ropes to the wall that holds the Mekillots. Unfortunately for Markham, the critter smells him and takes a bite of wizard, catching Markham's whole leg in his mouth. Fortunately, Markham squeezes free before losing the leg. After much risk and DM amusement, Group A manages to free the two Mekillots, causing a certain amount of confusion, but not as much as they had hoped. There are still plenty of troops in front of the door where TROIKA, BERN, WAXY and company are. Markham and Khanji decide to try to burst into the room, rescue BERN, take a hostage, and escape. The best way to do this, they figure, is to clear the area in front of the door with a c, then rush the door.

Unfortunately, the Fireball fails to finish off the dwarven bodyguard in front of the door (troops firing crossbows at them all the time from Areas 1-10 and 1-11). In the two rounds it takes them to get around her tough dwarven bodyguard, TROIKA uses dimension door to bring WAXY, BERN, and OLD MAN safely over to the barracks (area 1-3); HALFLING, ever-confident of his stealth abilities, hides under a bed in room 1-6. All group A knows is that they have alerted a fortress of nearly 700 troops, and they are trapped in a room with nowhere to go but out the door — and yes, the players have seen Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. The door to the room happens to be in perfect firing range of the 60 Troika archers perched in the area above the gate (Areas 1-10 and 1-11).

Time for plan B? Markham decides to cast Permanent Illusion and hide behind a false wall. HALFLING, not sure what the big wizard is casting, sneaks out and backstabs him. Markham survives, but his most powerful spell is lost. Khanji pins HALFLING, and questions him. HAFLING says that TROIKA has captured all of IANTO's troops and is holding them in cells on the second level. This checks out with what BERN had told wizard A: that there were passages of cells on the second level, since this place was a prison centuries ago before it became fort Ianto. HALFLING talks Group A into surrendering to TROIKA, assuring him that TROIKA will let them live.

Before surrendering, Markham pulls his last card, or to be more precise, his Deck of Many Things, acquired in a recent adventure. He sets out to draw six (the maximum), but due to "draw-again" cards, ends up playing nine cards, including increasing his intelligence by 2, the fates card, imprisonment, and lose-all-your-material-possessions. Markham uses the fates to escape losing his possessions, and is imprisoned by TROIKA. TROIKA has Markham and Khanji forced to drink drugged wine; Group A passes out. The last thing they hear is WAXY saying:

"There are more of them. I know it. Troika, send your troops to track outdoors, see if anyone has escaped. My troops will search the fortress, which is constantly turning up new secrets. If we cannot find IANTO or the comrades of these ones, we'll have to move at dawn, before word gets out. The element of surprise is more needful than the perfect preparation of my troops."

And then, of course, everything goes black. Back to Group B . . .

## Hostile Takeover Part Three

Part Three begins at the same campaign time that Part Two does, since the PCs split into two groups at the end of Part One.

After the drilling troops push past them up the stairs, Group B climbs back down to the bottom of the great staircase and decides to climb down the well.

Olga wants a place to regain spells; her half-brother Brandt also wants to rest to regain psionic strength. They fasten a rope at the top of the well; Brandt the mindbender goes first, and Olga (strength 7) goes once Brandt is most of the way down. They use a continual light stone to light the way down. Olga slips and falls on Brandt, but miraculously (considering his strength of 6) , he keeps his grip on the rope and she holds him. They both sustain damage from gripping and falling, and are beginning to wish that they had just fallen into the water, until a Cistern Fiend rises from the water, ready to attack.

BRANDT and OLGA thank the elements for the Teleport science (and that their DM uses the C&T initiative system in which the smaller creatures tend to move more quickly, especially when it comes to using psionics.) The mindbender uses the last of his PSPs to bring them up 10 yards to the top of the well.

[Aside: I find Mindbenders much more handy than spellcasters in a pinch. Spellcasters have to have everything just right: both hands and legs free for complex somatic components, material components available, and often legthy casting time. If you use C&T, spellcasting in melee leaves the caster open to attacks of opportunity (although I actually limit this to spells with somatic components which is only 97% of all spells!) How's that for a defense?]

But during the terrifying moments that Brandt and Olga were near the water level in the well, their magical light illuminated the underground river that feeds the well. Brandt is certain that he had seen at least one dry passage: a level below them! Brandt and Olga hypothesize that this third level is where IANTO would logically go to hide. They guess that he is probably still on the loose. If only they had not lost BERN, and the rest of the party . . .

Brandt and Olga dimension-door into a safe, previously seen dry passage tunnel off of the well area on the newly discovered third floor. Over several hours, they discover (See map below):

* An underground river.
* A small staircase leading up to the second level and all the way up to the top level (master room, but Group B does not know this)
* The still pond well area with the cistern fiend.
* Many caves and side passages that the river created over the centuries.
* A cave full of rotting, horrible smelling garbage and excrement
* One freshly killed human body, lying in the pile of garbage.
* One hungry Otyugh that nearly kills Group B

After the combat, Brandt and Olga talk to each other, and they hear a whisper from a hole in the vaulted cave roof above: "is that you, Orik?" "Yes," Olga says. No more whispering. The PCs shrug it off.

Group B has already explored the river-level of the caves, which took up a great deal of their time. They found no walled-off areas, no sign of human interference with the natural caves except for the mysterious pile of offal, which they avoided, of course. But the fight with the Otyugh has them all smelly (bad for sneaking around), so they decide to bathe in the freezing underground river.

As they carry their bundled clothes upstream towards what looks like a more shallow and safe area, they see a light and hear noise coming from the stairs behind them, so they try to head farther upstream to get out of sight. They hear voices:

"Master Ianto, we found your little secret staircase, and it is just a matter of time until we find you and your henchmen. Give up now! Your men are still alive. All Mistress Troika wants is your fort. Come and be reasonable. As a token of good faith, we have your son right here, alive and well — for now..."

Wouldn't you know it? When Group B was looking for IANTO, they couldn't figure how to find him, but when they were looking for a hiding place . . .

Group B finds another set of caves upstream. Exploring, they find a passage that smells bad and realize that this is connected with the offal-cave. They also find a cave that dead-ends in a still pool of water.

Finally, they find a man camouflaged in gray clay, and tried to tell him (IANTO) that they are friends of BERN, but he escapes them, diving into the pool, which Group B connects to the Cistern Fiend's pool (since tentacles waved them back as they approach.) IANTO swims back up to the surface a moment later, though, and allows Brandt and Olga to talk him into trusting them.

IANTO, who himself placed the Cistern fiend in the well, has a ring that allows him to command the monster. He returns to Group B because they are clearly the better choice: TROIKA troops saw Ianto emerging from the cistern on the other side of the wall and came after him. Group B is at least not dressed in the uniforms of his enemy! As IANTO speaks to the party now the Cistern Fiend is slaying Troika troops. ]



At IANTO's request, Brandt uses Dimension Door to take IANTO and Olga into the offal room.

IANTO points at the ceiling and says that one of the old prison cells opens a 3' crack about 25' over the cave, which he and his men used as a convenient waste disposal site.

Olga tells IANTO about the voice from above earlier, and as she does, the voice calls out again, "Master, is that you?" Ianto recognises the voice of one of his lieutenants.

Another easy Dimension door does the trick, and now IANTO and Group B sit with the Lieutenant and two other imprisoned Ianto troops inside a 10 by 10 cell. It is a good thing that the Troika troops did not know about the garbage chute, the lieutenant tells IANTO, adding that one of her comrades had tried to escape through there hours before, but she had not heard from him since (the Otyugh got him).

IANTO explains to the party that the cell they are in the middle of about fifty small cells in a long corridor on the second level (see map below). He would have walled this obsolete part of the old prison out years ago, but for the utility of the "garbage chute."



The party rests a few hours; Brandt recovers most of his PSPs but Olga just sleeps: she needs light to recover spells, which would attract the attention of the Troika guards.

The Lieutenant says that the Troika guards brought everyone in the cells wine and bread, but that she did not trust the wine (it tasted too sweet) and forbade her subordinates from drinking it. She is glad that she did this, because later evidence suggested that it was drugged: For the last few hours, Troika guards have been opening cell doors to see "who is asleep," and taking sleeping people out, about five at a time, the lieutenant estimates. There are about three or four prisoners to a cell, and all sixty cells \_were\_ full, but the Troika guards have been emptying two or three cells of sleepers every hour or so. What are they doing with the sleepers, group B wonders.

So Group B (hereafter referred to as "the party" since Group A is out of commission) hides with IANTO in a cell, in the middle of a hallway of cells full of Ianto troops, guarded by a stiff guard of Troika troops. The party tries to recoup a few hours, and eventually, by using a continual light marble and huddling everyone around the wizard, allow her to rememorize a spell in the dark. Fireball, Olga's favorite. She tries to memorize more, but suddenly the sound of guards shouting overcomes her concentration.

From the sound of it, the number of guards had just doubled, and they were opening all the cells and removing the sleeping ones. It was being done methodically, from one end of the hallway to the other. The party [I temporarily allowed the Group A players to run IANTO and the Lieutenant] bursts through the door and the wizard fireballs the hallway.

Sigh. Olga always miscalculates. The fireball sweeps the whole hallway, and backfires into the PCs' cell, killing all of the Troika guards, and also all of the sleeping Ianto troops that were being carried, and the two Ianto soldiers in the PCs' cell. (Is Friendly Fire a problem in your campaigns as well?)

The guards beyond the hallway go running for the main stairs to warn TROIKA, so the party is injured (from the fireball), but quite free. They spend a few minutes opening all the cells, and assemble sixty awake (but unarmed and unarmored) Ianto troops.

The party wastes time trying to equip the newly-freed Ianto troops with the burnt armor and weapons of the fireballed Troika guards, and finally they rush up the great central staircase.

The wooden stairs were previously damaged by Olga's Flaming Hands spell, and a portion of the stairs is giving way now, but the small unarmed army makes its way up the stairs without combat. They do hear someone at the top of the stairs shout "they're coming."

## Hostile Takeover Part Four

When they reach the top of the stairs, a PC looks around the corner and barely dodges a volley of arrows from the Troika troops above the gate. How to proceed?

The party mindbender takes a peek around the corner, and sees the door to the barracks just fifteen feet away. He opens a dimension door, and the party and Ianto troops pour through it into the barracks room. The trouble is that everyone is disoriented for a round after running through the dim door, and with sixty-five people running through . . . A horrible pile of confused people results, so big that the last troops in line fall back through the door. What a mess! Of course the Troika archers on the gate take advantage and shoot volleys of deadly arrows until one of the PCs crawls from the bottom of the dog-pile and shuts the barracks door.

The bad news is that twenty of the forty Ianto troops are dead or disabled, and there are sixty Troika archers on top of the gate, and another one hundred in the cave. The good news is that no Troika troops were in the barracks, and that there are enough original Ianto armor and weapons here for the forty remaining Ianto troops to arm themselves, and by the sound of it, may of the Troika troops on the ground are having a rough time keeping an enraged mekillot at bay.

The Ianto troops arm and armor themselves, and the barracks door stays closed. No sign of TROIKA, WAXY, OLD MAN, or any of the bodyguards or rust-troops. Nothing but a long, quiet stalemate for over an hour. Opening the barracks door is met by a volley of arrows every time. The mage and mindbender are expended; the mindbender thinks to meditate and dimension door outside the fortress, but IANTO points out that Troika archers would finish them off.

Suddenly, an angry, hungry mekillot comes tumbling from the cave-roof of the barracks, directly over the PCs, who mostly manage to roll out of its way as it falls (making their saving throws), crushing the lieutenant and a few Ianto troops. They manage to kill it, but end up with only thirty-two "fightable" Ianto troops. After a few discouraging minutes tick by, they hear a tired female voice calling:

TROIKA: "Master IANTO, I would parley with you."

They open the barracks door and see TROIKA, sitting alone and unarmed in the middle of the cave floor, gently holding an obviously drugged BERN in her lap. The mousy, blonde half-elf woman looks exhausted; her face shines with sweat. TROIKA asks that IANTO either come himself or send one representative to parley with her. They refuse, fearing a trick with the archers, but ask to negotiate by shouting from the barracks (she is fifty feet away.)

The party asks what she was going to do with the Ianto prisoners that were drugged and she says that she planned to give them to the dragon as part of his levy, but that was negotiable. She feared that Democratic Tyr would deny the Dragon his levy, and wanted to collect enough captives to fill it. The party mocks the idea that she was acting to save Tyr; this makes TROIKA smile for some reason.

TROIKA admits that she had a personal interest in seizing fort Ianto, and offers what seems like an amazing deal. TROIKA will:

* let the IANTO, his son BERN, and all conscious allies leave the fort unharmed.
* pay him a four hundred silver wergild (compensation) for his wife.
* pay him six hundred silver for his fort

In exchange, IANTO must sign a document (already written up!) stating that:

* IANTO is selling his fort to TROIKA for the four hundred silver.
* IANTO accepts the generous offer of six hundred silver as wergild for the unfortunate death of his wife and many of his men in a "misunderstanding" with house TROIKA.
* Since the wergild has been paid, IANTO promises not to seek retribution by military, economic, or legal means, nor to make "libelous accusations" against TROIKA, or publicly complain about the agreement which he signed.
* IANTO agrees to never deal anymore in Tyrian Silk or dyes, in exchange for twenty-five silvers, payable to a Ianto representative stationed in Tyr.
* This last provision startles IANTO. "Silk is a big market," he whispers to the PCs, "but the main market that we compete for has always been Iron." He even asks TROIKA, "put into the contract that we \*can\* continue to deal in iron.

She agrees: "If you wish, but it's unnecessary: it would hardly be reasonable for me to ask you to stop dealing in iron." The provision goes into the contract.

The party negotiates for the release of their comrades, and IANTO demands every single one of his men, conscious and unconscious. TROIKA complies, and every single person is accounted for, living, unconscious, and dead. Wizard and Gladiator A are still unconscious, but even their nice equipment is returned.

IANTO signs the contract. TROIKA conveniently has two somewhat embarrassed mid-level templars on hand to officially witness the signing was done legally and "without coercion;" in other words, that it is legal and binding. For a fee, the templars promise to scribe IANTO a copy of the contract.

Confused by TROIKA's apparent generosity, the party and IANTO leave fort Ianto (now Fort Troika) and begin the short trek to Tyr; carrying the wounded and sleeping this takes them two days.

On the second day of travel, Wizard A wakes up with the empty mind of a moronic child. Many of the Ianto troops share the affliction; BERN, fortunately, does not.

The party approaches Tyr, which is not quite the city that they had left just three days before . . .

Careful readers may be able to guess \*some\* of the changes.

**On To Tyr**

When they have nearly reached Tyr, the PCs run into some freemen who are fleeing the city. The freemen will not stop for kind words or money, but by following them and asking them and persistently asking them questions, the PCs learn some interesting information:

* At dawn two days ago the iron mines were seized by an unknown force. All of the mine guards were captured or killed. The unknown army is holding the mine, and has sent no emissaries or explanations.
* The freemen are fleeing Tyr because for the last two nights undead have been rising from UnderTyr and killing randomly.
* Because of the threat of the undead, the City guard cannot afford the men to attempt to recapture the iron mines.
* Agis, Sadira, Rikkus, and Neeva still have not returned from wherever they are, and Tithian still has not come out of the Golden tower. [if you want to know where they are, see the Amber Enchantress, or Year 3 in the various Official timelines]
* Rumor has it that the Dragon is coming to Tyr.
* Because of the undead attacks, and because the seizure of the mines has disrupted Tyr's cash-flow, most of the middle- and low-level templars are on strike, disrupting basic city services. Mobs fight for water at the wells. Slops and garbage sour in the street, etc.
* The City guard were going to shut the city gates, and allow no one else out of the city.
* When the Party reaches Tyr, the city guards tell them that if they enter the city, they will not be allowed back out. The guard were decimated by undead attacks the night before, and several of the survivors received the message that DMP, Kalak's former Chief Necromancer, was directing the undead, and that the attacks would stop for two weeks as long as no one was allowed to leave the city. For every one that leaves, the message said, two city guards and their entire families would die horribly. In fear, the guards are ignoring the orders of the city council, and enforcing DMP's demands.
* DMP's message went on to say that Tythian had promised DMP the Red Crystal of Tyr, but had never delivered on his side of the bargain, after DMP had struck Kalak's defenses with the copper-smelling bolt of magic (see the Freedom adventure) that had allowed Rikkus' spear to strike him. Tythian had two weeks to deliver the Crystal, or Tyr would be destroyed by its angry dead.
* The PCs also learned that a group of young merchant houses, led by Vordon, were gathering troops to retake the mines for Tyr, but the Guards adamantly refused to let them out until the two weeks were up.

Tyr is in a pretty mess. Any guesses?