

## City of the Lost God

### Part 37 – Five go to Gorshan

**“Bad place.....” Said Lilleth. “Lots of Vargouille in Gorshan.....death is all she’ll find there.”**



Muzzie was drunk, but so was just about everyone else. The coronation ball had gone very well and then the children had been sent to bed and the serious drinking had begun. Strange how people’s true feeling often only surface after half a bottle of decent red wine. He’d told Lilleth that he loved her and she was currently sitting on his lap, or rather half lying across him. Not that he had to worry about disapproving looks; many others were becoming quite intimate. Sara had left already, with Geese and they were likely to have returned to the tavern or found a bed in The Dome. He looked up at the large painting of Tomma-Goran on the curved ceiling above him.

“I bet that was a tough thing to paint.” He said.

Lilleth straightened herself a little on the arm of the chair and looked up at the ceiling of the newly discovered Upper Dome.

“They painted the horns wrong.” She remarked.

“How do you know ?”

“I met him once. He creates a lasting impression.”

Muzzie knew she was as drunk as him, but Lilleth rarely made up tall stories and he was curious.

“How did you meet one of the great deities ?” He asked.

Lilleth was about to reply, but Caspian was heading towards them and shoving people out of the way. He wasn’t being gentle about it and several voices were cursing him, one inviting him to step outside.

“Steady lad, steady !” Called Muzzie.

Torfi was just behind him, using the path that Caspian had created between the crowds of merry makers.

“You need to help me.” Said Caspian. “It’s Vella ! She’s gone to Gorshan.”

Caspian looked upset, but Muzzie couldn’t remember hearing of a Gorshan as a person or a place.

“What or who is Gorshan ?” He asked.

**“Bad place.....” Said Lilleth. “Lots of Vargouille in Gorshan.....death is all she’ll find there.”**

The young librarians were looking upset and, not for the first time, he cursed Lilleth’s need to be quite so honest all the time. Muzzie had met people who claimed to be able to sober up in an instant. He thought they were lying. No matter how hard he tried, he kept wanting to giggle.

“How did Vella get to this Gorshan ?” He asked.

“..... bound to be dead.....” Muttered Lilleth.

“There was a portal.....” Said Caspian. “We need to talk in private, there’s somewhere quite close.”

He led and Muzzie followed, Lilleth still clinging to his arm and looking very intoxicated. Muzzie noticed Waide sat by the door, looking fed up and bored. Muzzie put his fingers to his lips and whistled.

“WAIDE !!” He shouted.

Caspian was glaring at him.

“Good in a scrap as you know well,” said Muzzie, “she might even know Gorshan. Old as the rifts themselves is Waide.”

Waide followed them without saying a word, down a corridor and into a large workshop of some kind. It was the workshop of LLud Narren, the dead sorcerer, though only Caspian was aware of that. The door had a metal sheet across its inside and several serious looking bolts. Caspian rammed them all home.

"Ideal," he said, "no one can enter this room and accidentally use the portal, once we've gone."

Muzzie put his hand over Caspian's, pulling open one of the bolts.

"We need to prepare, I'm not even carrying a sword." He said.

It was Torfi who opened a few of the cupboards, showing racks of weapons, a few glinting with the dark promise of some kind of enchantment. More cupboards held armour of various kinds, again those with the ability to see such things, would have seen the glow of magic embedded into some of the items.

"It's all here Muzzie," said Torfi, "better weapons than anyone in the City has wielded for thousands of years and armour too."

Muzzie finished opening the door, but Lilleth was examining some of the weapons and Waide had a long bow in her hands.

"Reeks of humans," she said, "but a good weapon. We'll need good weapons to fight Vargouille."

"You've fought them before?" He asked.

Waide found a full quiver of arrows and examined them as she answered him.

"Only once," she said, "brutal creature, like flying wolves. They hunt in packs.... smart and dangerous."

"All the more reason to find Geese and a few others." Said Muzzie. "We'll need a good sized force and some supplies."

Caspian was looking at him with beseeching eyes.

"She's been there twelve hours on her own." He said. "If we have to find others and then wait for them to get ready..... it'll be another twelve hours..... Please, we have to go now!"

"Why did you leave it twelve hours?" Asked Lilleth.

"Her note, Vella's note, became stuck to a box when Celli was cleaning." He answered. "She only found it less than an hour ago."

Lilleth put her hand out.

"Show me the note."

Caspian hesitated, but eventually took the note from his pocket and handed it to Lilleth. She read it through twice and handed it to Muzzie.

"You never mentioned her being with child." He said.

"Does it make a difference?"

"Of course it makes a difference."

Muzzie gave him back the note and picked a short sword from the various cupboards, turning it in his hand to feel the balance.

"We'll need water and some supplies." He said. "Torfi and Waide can go to the kitchens, it won't take them long. All the water they can carry and some bread, stale will do. You'll be amazed how hungry you'll become, once the fighting starts."

Waide nodded at him and took Torfi with her as she left the room. Caspian was looking happier, placing the puzzle pieces on LLud Narren's old desk.

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Dawn brought noises that woke Vella. She'd crawled deeper into the bushes, finally falling asleep in the centre of a large thorn tree with red berries. Something was near the foot of the stairs, two

things if her ears were working properly on Gorshan. A cackling sound, quite high pitched and then an answering screech that was much lower. Vella crawled on her stomach, all worry about ruining her clothes had long gone. A new day on the terrible world of Gorshan and still no sign of Caspian. Less than twenty feet from her, two Vargouille were greeting the new day with their calls and grooming each other. It might have been pleasant watching them, if it hadn't been for the foul smell. Like animal dung left to ripen in the sun, the creatures smelt of excreta, mixed with a general sour smell that was hard to place.

Vella kept well back, watching the winged wolves preening and grooming. Eventually they spotted something on the valley floor below. Vella spotted it too, its body heat shining like a beacon in the cool morning air. The Vargouille screeched and answering calls came from the ruined castle, high above them. The monsters circled the tiny hot blooded animal, until over a dozen of them were stalking it. One of the Vargouille struck first, picking the animal up and throwing it high into the air. Another caught it and did the same and a game of some kind began. The upsetting thing was that the animal was obviously still alive and howling piteously. After a good fifteen minutes they killed it, though it was barely large enough for a mouthful each.

Vella crawled back under the thorn bush and brought out the sword that could kill anything. If Caspian hadn't arrived by the time her water ran out, she'd plunge it into her own heart.

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Caspian placed the puzzle pieces on the table and fitted them together. Almost immediately there was the attractive view of Castle Gorshan on the desk, slowly rotating and showing an idyllic sunny day. To him the image was no longer startling, but the others crowded round the desk.

"Some of the humans are actually quite good looking." Said Waide.

"They're all long dead." Said Caspian.

He brought the book out of his pack, the one with the drawing of Gorshan in ruins. He also showed them a picture of a Vargouille, a large fully grown adult.

"Their kiss is the danger," said Waide, "it's like a bite but turns you into one of them.

"How can you tell if it was a kiss and not a bite?" Asked Torfi.

Waide gave a long wicked chuckle.

"If you start growing wings, it wasn't a bite." She said.

As they talked a blue spinning portal opened up to one side of the desk.

"How long does it stay open?" Asked Muzzie.

"I don't think it closes unless you take the puzzle apart." Answered Caspian.

"We might as well be going then." Said Lilleth.

It was Torfi's turn to look a little awkward and hold them up.

"I'm not sure how my body will react to Gorshan." He said. "There's something I need to tell you."

Lilleth put her hand on his arm.

"If it's about being a Kveld? We all know." She said.

"Everyone?!"

"Most of the regulars in my bar know." Said Muzzie.

"I guessed months ago." Added Waide.

Torfi looked at Waide.

"You too?" He asked. "Does everyone in the City know?"

"Most who have a little of the sight will know." She replied. "Don't worry Torfi. Compared to some of the creatures seen in the City recently, a Kveld seems quite ordinary."

Muzzie slapped him on the back.

“Just don’t eat anyone we know.” He said. “Right, time we rescued Vella. Weapons at the ready.” Caspian led, it seemed right as it was his wife they were rescuing. Behind him came Muzzie and then the others, all arriving on Gorshan in the middle of a hot and sunny afternoon.

The first thing they saw were two Vargouille who were licking bright red blood off each other’s fur. Caspian didn’t hesitate, he ran at one of them, striking it across the head with his sword. Muzzie could move fast when he wanted to and Caspian could see him attacking the other foul smelling creature. Waide put several arrows into the brutes, but they still took several minutes to die and Caspian found himself puffing from the exertion.

“They take some killing.” He said. “I’m not looking forward to meeting a whole flock of them.”

“A pack,” said Waide, “it’s called a pack of Vargouille.”

They could hear cries and shrieks coming from the castle ruins at the top of the mountain, but no other Vargouille came to attack them. Caspian looked down and noticed blood on his leg, one of them had given him a shallow bite. He pulled up his trouser leg and began to frantically examine the tooth marks. Waide put her hand on his shoulder.

“I shouldn’t have teased you.” She said. “The kiss of the Vargouille is delivered by them placing their smelly mouth over yours and is only given to opponents who can no longer defend themselves. You just have a bite.”

“Clean it well though,” added Lilleth, “their mouths and teeth look filthy.”

Caspian used some of their precious water and cut the sleeve from a spare shirt, using it as a makeshift bandage. As he finished there was a noise from the bushes and Vella was running towards him, flinging her arms around him.

“I was asleep.” She said. “Is it really you ? I dreamt you were here so many times.”

“It’s me. I was so worried you’d be killed.” He said. “Celli managed to get your note mixed up in her dress box..... but I’m here now.”

The others were cheering, but only quietly, probably due to the proximity of the Vargouille pack.

“Well, that was all far easier than I expected.” Said Torfi.

“Yes,” added Muzzie, “activate the portal and we can all go home, mission accomplished.”

The awkward moment had arrived. Caspian hadn’t lied; he’d just withheld a lot of facts, which his friends were likely to consider to be lying by omission.

“I can’t activate the portal from here.” He said.

Torfi knew the truth of course and he was looking worried.

“Don’t tell me we have to fight our way to a portal in the ruins ?” Asked Lilleth.

Caspian held Vella and that was all that mattered to him. If he’d told them the truth, they might not have come with him.

“We don’t know where the portal is this end.” Said Vella. “We have to find a way to release Inanna, the stone angel and then we’ll be shown the way home.”

“Would have been nice to have been trusted with that information before we left.” Said Waide.

“Sorry,” said Caspian, “I wasn’t sure you’d come, if you.....”

Muzzie grabbed him by the collar of his jacket, momentarily lifting him off the ground.

“You didn’t trust us to come if you told us the truth !” He bellowed. “You little shit, I should squash you and leave you for the Vargouille !”

Vella and Lilleth were both pulling at Muzzie’s arms, but the huge tavern keeper showed no signs of letting go. Caspian thought he was going to die and part of him knew he deserved it. Then he was flying through the air to land on his backside. He looked back at Muzzie, who was waving a sword at him.

“One more lie,” he said, “one more trick, one more attempt to play us and I’ll gut you.”

Galla left early compared to most, she was of an age where serious drinking meant far too many headaches the next day. There were several coronation parties going on in the City and she’d been invited to Tarin’s, the most sought after invite in the City. Some would go home later that night, but many of the parties would go on for days. The City hadn’t had much to celebrate in quite some time, they deserved a little excessive merry making.

“You’re missing some important gossip.” She muttered to herself. “Getting old, you old fool.”

Tarin’s party wouldn’t become an orgy, there were too many important people there, people with a reputation to think of. But there would be inappropriate kissing, touching and desires. For an empath it was a gold mine of useful information that could be used as leverage, even sold.

“Their thoughts and desires though..... all too loud.”

Galla couldn’t read minds, though most thought she could. It was all about moods, desires, even the colour of a person’s thoughts. Put someone next to another person’s wife and Galla could tell you if they’d been involved in a little extra-marital fun. She was always right, every single time. Drink though, it made people’s thoughts too haphazard, too chaotic. It was like trying to listen to subtle whispers in a hurricane. Galla had picked up a few interesting pieces of gossip and decided to have an early night.

“Galla ? Galla the apothecary ?”

A quiet voice from the shadows. What worried her most is that she hadn’t felt his presence. Galla cursed herself for not hiring a couple of guards. A few pieces of silver and she could easily have had two hired ruffians at her service. She had the money, yet she’d resented paying Sara the three silver pieces she’d asked.

“Who asks for my name ?” She asked.

He moved closer and Galla couldn’t see his face as he was wearing hooded priest’s robes. There was a touch of darkness about him, but that didn’t worry her unduly, most of her best customers had a touch of darkness.

“I’d rather not name myself.” He said. “A friend told me you have certain objects for sale, objects from the early days of the City, perhaps of human origin.”

So word was spreading about her selling Ousha’s little windfall. That was good, as long as the information only reached sympathetic ears. Good days in the City or not, Aeony would probably have her executed if she was known to be selling human artefacts.

“What friend ?” She asked. “Convince me you’re not here to trap poor old Galla.”

“She bought two gold statues from you.” He said. “One was of a Genova.”

“Name, give me a name ?”

He just smiled at her, it was obvious that if anything, he was more paranoid about being capture by the tower than she was.

“Oh, keep your secrets if you want.” She said. “Your gold is as good as anyone else’s. Follow me home, but no tricks, I’m not without defences.”

He followed her home, always keeping about four or five paces behind her. Strangely it made her feel safe and she promised herself that she would hire guards in future. Galla had killed a creature of chaos and she had no idea who it had served and how angry they might be to lose it. Not that Sara’s ruffians could do much against a chaos enforcer, but their presence would make her feel safer. That was what guards were all about really, a security blanket for those rich enough to be able to afford them.

“Come in, but be careful you don’t scare my bird.”

Most people looked confused when she said that, had a need to make some kind of comment. He just followed her into her home and sat himself on her best cushions. He knew the layout of her home, good, that gave some credence to his story.

“Can I get you a drink ? Something to eat ?”

He just shook his head, so Galla poured some wine for herself and brought out the sack full of Ousha’s objects. Galla had considered putting them out of display, the sack hardly encouraged anyone to consider them as high priced antiquities. There was the danger of a surprise visit by Aeony though, so they’d remained in a sack under her counter.

“I know the seller personally.” She said. “I can vouch for their honesty and the authenticity of the items being sold.”

There were hundreds of small towns on the rifts, probably thousands if you included all the small farming communities. They all had their own temple and their own version of chaos to worship. There were a few different religious cults though, those who still worshiped the older gods, the gods who’d officially died out a very long time ago. Judging by the way her guest grabbed the small statues of the old gods, she guessed that he was cleric of such a temple.

“They are beautiful.” She said. “And in perfect condition, which makes them rather expensive.”

He had them all on his lap, running his hand over them as you would a pet animal. Four small gold statues of the reptilian old gods, the gods who had long since vanished from the rifts.

“Are these four all you have ?” He asked.

He was looking in the sack and along her shelves. She didn’t need to ask him what he meant, the statues of the old gods were far better made and of far better quality than anything else she had for sale.

“No, these four are all the seller has.”

“Can I talk to the seller ?” He asked. “Perhaps they know where more might be found ?”

He looked quite agitated, but that didn’t bother Galla. She was home now and sat in her favourite chair. She was confident that nothing could harm her now she was at the heart of her various defences.

“The seller obtained the items in a legacy.” She said. “She knows little of their history and the original owner is now dead.”

He was sharp, or she was feeling tired and being careless.

“So, a woman is selling them. Did she obtain them from her husband’s estate ?”

Galla felt in her pocket for a little something, the same kind of something that had killed a servant of chaos.

“I have told you enough about the seller.” She said. “If you wish to discuss a price for these four, we can agree something here, right now.”

He was angry and she felt something flare up in him, a lot more than just a touch of darkness. It was no ordinary cleric front of her, probably he was the head of a temple. Not that Galla was worried, it just meant he’d be able to afford a good price and in imperial gold. Her bird squawked on the floor above and it seemed to bring her back to the matter in hand.

“I have had a tentative offer.....” She began.

He was shushing her, waving his hand in front of her face. Frustration was the key thing Galla sensed, but no aggression.

“I don’t need your haggling games.” He said. “I will pay you a thousand imperial for all four. Take it or leave it, but I am assuming you’ll wish to take it.”

Galla would have been happy with two hundred and fifty, three hundred on a good day.

"That price is acceptable." She said.

She felt something she rarely felt, he was trying to read her. Out on the streets he might have stood a chance, but she had at least a dozen empath blocking artefacts dotted about her home. He smiled at her and gave her a slight nod.

"I will return tomorrow evening with the money." He said. "But I have one small condition. Not unreasonable, considering the amount of gold I'll be giving you."

"What is this condition?" She asked.

"I'm not interested in the identity of the seller; she can wear a mask or sit behind a curtain. I just need to talk to her."

"Why, she knows nothing?"

Again waves of frustration coming from him, but also sincerity. He doesn't want know who Ousha is, he just wants to talk to her.

"She might have information she's unaware of knowing." He said. "Five minutes is all I ask."

It didn't seem unreasonable and an extra thousand imperial would mean Ousha living like a queen for the rest of her life.

"Yes." Said Galla. "I'll have the seller here tomorrow night."

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The journey up the stairs had been tough. Millennia of erosion had cracked stone slabs and left stairs that were unsafe and often behaved like traps. Waide had narrowly avoided serious injury when a hole had opened up under her foot. It was approaching dusk when they reached the top of the stairs. Dusk was a novel experience for all of them. Caspian had said almost nothing since Muzzie's outburst; he seemed to consider himself to be in disgrace.

"It stinks of those Vargouille creatures." Said Torfi.

It was a ruin, but Lilleth was still impressed by the size of Castle Gorshan. The spring which had fed the moat had obviously stopped flowing; the moat was now a deep, rubble strewn obstacle for them to cross. The castle itself must have been half a mile long on each side, though most of the stonework had collapsed.

"It all looks so..... ancient." Said Vella.

"It is," said Caspian, "the drawing I have of it in ruins, is thousands of years old."

Lilleth noticed the two worlds that Vella had mentioned, the ones that hung in the night sky. It was all so terrifying and wonderful in about equal measure. Seers like Louelle visited such world in dreams, or through the memories of others, but to see it in real life..... it staggered her mind.

"We'll need to wait until morning to find a way across the ditch." Said Muzzie."

"Cover is what we need." Said Waide. "The Vargouille pack will hunt at night."

Lilleth looked around and there was barely a bush large enough to hide a child, let alone six hybrids and their weapons. In the castle ruins though, there were whole sections left standing and surely there had to be basements of some kind?

"We need to cross the ditch before we rest." She said.

Her tone and posture invited no disagreement and everyone followed her as she began to follow the ditch, hoping for a way across to the castle ruins.

"See," said Vella, "the twinkling lights in the sky are beginning to come out."

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Hervör was a little put out at not being invited to any of the coronation celebrations, but they were still considered to be outsiders.

“We were given this house by Silsk,” Wēland had said, “and Silsk is now dead. It’ll take them a while to get used to us. Be patient, I do have several good commissions, we won’t starve.”

Her husband was actually positive about remaining in the City, the first time she’d seen him happy about anything in years. Apart from when engaged in his work of course, he always seemed happiest when creating something of beauty.

The children were in bed and she should have been lying next to her husband, but something was keeping her awake. There was quite a bit of noise outside, it came and went in waves, as groups of merry makers either went home, or found another party. No one had invited them to a party, that was what kept her awake. Wēland had at least a dozen pieces he was working on, many for the wealthiest people in the City. They were from the north though, outsiders who’d never visited a temple to chaos in their lives. She was worried that they and their children would always be outsiders.

Hervör heard a sound, a scratching at the window that faced the main street. Galla had told her to ignore such things, but surely there was no harm in just looking ? She had the shutters tightly closed, they were always closed well before full darkness. As she approached the window the scratching became louder and then there was a clear knock on the window frame. Should she wake her husband ? He’d had a busy few days, he needed his sleep. They’d found a tutor they liked, recommended by Galla. Tutors were expensive though, Wēland needed his rest so that he could earn the gold to pay for tutors and everything else that made their life comfortable. The scratching began again and a voice too faint to be understood.

“Please don’t be a monster.” She muttered.

Hervör pulled the pegs out, the pegs which stiffened the shutters and made them burglar proof, or so the man who fitted them had told her. Another recommendation of Galla’s, he’d worked for Winshin’s for years and had decided to start up his own carpentry business. She put the pegs on the windowsill and pulled back the three bolts.

“Just enough of a gap to squint through.....”

She pulled the shutter back and at first she could only see darkness, but then Galla was there, her face lit up by the dull yellow glow of an oil lamp. Hervör ran to her door and pulled back the seemingly endless series of bolts. Galla was on their doorstep and she looked as though she’d been in a fight.

“Come in, are you alright ? What happened to you ?”

Galla didn’t look seriously injured, but her neck was covered in thick green blood and her right sleeve was similarly stained.

“It isn’t my blood.” Said Galla. “I have a few bruises, but the blood belongs to his man, the guard he brought with him.”

She didn’t understand a word, but that was how conversations with Galla frequently started. Hervör led Galla to a chair and then closed and rebolted her door.

“Now Galla, tell me who is injured and how I can help ?” She asked.

“I don’t normally see clients at night,” said Galla, “but he was very insistent. His man carried the gold, but he was also there to kill me. I realise that now.....”

Galla could sometimes talk in riddles, but she seemed worse than ever.

“Should we go to your house ?” Asked Hervör. “See who is injured and might need help.”

“Oh yes, but we’ll need Wēland to help carry the bodies, not that the Priest’s body can be carried..... we’ll need a bucket and shovels, but I have those.”



Hervör was beginning to realise that Galla needed help with disposing of two dead bodies. Once that would have horrified her, but she had seen a lot of strange things since moving to the City. Besides, Galla was not only her best friend, she was just about her only friend.

"I'll wake Wēland." She said. "To be clear though, you need help removing two dead bodies from your home. A priest of some kind and by the sound of it, his guard."

"Yes, yes, yes !" Shouted Galla.

Galla grabbed her hands, pulling her down so that she was knelt on the floor in front of her chair.

"My friend Ousha has a few small cuts, but she'll be fine." Said Galla. "His guard I had to use a blade on, he'll be easy to shove down the sewers."

Her eyes were inches from Hervör's and were the most beseeching eyes she'd ever seen. Maybe it was Galla's empath skills, but Hervör knew there was no way she could say no, to anything Galla wanted.

"Him, the priest, knew there was something strange about him." Said Galla. "I had to use a powder on him..... His body is all there, but we'll need a shovel....."

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Muzzie followed behind Lilleth. It seemed crazy to be heading towards the Vargouille pack, but there was no cover at all along their side of the ditch. The darkness was drawing in, but the two moons gave just enough light to walk by, as long as you were careful. A daylight spell would have been nice, but that was likely to bring the whole pack after them.

"There, see ?" Asked Waide, pointing.

He could just see a hole in the lower castle wall, about six feet above the bottom of the ditch.

"A drain," said Lilleth, "a sewer outfall from the castle, hidden underwater when the moat was full."

"Looks narrow." Said Muzzie.

He'd fit in it, but Muzzie knew that he'd be crawling on his hands and knees in the dark, which didn't appeal to him.

"We'll fit." Said Vella, who was still clinging to Caspian.

"It's getting dark and we need shelter." Said Lilleth. "Do we really have another choice ?"

She was right, he looked along the edge of the ditch and there was no way of crossing, no convenient tree trunk bridge. There weren't even any trees !

"We'll use the sewer pipe." He said. "We've still got the problem of getting down into the ditch."

Lilleth threw her weapons into the ditch and a small back pack that Torfi had found in the library kitchens.

"Getting down is easy." She said.

She jumped, landing about halfway down the empty moat and hitting the side with her feet together. Then she tucked herself up into a ball and rolled, ending up at the bottom of the ditch, covered in loose soil. Lilleth stood up, brushed herself off and gave her astonished audience a bow.

"Look." Said Muzzie. "You may be able to do that, but I'm not built for acrobatics."

"It was full of water for years, maybe thousands of years." She replied. "It's full of silt and all sorts of muck, most of it soft. Jump or slide down on your backside, it's not a hard landing."

To Muzzie, thousands of years of being a moat meant the silt was fish guts, dead plants and if you hit just the right spot, a rusty sword up your backside. There was no other way though. Muzzie stepped about a foot past the edge and simply let himself drop. He hit the side and tumbled, head over heels, eventually landing in a heap not far from Lilleth.

"See ! Easy." She said.

The silt seemed to fill every orifice, he stood and spent a good minute getting it out of his hair and ears. He blew his nose on his sleeve and an unpleasant green slime covered his cuff. It was nasty and unpleasant, but he had to put on a brave face for the others. They still had to join them in the ditch. "Easy, your turn Caspian."

Lilleth was examining the hole in the wall, which seemed a bit larger now that they were closer to it. A good six foot diameter, still a bit narrow for comfort, but the others would be able to stand up in it.

"There are no grills and it looks wide enough." Said Lilleth. "Come on Caspian, get your backside down here."

Torfi arrived next and having Kveld reflexes didn't help. He ended up as a dirt covered ball at the bottom of the ditch. Waide wasn't waiting for Caspian either, she was light and lithe and almost walked down the side of the ditch. Gravity will always win though and she too ended up silt covered by the time she reached the bottom. Caspian and Vella then jumped together, just an arm's length between them. Vella twisted her foot slightly, but they were all soon as dirt free as they were likely to be and watching Muzzie help Lilleth up into the pipe. Lilleth was only gone for a few seconds. "It's dark, but clear of obstacles for at least fifty feet." She said. "Muzzie will help you all up and I'll pull you from this end."

Muzzie picked Vella to go first, she was the person they'd come to rescue. He held her around the waste and simply lifted her, until Lilleth had her arms and pulled her into the pipe.

"It doesn't stink." Said Vella. "I thought it would smell."

Torfi next, passed up to Lilleth as though he was a rag doll. The pipe had to be closer to seven feet above them rather than six, but Muzzie had the strength and the height to make it look easy. Quite soon it was just him and Caspian left in the ditch.

"How will you get up there ?" Asked Caspian.

"I'll manage. Lilleth and I have been in plenty of situations like this."

They'd forgotten all about the pack of hungry Vargouille. It wasn't anyone's fault, it was just how people cope with dangerous situations. Getting into the ditch and then the pipe was enough to think about, everything else was tuned out. One moment Muzzie was about to lift Caspian up to Lilleth, the next the air seemed to be full of claws, wings and sharp teeth.

Muzzie's short sword was still on the ground, it was left to Caspian to keep the monster at bay. Only one Vargouille, probably hungry and searching the ruins for something to feed on. Muzzie picked up his sword, but didn't forget the spells the Hand of Arcadis gave him. He struck the monster several times as the spell built.

"Don't they ever die ?!" Called Caspian.

Arrows now, Waide had positioned herself at the end of the pipe. Muzzie had cut deep into the creature's flesh, as had Caspian. Add a good five arrows from Waide and yes, Muzzie had to agree, the Vargouille were tough bastards.

"Jump back Caspian !" He yelled.

Fire was good, Muzzie had learnt some useful information. He'd only had time to build up a small fireball, but it seemed to dissolve the Vargouille's flesh. Muzzie stood looking at the pile of ash that had been causing them so much trouble.

"Thank you." Said Caspian. "And..... I'm sorry, really !"

"Oh, don't worry Caspian, I'll have a favour I need from you one day. You owe me."

He held Caspian up and several sets of arms pulled him into the hole.

"Get back." Said Muzzie. "I'm going to take a run at it."

The ditch was wide enough to give him enough speed. He ran and leapt at the hole, getting most of his body inside, just as gravity decided to show him who was boss. He started to slide back, but Lilleth grabbed him and then Waide, who was far stronger than she looked.

“You need to lose weight.” Said Lilleth.

Once again Muzzie was rubbing the muck off his now ruined clothes. They’d been his best clothes too, his smart jacket and trousers he kept for festivals, weddings and funerals. Vella was right though, it didn’t stink. There were no unpleasant smells in the tunnel, no trace of sewer smells or of Vargouille. He had to crouch, but he managed to walk past them all and cast a very small daylight spell.

“It goes for miles.” Said Lilleth.

“We need a side tunnel.” He said. “Something we can defend if the brutes attack in force.”

He led, crouching far too low to be comfortable. The pipe did seem to go on for miles, but at least it appeared to be unblocked and there were various small opening in the wall. Muzzie just hoped they’d find a decent sized side passage to sleep in.

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Part 38 will be posted at the end of November.