

Thundarr The Barbarian & The Lost Children

By Thundarr

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The Young Ones finally make it home, but accidentally find themselves in the early 41st Century. Now they must team up with Thundarr The Barbarian, Ookla The Mok, and Princess Ariel in order to set things straight.

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1 - Chapter One

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THUNDARR THE BARBARIAN

AND

THE LOST CHILDREN

Chapter One

In the year 1994, from out of space came a runaway planet, hurtling between the Earth and the moon unleashing cosmic destruction! Man's civilization was cast in ruin. 2000 years later Earth is reborn. A strange new world rises from the old. A world of savagery, super science, and sorcery. In this world, three heroes ride their mounts along an ancient paved road. In the lead is a large muscular man riding a white stallion. His long blonde hair is the colour of straw. He wears the brown furs of a large animal and a large tooth hangs from his neck by a leather thong, marking him as a barbarian as though from some ancient legend. His wrists are adorned with leather bracers, a golden sword hilt attached to the one on his left. His blue eyes dart back and forth from one side of the road to the other, always on the lookout for danger. He is Thundarr, once a slave to the evil wizard Sabien, now a hero to the weak and the downtrodden.

Following Thundarr close behind on her chestnut mare is a beautiful young woman. Her long raven black hair flows behind her in the evening breeze. She wears a small blue outfit, reminiscent of the swimwear people once wore centuries ago. She has golden bracers on her wrists, a matching belt around her waist, and yellow boots which come up almost to her knees on her feet. She is Princess Ariel. She's the stepdaughter of the wizard Sabien who had enslaved Thundarr and was instrumental in his escape. She spent most of her life in her stepfather's library, learning all she could about history, culture, and sorcery. Her almond shaped eyes and olive skin mark her as of Asian descent, though

many such distinctions are lost to the world now.

Bringing up the rear is their companion. A large leonine humanoid called a mok, riding a massive lizard like alien mount called an equart for only equarts are strong enough to carry such large riders as moks. The mok's name is Ookla. He and Thundarr befriended each other when they were both slaves of the wizard Sabien. When Ariel freed her stepfather's slaves, Ookla elected to stay with Thundarr. Together the three of them have been riding across the countryside, defying the wizards who rule where ever they encounter them. Thundarr and his white stallion leap over the wreckage of an ancient VW bug lying in the middle of the road, clearing the ancient automobile with ease. Ariel follows close behind on her mare, also clearing the wreckage. Ookla and his equart leap over the automobile, but don't quite clear it and squash the wreckage flat. They come upon a wide field of broken concrete at the edge of an ancient chain link fence. Beyond the fence are several large structures which look very strange to Thundarr and Ookla.

"What manner of place is this?" asks Thundarr.

"It's an ancient amusement park," says Ariel, "Years ago, before the cataclysm, people used to come here to have fun."

"Fun doing what?" Asks the barbarian.

"Play games, eat greasy foods, ride the rides," she tells him.

Ookla says something in his native tongue of yelps and growls and points at the ancient roller coaster.

Ariel laughs."I'm sure they were in much better condition two thousand years ago Ookla."

"Lords Of Light!" says Thundarr, one of his favorite sayings, "What is that?"

Ariel looks to see what had caught her friends attention. On the far side of the amusement park she sees a strange green glow. Ookla growls his own expletive of curiosity.

"It appears to be magical, whatever it is" she tells them.

"Let us take a closer look," says Thundarr, "I want to see if this sorcery is the work of friends, or foes."

Ariel raises her hands above her head and blasts the chain link fence with a beam of magical energy. The fence disappears and Thundarr charges through.

"ARIEL! OOKLA! RIIIIIDE!"

2 - Chapter Two

Chapter Two

At the other end of the park, there's an ancient carnival ride. The entrance to the ride is designed to look like the head of an enormous dragon, with the tracks for the cars going directly into its mouth. Above its head in crumbling letters reads the sign Dun eon & Dra ons. The doors in the fake monsters mouth begin to glow a strange green colour, then burst outward in an eruption of green light. From the light tumble six young people, all dressed as medieval fantasy adventurers. At the top of the heap is a young man with short black hair named Eric, dressed as a knight and carrying a golden shield. Lying directly on the bottom of the heap is a blonde haired young man named Hank, who's dressed as a woodsman and carrying a golden bow. Sandwiched between Hank and Eric is a pretty redhead named Sheila, who's dressed all in various shades of purple, including her cloak. Off the the side are the two youngest members of the party. Presto, a red haired boy of about 14 years wearing the green robes and conical hat of a mythical wizard. And Bobby, a blonde haired boy wearing the furs and horned helm of a barbarian and carrying a wooden club. He's also clutching a baby unicorn protectively in his arms. The only one who didn't wind up in the dog pile was Diana, a mocha skinned acrobat wearing a fur bikini and carrying a green wooden staff. She walks over to Bobby and Presto and helps them to their feet. Eric is the first of the others to recover from their bumpy ride.

"Hey!" he says, "We did it! We're home!"

"Great," groans Hank, "Now will you please get off me? I can't breath."

"Oh, right. Sorry about that Hank."

Eric gets up off his friends and helps Hank and Sheila to their feet. Meanwhile Diana, Presto, and Bobby are looking around with very confused expressions on their faces.

"Ummm, Hank?" says Presto, "Are you sure we went through the correct portal to our world?"

"It was right where the Dungeon Master said it was going to be," says Eric, "Why wouldn't it be the right portal?"

"Well I don't remember the moon looking like that!" says Presto.

They all look up to the shocking image of the moon split cleanly in two, like a giant egg.

"What happened?" asks Bobby. The baby unicorn makes an affirmative bleating sound.

"Bobby!" says Sheila, "You were supposed to leave Uni back in The Realm! She won't be able to survive in our world!"

"But Sis," Bobby replies to his older sibling, "Venger was right there! I couldn't just leave her there! He

would've hurt her!"

"And I still might, barbarian," says a deep voice dripping in cruelty.

The kids all turn to see the demonic figure of Venger exiting the Dungeons & Dragons ride, sitting atop his nightmare mount with the ever present Shadow Demon hovering by his side. "Now give me your magical weapons and I will leave your world in peace! Refuse, and you shall suffer the consequences!"

"Scatter!" shouts Hank, "Remember our weapons don't work in our world!"

The kids all run in several different directions. Presto runs around to the back of the Dungeons & Dragons ride. Bobby, Sheila, and Uni all make a mad dash for the carousel. Hank and Diana run towards the target range, and Eric heads straight for the food court. Howling in rage, Venger and his mount take to the sky. From above, he starts unleashing his magical assault. Eric almost makes it to a burger shack before one of Vengers magical bolts blasts it to kindling. Eric turns to see Venger above him, a glowing ball of energy in the palm of his hand. Venger hurls his magical sphere at Eric. With nowhere to hide Eric instinctively ducks behind his enchanted Griffon Shield. Incredibly the magical blast is deflected off the shield and goes right back at Venger, nearly knocking him from his nightmare.

"Hey everybody!" Calls Eric, "My shield still has its magic!"

With a hopeful expression, Hank draws back on his Energy Bow. To his delight, a magical arrow appears and he aims and fires it at Venger. "Eric's right," he says, "Hit Venger with everything you've got!"

Sheila puts up the hood of her Invisibility Cloak, disappearing from view. Soon rocks are flying at Venger's head, thrown by an unseen assailant. Bobby uses his Thunder Club to break off pieces of the carousel and send them flying at Venger. Venger fires back with bolt after bolt of magic, only to have Bobby, Diana, and Eric send them back with their club, javelin staff, and shield.

Seeing that their weapons are working on Earth now, Presto decides to lend a hand. He takes off his Hat Of Many Spells, wiggles his fingers over it, and says "Magic hat which I hold, give me a spell to leave Venger cold!"

Then he reaches into the hat, and pulls out a vanilla ice cream cone. Presto looks down at his botched spell. "Aw nuts," he says.

Then he looks up just in time to see Venger throw his own spell at him. Presto screams and holds up his hat in front of him like a shield. Venger's attack gets caught in the hat, but hits with enough force to throw Presto several feet to be slammed against the side of the Dungeons & Dragons ride. Presto slumps to the ground unconscious.

3 - Chapter Three

Chapter Three

Venger sits atop his nightmare laughing evilly at the young wizard's misfortune. "PRESTO!" Cries Hank, and he starts shooting arrow after arrow at Venger. Bobby strikes the carousel with his Thunder Club and sends it flying at Venger. Using his magic, Venger catches the carousel in midair and hurls it at Hank. Hank is mysteriously knocked out of harms way. After the dust from the carousel attack has settled Sheila reveals herself as his savior. Now Venger points a clawed finger at Presto, and his hand begins to glow. Diana, Eric, Bobby, and even Uni all run to get to Presto's side, even though they all know that none of them can get to him in time.

"Now young one," snarls Venger, "I finish this!"

A beam of energy leaps forth from Venger's fingertip, and is deflected back at him. Standing over Presto is Thundarr, his Sunsword in hand with its fiery blade ignited.

"Demon Dogs!" Thundarr cries, one of his favorite sayings. "Fighting children, wizard? Too cowardly for a real challenge? Try Thundarr on for size!"

"I don't know who you are, barbarian," replies Venger, "but this is none of your affair!"

"I am Thundarr! And I'm making it my affair!" Cries Thundarr, "Leave these children alone or face Thundarr's fury!"

"Then perish with them foolish barbarian!" And with that Venger throws bolt after bolt of magic at the newcomer, only to have them deflected by the Sunsword time and again.

Meanwhile, Eric, Diana, and Bobby check on their fallen friend. "How is he?" Asks Bobby, "Is he going to be okay?"

"I don't know Bobby," says Diana, "he got hit pretty bad."

"At least he's still breathing," says Eric, "If that guy with the light saber hadn't stopped Venger's second attack, Presto'd be a goner."

"Who is that guy anyway?" Asks Bobby.

Eric looks at Thundarr's blonde hair and Sunsword, "Ummm, Luke Skywalker?" He says, then he looks at Thundarr's bulging biceps, "On steroids?" He adds.

Thundarr hears their conversation and turns his attention from Venger for a moment. "Stair-roids?" He asks, pronouncing it very slowly as is his custom when learning new words.

But his momentary distraction is all Venger needed to get the advantage. He conjures up a ball of fire

and raises it over his head. But before he could strike Thundarr down, he is hit from behind by a magical blast. His fireball goes wide and hits an overturned car from the Dungeons & Dragons ride, melting it into slag. He whirls about to see who would dare to attack him. Standing there in her blue swimsuit and yellow boots is Princess Ariel, her hands aglow as she readies her magic.

"Uh-uh-ah," she says waving her finger as though scolding a naughty child, "that's no fair hitting from behind."

Over by the wreckage of the carousel Hank is helped to his feet by Ookla. Hank draws his Energy Bow and takes aim at Venger. Ookla knocks a stun arrow to his mok bow and also takes aim at Venger. Venger looks over to where Presto still lies unconscious, and sees Eric, Diana, Bobby, and this newcomer Thundarr standing protectively over him. Realizing he's hopelessly outmatched, Venger flies out of range of their weapons and escapes. Hank launches an arrow after him, if for no other reason than to make himself feel better.

4 - Chapter Four

Chapter Four

Hank and Sheila hurry over to check on Presto, Ariel and Ookla following close behind.

"So how is he?" Hank asks as he kneels down next to Presto.

"He's alive," says Diana, "but other than that I can't tell."

"How's your friend?" Asks Thundarr.

"We're not sure," says Hank, "he's never been hurt this bad before."

"May I take a look?" Asks Ariel.

"Can you help him?" Asks Sheila.

"Maybe," says Ariel, "I know a lot about magic, and that was quite a blast he took."

Sheila looks to Hank, who takes a moment to think it over, then nods in agreement. He then turns to Thundarr.

"Thank you for your help," he says, "Who are you people anyway."

"I am Thundarr, a barbarian," Thundarr replies, "and these are my friends. Ookla, a mok, and Princess Ariel."

"Wow," says Diana, "a princess? From where?"

"A land which, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists and is best forgotten." She replies.

"Now," says Thundarr, "Who are you friend? And how is it you came upon these weapons of yours which you use so well?"

"My name's Hank. That's Eric with the shield. Diana's the girl with the staff. That's Sheila and her little brother Bobby. And the one who's hurt is Presto." Then Uni begins to bleat in irritation, "Oh yes, and this is Uni." Uni makes a satisfied bleat. "And as for our weapons, they were gifts from the Dungeon Master when he gave us each our roles in The Realm."

"Realm?" Asks Thundarr, "What Realm?"

"The Realm on the other side of the Dungeons & Dragons ride," offers Bobby, "Where dragons and monsters and magic and stuff are all real."

"Look guys," interrupts Eric, "I'd hate to break up this history lesson, but we still have a very ticked off Venger out there who knows exactly where we are. So can we please save it for later? Like maybe after we get out of this amusement park and go somewhere more secure?"

"I'd hate to admit it," says Diana, "but Eric's got a point. This should wait 'til later."

"So how is he Your Highness?" Asks Hank.

Ariel chuckles at the title, "Ariel," she says, "Just Ariel. And your friend is going to be fine. He just has a nasty bump on the back of his head. He's lucky, it looks like his hat managed to absorb most of that blast. A pretty amazing piece of sorcery, that hat."

Just then Presto begins to come to. "Ow my head," he groans. He blinks several times trying to focus on people around him. He then starts feeling about his face and body in panic. "My glasses!" He says, "I can't find my glasses!"

Ariel looks around and sees them lying in the dirt several feet away. They must have fallen off when Presto was hit. "Ookla," she says, "could you hand me those glasses there? Be careful, don't break them."

Ookla gingerly picks up the glasses and hands them to Ariel, who cleans the lenses and puts them on Presto's face. He blinks several times to allow his eyes to adjust. Then he sees Ariel's face. "You're pretty," he says. Then he looks around and sees his friends, "Hi guys." Then he sees Ookla for the first time. His eyes roll into the back of his head and he collapses again.

"Presto?" Says Bobby.

"It's okay," Ariel tells them, "He just fainted. Ookla can have that effect on people sometimes." Ookla chuckles.

"So where should we go?" Hank asks of no one in particular.

"I say my place," says Eric, "It's near by, it's secure, it's very defensible, and it's huge."

"It's as good of a destination as any," says Diana.

"Okay," agrees Hank, "Eric's place it is."

"My friends and I will take you," offers Thundarr, "that way we can talk as we ride."

"Right," says Hank, "Diana, you and Bobby ride with Thundarr. Sheila and I will ride with Ariel. Eric, you and Presto ride with Ookla."

Once everyone climbs onto their assigned mounts, Thundarr shouts "OOKLA! ARIEL! RIIIDE!" And the three mounts gallop off with their heavy burdens.

5 - Chapter Five

Chapter Five

Some time later, the nine companions are sitting on the floor of what was once Eric's family room. There's a large fire roaring gayly in the fire place, giving them warmth and light. Hank and the others tell Thundarr, Ariel, and Ookla all about The Realm, how they got there, and about the many adventures they'd had in that other world. In return, Ariel tell them all she know about the history of Earth from The Cataclysm of 1994 to present time. Then Thundarr tells them of how he'd met Ariel and Ookla, how they'd escaped the stronghold of the wizard Sabien, and of the adventures they've had since. For the most part, Hank, Sheila and the others took the news quite well.

"Two thousand years," groans Eric, "We finally make it back home, and we're two thousand years in the future."

"More like two thousand ten years," interjects Presto, "When we left it was only 1983. If we did make it back to the correct year, we'd be dead after only ten years when that comet comes."

"But everything's gone!" Shouts Eric, "My stereo, my TV, my VCR, my Atari, my comic book collection, my records! Everything! It's all gone!"

"Is that all you can think about Eric?" Shouts Bobby, " what about all the other stuff the rest of us were trying to get back to? Our friends! Our parents! Even our school! Everything's gone! All of it! Gone! What are we gonna do Hank? What are we gonna..." Then he begins to cry.

Ookla gently lays a hand on Bobby's shoulder to try and comfort him. Bobby buries his face in Ookla's massive chest and just begins sobbing. Ookla wraps his arms about Bobby and just let's him cry, while Uni comes up and tries to comfort her friend by nuzzling his hand. Thundarr looks upon the young barbarian with empathy. He'd never felt pity for anyone before but he felt a strange kinship for this boy, as though they're a kindred spirit.

"How can we help?" He asks Hank.

"I'm not sure if you can," replies the ranger.

"How'd we end up traveling through time anyway?" Asks Presto.

"That's a good question," replies Ariel, "What can you tell me about how you got back to Earth?"

"Well," says Sheila, "Dungeon Master sent us to find a map which he said would lead us to a way home. We retrieved the map, and sure enough it had directions to a portal home. But as usual, when we got there Venger was waiting for us to try and take our magic weapons. He started firing magic bolts at us as we tried to enter the portal. Eric saved us, using his Griffin Shield to summon a magical force field around us. Venger got angry, even more so than usual, and hit Eric's shield with a blast so powerful that

he knocked us all through the portal. Then we wound up here, in the year 4000."

"Well," says Ariel, "if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say the offensive magic of Venger's spell combined with the defensive magic of Eric's shield and interacted with the transdimensional magic of the portal, causing you to travel not only through space but also time."

"So now what are we gonna do?" Whines Eric, "We spend over a year trying to escape one whacky world full of wizards, monsters and all sorts of strange stuff, only to return home to find it's been turned into a whacky world full of wizards, monsters and all sorts of strange stuff."

"What do you suggest Ariel?" Asks Hank.

"The way I see it, you all have three choices," she says, "One, you can stay here and start your lives anew here in the year 4000. Two, you can go back through the portal and return to The Realm where you can wait out The Cataclysm before returning home. Or three, you can return to your own time and hope to survive The Cataclysm 10 years later."

"Are you saying you can send us back to our own time?" Asks Hank.

"Not on my own," she replies, "but there are magical devices that allow time travel. My stepfather has one in his tower."

"Well what are we waiting for?" Cries Eric, "Call him up and ask him if we can use his time machine!"

"It's not that simple," says Ariel.

"Why not?" Asks Presto.

"Because my stepfather is not a very nice person."

"He is a wizard," adds Thundarr, "vile and wicked."

"But isn't Ariel a wizard too?" Asks Bobby.

"I'm a sorceress," replies Ariel, "there's a difference."

"Oh," says Bobby.

"I don't know about you guys," says Eric, "but I wanna go home."

"I agree," says Hank, "How about you guys?"

They all nod their heads in agreement.

"Very well then," says Thundarr, "everyone get some sleep. We leave at first light."

6 - Chapter Six

Chapter Six

As they're settling in for the night, a shadow on the wall opens its glowing white eyes. Shadow Demon had been eavesdropping all night long and heard every word that was said between the young adventurers and their new friends. As soon as he's certain that he won't be seen he slips out of the ancient mansion and seeks out his master, Venger. He soon finds Venger sitting astride his nightmare and tells him all that had transpired.

"So," says Venger, "they plan on returning to their own time do they? Well if they're going to travel to this Ariel's stepfather, then we are going to be there to greet them."

And with that, Venger and his trusted steed soar through the air to find the wizard Sabian, with Shadow Demon following close behind. Some time later, the wizard Sabian is sitting on his throne in his throne room and eating grapes being fed to him one at a time by a slave girl dressed in a torn and ragged skirt and blouse. Just then his chamber doors fly open and the robot guards he had stationed outside hurtle in to lie in a broken heap on the floor. In strolls Venger with hardly a care over the havoc he had just wrought. Sabian glares at Venger with vile contempt.

"How dare you barge into my inner sanctum!" He growls, "GUARDS! Eliminate him!"

Four concealed doors open and several mutants come charging out. Venger throws out his hands and with hardly a thought sends the mutants flying back to crash into the walls and fall unconscious in a crumpled heap. Sabian lifts a hand and shoots a bolt of magical energy at Venger from the palm of his hand. Venger deflects the blast with his palm. Sabian shoots two beams of energy at Venger, one from each hand. Venger deflects these too.

"Enough!" Shouts Venger, "I have not come here to fight you!"

"Who are you then?" Asks Sabian, "And what do you want?"

"I am Venger, mightiest wizard of my world...or yours. And I am here to offer you an alliance."

"And why should I ally myself with you?" Asks Sabian.

"Because," says Venger, "your stepdaughter and her friends are on their way here."

"Ariel?" He asks, now very interested, "Coming here?"

"Yes," says Venger, "she and her barbarian friend, together with that great beast will be accompanying six children into your stronghold. They intend to send the children back to their own time, to Old Earth."

"And you think I need your help to defeat my stepdaughter, a barbarian, a mok, and bunch of children?"

Sabian asks in an incredulous tone.

"Do not underestimate these children," warns Venger, "They may be young, but they are formidable adversaries. Each of them carries an object of power which makes them all very powerful opponents."

"Suppose I agree to this alliance," begins Sabian, "what do I get out of this partnership?"

"You get your stepdaughter back, and eight new slaves," says Venger.

"And what do you get?"

"I get their objects of power," replies Venger, "all six of them."

"Very well," agrees Sabian, "we have a bargain. I'll even let you keep Thundarr's Sunsword. As a sign of good faith."

"Agreed," and with that, Venger and Sabian shake hands.

7 - Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven

Thundarr, Ookla, and Ariel are getting ready to guide the kids to Sabien's stronghold. "Thundarr," says Ariel, "we can't all ride on our three mounts. Not from here to my stepfather's."

"How about Presto?" Asks Bobby, "Maybe he can conjure up some mounts for the rest of us."

"I don't know," says Presto, "My spells don't usually turn out right. I might end up conjuring up a bunch of flying monkeys or something."

Ariel takes Presto by the shoulder and looks him straight in the eye. "The secret to using magic is confidence," she tells him, "If you don't believe you'll get the result you desire, then you won't. Believe in yourself, and you can accomplish anything."

"Okay," Presto tells her, "I'll try."

"No," she replies, "Don't try, just do."

Presto takes off his magic hat, takes a deep cleansing breath, begins waving his hand over the hats opening and says, "Hocus Horses, Abrakavallions, I conjure up six black stallions!"

A bright purple light emanates from the hat. The beam hits the ground in front of them, and standing there waiting to be ridden are six beautiful horses with sleek jet black coats and manes and tails as white as fresh fallen snow.

"Hey!" Says Presto, "It worked!"

"You see?" Ariel asks him, "All it takes is confidence."

"Come!" Says Thundarr, "We have a long way to go to get to Sabien's tower." They all mount their horses, then Thundarr says "Everyone follow me! RIIIIIDE!"

And the entire group rides off towards the rising sun. The nine companions ride all through the day and into the evening. Thundarr stays in the lead, with Ariel, Ookla, and their six new friends following close behind. Presto keeps glancing over at Princess Ariel. Whenever Ariel catches him looking he quickly turns away and blushes. She smiles, amused at the young sorcerer's apparent crush. When the sun is just above the western horizon, Ariel brings her mare up next to Thundarr.

"Thundarr!" She says, "We can't keep up this pace much longer! The horses and the children need to rest!"

"There's a creek which empties into a lake, just over that ridge," he tells her, "We'll camp there for the

night. If we hurry we can get there before dark."

A couple hours later, just as the western sky is turning red from the setting sun, they arrive at the lake. They dismount and tether the horses, which are lathered in sweat from the hard days ride. Sheila, Bobby, and Diana start collecting firewood for the campfire while Thundarr starts building a fire with whatever driftwood is nearby. Ariel and Presto tend to the horses, brushing their coats and rubbing them down. Once the campsite is set, Presto decides to try his hand at conjuring up some dinner. He takes off his magic hat, waves his hand over it, and says

"Bread and salad, turkey and veal, I conjure up, a twelve course meal."

In a flash of light and puff of smoke, a banquet table appears with all sorts of delicacies laid out. Roast beef, roast turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, candied yams, salad, corn on the cob, hot apple pie, chocolate cake, the works. "Hey!" Exclaims Presto, "I think I'm getting the hang of this!"

Ariel gives Presto a peck on the cheek, "Very nicely done," she says.

Presto's face turns so red in embarrassment that his freckles disappear. The nine friends all sit down to a fabulous meal, the best any of them have had in a long time.

8 - Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

After feasting, Thundarr and the others sit around the campfire swapping stories. Hank and the others let Thundarr and Ariel do most of the talking. They tell them about all their adventures. They tell of their encounter with the alien from the stars. They tell of their battles with the wizard Gemini, and of the man-apes. The young adventurers hang on their every word, especially Bobby and Presto. Bobby sees Thundarr as a kindred spirit, while Presto is infatuated with Ariel. While they're laughing and joking, a laser blast rocks a nearby tree.

"DEMON DOGS!" Cries Thundarr, another of his favorite sayings, as he leaps to his feet and ignites his Sunsword. From out of the bushes come several humanoid beings. They all appear to be part man (or at least part organic) and part machine.

Ariel jumps up, "Cyberbandits!" She yells.

There's one cyberbandit with a laser canon for one arm, a mechanical claw at the end of the other arm, both legs are metal, and one of his eyes is electronic. There's a mok with a morning star in place of his right hand and an steel mechanical jaw like a bear trap. There's a groundling with two bionic arms and a whip like bionic tail. There's a carock with steel jaws much like the moks, bionic arms, and a spiked mechanical tail which can be whipped about. Then there's a hawk man mutant with rockets built into its bionic legs, a metal beak, a pair of shoulder laser canons, and bionic arms with steel talons. There's a tiger man mutant with steel claws and bionic legs. There's a human with two electronic eyes and one bionic arm with a built in flame thrower. There's a human with a pair of bionic legs, a bionic right arm with a chainsaw in place of his hand. There's another human with two bionic legs, a bionic left arm with a circular saw in place of the hand, and a bionic right hand. They have Thundarr and his friends completely surrounded.

"What do you want?" Thundarr asks them.

"Everything you have," says the cyborg with the laser canon arm, "your weapons, your horses, and anything else of value that you have."

"And if we refuse?" Hank asks.

"We take them," says the bandit leader, then leers at the women, "as well as anything else we want."

"In that case," replies Hank, drawing his Energy Bow, "if you want our weapons? TAKE THEM!" And he fires an energy arrow at the leader, destroying his laser canon.

"Ariel! Ookla!" Thundarr cries, "INTO BATTLE!"

"Take them!" Shouts the cyborg leader.

Eric gets his Griffon Shield up a split second before the bandit with the flame thrower tries to roast them, his magical force field protecting the entire group. Ookla grabs the log they were using as a seat and throws it at the bandit. The log slams into the cyborg and knocks him to the ground. The hawk man mutant takes off, flying into the air. The cyborg with the chainsaw for a hand runs straight at Thundarr. Bobby, fearless as ever, takes up his Thunder Club and charges the fiercest looking cyberbandit, the mok. Hank and Ariel fire bolt after bolt of magic at the flying hawk man mutant who's taking potshots at them with his shoulder canons. Ookla runs to confront the carock with the spiked tail and steel jaws. Having been a prisoner of carocks and forced to harvest their doom flowers, Ookla has a certain enmity for these reptilian humanoids. The cyborg with the circular saw for a hand charges at Eric, who in his typical 'cavalier' way, screams like a girl and runs away. Diana takes on the groundling with the whip like tail. And Sheila puts the hood of her cloak up and disappears from sight.

The mok cyborg attacks Bobby with his morning star, which is parried by the young barbarian's Thunder Club. The mok howls in rage and swings again. Bobby ducks underneath and the morning star whistles past overhead. The mok tries again, this time a downward overhead strike. Bobby jumps aside and the spiked ball slams hard onto the ground. Then the young adventurer smashes the mok right in the steel trap like jaws. If it were an ordinary club, then it would have had little effect. But Bobby's Thunder Club could topple mountains. The force of the blow shears off the bottom jaw, and sends the mok face first into the dirt. The mok tried to push himself back up to his feet, and Bobby knocks him back down with a club shot between the shoulder blades.

Meanwhile Diana is fighting the ratlike groundling. The groundling's robotic hands are electrified, like defibrillator paddles, and its whip like tail is snapping at her. It takes all of Diana's gymnastics training and acrobatic skill to keep out of the groundling's reach. The groundling whips its tail at Diana, who blocks it with her Javelin Staff. The tail wraps itself about the staff and the groundling tries to wrench it from Diana's hands. When he can't he tries grabbing her to shock her, but Diana moves his tail in the way and he zaps himself.

Ookla grabs the cyborg carock by the wrists. The carock snaps at Ookla's face, his steel jaws chomping down on empty air. The carock whips about, trying to get at Ookla with his spiked artificial tail. The mok ducks under the tail. The carock tries again. Ookla grabs the tail, whirls the carock around in the air a few times before slamming him down to the ground. Ookla places a booted foot onto the small of the carock's scaly back and pulls his bionic tail right off.

As he's running from the cyborg with the circular saw, Eric trips and falls flat on his face. He rolls over onto his back and gets his Griffon Shield up just in time to prevent the circular saw from cutting him in two. Sparks fly as again and again the cyborg tries to cut through the magical barrier. Presto takes his Hat Of Many Spells off, takes a steadying breath, waves his hand over the hat, and says, "Magic hat that I hold, give me a spell to leave that guy cold!"

Presto reaches into the hat and pulls out a white glowing snowball. Presto looks at it and shrugs, "Well," he says, "I'm getting closer."

He winds up and hurls the snowball at the cyborg, hitting the bandit in the back. Right where the snowball hits, ice begins spreading across his body. Soon the cyborg is encased in a block of ice up to his neck. Presto, surprised at how well the spell actually worked, just sort of stands there staring at his handiwork. Then he smiles and says, "Cool!" He looks over to Eric who gives him a thumbs up.

The cyborg with the chainsaw for a hand, attacks Thundarr. The barbarian parries the attack with his

Sunsword, cutting through the saws blade. As the cyborg looks at the ruined weapons blade, Thundarr cuts its legs out from under him. The bandit flounders about on its back like an overturned turtle. The barbarian turns and runs to help Diana, who is struggling to defeat the tiger man mutant. The tiger man mutant is slashing at Diana with his steel claws, but she's too agile for him to get a hold of. She ducks and dodges, and then swings with her Javelin Staff. But the tiger mutant is just as nimble as Diana and always ducks just out of reach. Occasionally an unseen hand yanks his tail and he whirls about and slashes at the empty air. He tries to claw Diana again but she dodges aside, and his steel claws sink deep into an ancient oak tree. So deep in fact that he can't get them out. Just as his steel claws begin to inch their way out of the wood, Thundarr arrives and slices off the artificial hands with a single swipe of his Sunsword.

The cyborg with the flamethrower arm is beginning to recover. As he's struggling to his feet, the fuel line to his tank comes undone (apparently by its own accord). The grass shifts as he looks about. He chuckles to himself. "You'll have to do better than that girl," he says as his bionic eyes see through the magical invisibility of Sheila's enchanted cloak. He takes aim at Sheila as she's running away, not realizing that there's fuel leaking down his arm, and tries to launch a burst of flame at her. Too late he sees the leaking fuel line as the fuel ignites, flames running up his arm. The flames reach the tank and it explodes in a ball of fire. The cyborg collapses, his bionic arm completely destroyed.

The hawk man mutant is soaring about the battle, firing his laser canons. Eric keeps a magic force field over himself and those close to him, while Hank and Princess Ariel fire missile after missile at the cyborg. Unfortunately the cyborg is so agile and nimble that they can't quite hit him. Diana sees a young tree slowly bending over, apparently of its own accord. Figuring it must be Sheila, Diana makes a mad dash for the tree. She pole vaults up and lands on the bent tree, bending it almost in half. "Hey birdbrain!" Diana calls up, "Ya want me? Come and get me!" The hawk mutant swoops down to try and grab her. Diana waits until the absolute last second, then jumps out of the way. At the very same instant, Sheila let's go of the tree. The tree snaps back up straight, knocking the hawk man mutant out of the air. Then Hank draws his Energy Bow summoning twin arrows and lets them fly, destroying the shoulder guns of the mutant. The hawk man tries to take off again, but Thundarr cuts the feet off of his bionic legs. The mutant flies out of control and crashes into his leader, knocking them both unconscious.

With the cyberbandits defeated, Thundarr uses his Sunsword to render all of their cybernetic limbs useless. Princess Ariel casts a spell summoning a magic bubble which imprisons the rogues and sends them floating away.

"Where are you sending them?" Presto asks her.

"To the nearest town, where they can face justice," she replies.

"You called them something earlier," says Hank, "what was that?"

"Cyberbandits," she replies.

"What are 'cyberbandits'?" Diana asks.

"Thieves and highwaymen," replies Ariel, "who have replaced body parts with mechanical parts to enhance their fighting abilities."

"You mean they voluntarily have their arms and legs cut off and replace them with robotic ones?" Asks Eric.

"Sometimes," replies Ariel, "Sometimes they were bandits before the cybernetic replacements, and they lost their limbs or eyes to defending caravan guards. Or they were simple villagers who lost limbs, eyes, and other body parts to wizard attacks and sought cybernetic replacements. They get the replacements from the cyberbandits, but must spend their lives as members of the gang in order to pay off their debt."

9 - Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine

The wizards Sabian and Venger stare into Sabian's scrying pool, watching the cyberbandits defeat at the hands of Sabian's stepdaughter and her friends. Sabian's eyes glow red in fury as he sees the relative ease with which these children had bested such powerful adversaries. He looks over at Venger, his new ally.

"You're right," he says, "they are powerful indeed."

"And resourceful," replies Venger, "as time passes and they become more proficient in the use of their weapons, they will become even more difficult to defeat."

"My stepdaughter and her friends are quite formidable on their own," says Sabian, "together they will be tough to beat."

"Now you see why you need me," replies Venger.

"What do you propose?" Sabian asks his partner.

"I will need time to study the young ones' new friends," replies Venger, "a few hours alone with a scrying device should suffice."

"Very well," agrees Sabian, "you can use my private study, and I'll provide you with the device you require."

Hours later, Sabian is sitting on his throne in his audience chamber when Venger appears in a puff of smoke. "We might be allies," growls Sabian, "but don't presume you have free reign in my palace. If you wish to see me, ask permission for an audience!"

"Humble apologies," says Venger with an insincere bow, his voice dripping with sarcasm, "it will not happen again."

Sabian glares at his ally. "What do you want?" He says.

"I have found a weakness in your enemies," replies Venger with an evil grin, "one we can exploit."

Sabian leans forward, very intrigued. "A weakness?" He asks, "What weakness?"

"It seems that Thundarr's Sunsword is powerless against negalightning," explains Venger, "Apparently a wizard named Yando used this against him some time ago."

"Yando?" Asks Sabian, "Never heard of him."

"I'm not surprised," says Venger with a laugh, "He wasn't a true wizard. Merely a human using smoke and mirrors, passing off slight of hand and simple tricks as real magic. But he discovered that negative lightning can render the Sunsword powerless, and that a fully charged Sunsword cannot cut through a weapon powered by negative lightning."

"Interesting," says Sabian, "but negastorms are difficult to predict. And even if there is a negastorm, how do we use it to our advantage?"

"I have a plan," says Venger, "In the ruins of Manhatt, there was a wizard named Gemini who was beaten by your stepdaughter and her friends."

"I've heard of Gemini," Sabian tells him, "Powerful wizard. Nearly as powerful as myself."

"This Gemini had an army of robot knights," explains Venger, "all of which were destroyed by that barbarian and his mok friend. I plan on retrieving those knights and repairing them. I will arm them with swords and shields that are wired directly to their power sources. Then we will power them with negative lightning. Thundarr's Sunsword will be unable to do them any harm."

Sabian lets out a wicked laugh, "My friend," he says, "I like it! Now get started. Any resources you need are at your disposal."

Some time later, out in Sabian's courtyard, an entire legion of robot knights are all standing perfectly still, as though at attention. Numerous human slaves are wiring shields and swords to the knights' hands. Mutants who are skilled in robotics and electronic repair work on fixing the damage caused by the barbarian and the years of neglect since their defeat. In the middle of the courtyard is a massive iron tower with a metal antenna on the very top. Coming from the tower are dozens of heavy cables spreading out and attached to the robot knights. The two evil allies Sabien and Venger stand on the balcony, overseeing the work. When Sabian's mutant guards give their masters the signal that all is ready, Sabian steps forth. Raising his arms to the sky, the evil wizard shouts, "Wind and clouds, under my thrall! Come to me, answer my call! Crimson clouds, grow and take form! Bring to me, a negastorm!"

Dark red clouds roll in and the sky grows dark. Rain the colour of blood pours from the sky and crimson lightning crackles through the air. Then Sabian points at the iron tower and says, "Negalighting! Come to me! Do my bidding!"

A red bolt of lightning strikes the tower and runs along the cables. In moments all the robot knights are activated, their shields and swords glowing a bright red. In unison, they all raise their swords in salute to their new masters. Sabian turns to Venger, and the two of them share an evil grin.

10 - Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten

Thundarr, Ariel, Ookla, and their six young charges ride their horses across the ruined landscape. Whenever they camp for the night, Ariel spends much of her time training Presto in the art of sorcery. Thundarr and Bobby have become similarly close. Thundarr would train Bobby in combat, using stout wooden clubs they'd find lying around while searching for firewood. Thundarr even lets Bobby win occasionally so he won't feel like he's not improving. Meanwhile Ookla and Hank have become quite friendly, despite the language barrier. Hank finds Ookla to be a fine archery instructor. Through simple sign language, pantomiming, and demonstration, Ookla is able to greatly improve Hank's archery skill.

Eventually they come upon a farming community. This is their last stop before continuing to Sabian's stronghold. These farmers are forced to give nearly all of their crops to the wizard, while they practically starve to death. They have no love for Sabian, and happily give the heroes shelter for the night. Hank tells the farmers that they may keep the six black horses in exchange for providing them with shelter for the night. That night, Thundarr, Hank, and the others sit around the loft in the barn and discuss their plans for the following day.

"So how are we gonna break into the tower?" Hank asks.

"There is a secret entrance," Thundarr tells them, "It was how Ariel, Ookla, and I escaped from Sabian's tower."

"Doesn't he know it's there?" Sheila asks.

"He may," answers Ariel, "it's been several years since our escape. But it's also much safer that going in through the front door."

"Thundarr," says Bobby, "can you do me a favor?"

"What is it Bobby?" Thundarr asks.

"I can't take Uni back to Old Earth with me," Bobby says, "Can you take her back to the amusement park and send her back through the portal to her own world? She'd never survive here on her own."

"It's the least I can do for a fellow barbarian," Thundarr says, "Consider it done."

"So when are we gonna go in?" Sheila asks.

"Tomorrow night," says Thundarr, "when most of his mutant guards and human slaves are asleep. We may still have to deal with his robot guards, but they are limited in their abilities and are easily beaten."

"So what are we gonna do until then?" Asks Eric.

"Get some rest," replies Ariel, "it's been a long ride and we're going to need to be bright and alert when we're sneaking into my stepfather's palace."

They all settle in for one last night's sleep before returning home. Elsewhere, Sabien and Venger are staring into Sabien's scrying pool, listening to every word.

"So," says Venger, "they are planning to come tomorrow night."

"And we will be waiting for them," says Sabien.

"Why not go after them now?" Asks Shadow Demon.

"There are too many ways they can escape capture in that barn," explains Venger, "Better to let them think they're succeeding, then trap them in the tunnels with nowhere to run."

"Exactly," agrees Sabien, "Tomorrow night, we shall both have everything we desire."

Venger grins evilly, "Power, and revenge!"

All three of them then share in an evil laugh.

11 - Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven

As the sun is sinking in the west, Thundarr, Ariel, and Ookla guide the kids out of the farming village and towards Sabien's citadel. Unbeknownst to them a shadowy form glides through the darkness, following them as silent as death. Shadow Demon keeps his distance so as not to alert the young adventurers or their powerful allies. They sneak past Sabien's robot guards and creep along the outer wall. Ariel finds the spot they're looking for. She casts a spell, opening a concealed door. Thundarr ignites the blade of his Sunsword, using its light as a torch. Hank draws on his Energy Bow, summoning an arrow and adding to the illumination. The nine friends enter the secret tunnel, silently being watched by Shadow Demon. Quickly, he soars into the tower to deliver the news to Venger.

The group carefully sneak through the hallway. Thundarr and Hank take the lead. Ookla, Bobby and Diana follow close behind. Ariel, Sheila, Uni, and Presto follow them, and Eric brings up the rear. The group rounds a corner and come face to face with the wizard Sabien and at least a dozen of his knights, accompanied by a score of his robot guards.

"Demon Dogs!" Cries Thundarr.

"Welcome home barbarian," says Sabien.

"There is nowhere to run," says a deep booming voice from behind them, "Hand over your weapons and you shall not be harmed!"

Eric looks behind them and sees Venger there with a dozen knights and another dozen robot guards.

"It's Venger!" Shouts Eric, "We're trapped!"

"The boy's right Thundarr," says Sabien, "you have no escape. Surrender, and no one need be harmed."

"It'll take more than you and your tin soldiers to stop us, wizard!" Declares Thundarr.

"I'm sure," says Sabien in a droll tone.

A couple of Sabien's four armed robot guards start shooting at the friends. Thundarr deflects their laser blasts with his Sunsword. Hank returns fire with his his Energy Bow. The arrows that strike the robot guards with four arms destroy them. When the arrows strike the shields of the knights however, they bounce off harmlessly. The robot guards with Venger attack from the rear, but Eric uses his Griffon Shield to summon a magical force field which blocks off the entire tunnel.

"Give up Thundarr" says Sabien, "You are hopelessly outnumbered! You have no chance!"

"You think so wizard?" Thundarr asks, "ARIEL! OOKLA! INTO BATTLE!" Then he charges with his

Sunsword held high and shouting his battle cry, "Yaaaaaa-hee!"

Ookla howls in rage and follows right behind. Before anyone can stop him, Bobby charges as well, his Thunder Club held poised to strike. The nega-knights step forth to intercept them. Thundarr gets there first. He strikes their shields, expecting to cut right through them. To his surprise, the Sunsword bounces right off. One of the nega-knights retaliates with a sword strike. Thundarr parries it, again expecting the Sunsword to cut right through the blade. The negasword bounces harmlessly off.

"Lords Of Light!" Cries Thundarr, "The Sunsword has no effect!"

The nega-knight swings its sword again, but this time Ookla grabs it by the wrist and lifts it off the ground. A second nega-knight strikes Ookla in his chest with a nega-mace, shocking him with negative lightning and knocking him to the ground. Bobby runs up and strikes the nega-knight with his Thunder Club. The club bounces harmlessly off the knights nega-shield. Ariel joins Hank in giving them cover fire, and Diana runs to help Bobby and Thundarr. One of the four armed robot guards shoots her with a stun blast, rendering her unconscious.

"Diana!" Cries Hank.

"We have to get out of here!" Shouts Ariel, "Thundarr! Bobby! Get back!"

"These tin soldiers won't stop Thundarr!" The barbarian bravely declares.

"Or Bobby The Barbarian!" Bobby adds.

Just then a nega-knight grabs Bobby from behind and picks him up. As he's struggling to free himself, a robot guard zaps him with a stun blast. Thundarr turns his attention to the nega-knight that grabbed Bobby. Leaving himself open to be stunned by a laser blast. With Thundarr, Ookla, Bobby, and Diana down, the nega-knights form a shield wall and start marching towards the rest of the companions. Hank and Ariel unleash volley after volley of magic missiles only to have them bounce harmlessly off the nega-shields.

"What are we gonna do?" Sheila asks in a terrified voice.

"Sheila," says Hank, "use your cloak to turn invisible, then you and Uni teleport out of here!"

But what about the rest of you?" Sheila asks.

"We'll be fine," Hank tells her, "You're the only one who might be able to sneak back in and free us. Please Sheila, just do as I say!"

"Okay," she says, "here goes."

She pulls the hood of her cloak up over her head and disappears from sight. She then wraps an arm around Uni.

"Come on Uni," she says, "take us out of here."

Uni makes a terrified bleating noise. It almost sounds like she's saying "Bobby".

"I know you want to help Bobby," Sheila tells her, "so do I. But Hank's right. This is our best chance to rescue them. If we get caught, we'll have no chance at all."

Uni settles down. She nods her head as if agreeing with Sheila, then closes her eyes and holds her breath in concentration. It would look kind of comical if it weren't for the desperate circumstances of their predicament. Seconds after Sheila and the unicorn have teleported away, Sabien's robot troops and nega-knights have over run the companions position. Sheila and Uni watch helplessly as Hank, Eric, Presto, and Princess Ariel are all taken captive. Venger walks up and looks over their prisoners. He notices that one of them is missing.

"Where is the rogue?" He demands of Hank, "And where is the little unicorn?"

"I don't know," says Hank, "last time I saw her she was right behind me."

"What's wrong?" Sabien asks Venger.

"One of the young ones is missing," Venger tells him, "which means I still don't have all of their magic weapons."

"How could she have escaped?" Asks Sabien

"She wears a Cloak Of Invisibility," Venger replies, "and she has a baby unicorn with her. Unicorns have the ability to teleport, though ones so young generally can't teleport very far."

"I will double the guards then," Sabien tells him, "both robot and mutant. Even invisible, no one shall get far in my citadel."

"Even if she does," agrees Venger, "she will have to face both of us. . . alone."

The guards take the eight companions, some of them unconscious, the rest with their hands shackled behind their backs, and march them off to the dungeons. Unobserved from the shadows, the still invisible Sheila watches them parade past. As soon as the last robot clanks past she slips in behind and follows them in, Uni tucked under her arm and concealed by her cloak.

12 - Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve

Sabian's robot guards take Thundarr, Ariel, Ookla, and the five youngsters into the dungeons. None of them noticed the invisible girl slipping silently behind them. Once there, they meet up with Sabian's mutants. They locked Ookla into a specially designed cell, made especially for moks. Sheila watches as they lock Ookla's arms into very heavy shackles. The mok's hands are locked into large cylinders that go all the way up his forearms past the elbows. They locked the shackles with a small golden key. The chains are the heavy type typically attached to anchors, the other ends mortared heavily to the dungeon walls. Then each of the other members of the team are locked into their own private cells, the doors locked by a silver key. Ariel is led away, her wrists still bound, and Sheila follows. Sheila watches as the nega-knights lock her friends' weapons in a large, heavy vault. Then she explores the rest of the palace. She finds Sabian's audience chamber. Princess Ariel is there, her wrists and ankles shackled with heavy steel chains, being forced to serve her stepfather as a slave. Sheila explores more of the palace. She finds the library, Sabian's private study and laboratory, the mutant guards' barracks, among other things. Sometimes she would set Uni down and remain visible. Other times she would tuck Uni under her cloak and turn invisible. By the time she returned to Sabian's audience chamber she had committed much of the palace layout to memory. Sabian has done enough tyranny for the day and decided to retire for the night. Venger stalks off to his guest quarters, Shadow Demon skulking close behind. Two mutants escort Ariel to her quarters. Invisible still, Sheila follows. When they enter Ariel's bedchamber, there are two robot guards standing watch inside the room. Ariel sits down on the edge of her bed and begins to cry. Suddenly the maintenance hatch on one of the robot guards pops open and several wires pull out, apparently by their own accord. The other robot guard walks over to investigate and the same thing happens to that one. When the second guard is disabled, Sheila sets Uni on the floor and takes the hood of her cloak down, becoming visible again.

"Ariel," says Sheila quietly, frightened of alerting any other guards.

"Sheila?" Ariel says in an astonished voice, "You're okay!"

The two young women hug each other. They sit down on the bed and Sheila takes a look at the shackles on Ariel's wrists.

"They're magical," Ariel tells her, "they can't be picked. They have to be removed with magic."

"I'm just a thief," says Sheila, "I don't have anything magical to remove them with."

"You're more than just a thief," Ariel tells her, "much more. And right now, you're our best hope of getting out of here alive."

"Jeez, no pressure or anything."

Ariel chuckles, "Sorry," she says.

"So this is where you grew up?" Sheila asks.

Ariel looks away sadly, "Yes," she says.

"So what happened?" Asks Sheila, "How'd you get someone like Sabian as a stepfather?"

"My parents used to rule this land as king and queen," Ariel tells her, "Sabian was their royal magician, a sorcerer. Sabian lusted after my mother. What's more, he lusted after power both political and otherwise. Eventually he cast a spell upon her, charmed her into murdering my father. After an 'appropriate' period of mourning, she remarried to Sabian. As I started becoming a young woman, Sabian's attentions started to be directed towards me. Eventually he tired of my mother and had her executed for murdering her king. It was shortly after this I decided to flee with Thundarr and Ookla. And the rest, as they say, is history."

"So that's why you don't like to talk about your family," says Sheila.

"Yes," replies Ariel, "but that's not important now. Right now we need to work on a plan to get us out of here and send you and your friends home."

"I know where our weapons are being kept," says Sheila, "They're in a vault."

"Yes," agrees Ariel, "that would be the royal vault. Without the key card it's virtually impenetrable."

"Then I'll have to get the key card," says Sheila, "Where is it?"

"Sabian keeps it with him at all times," replies Ariel, "likely the only time he's without it is when he sleeps. His 'royal bedchamber' is on the very top floor," Ariel tells her, "be very careful. I'd hate to think of what might happen if you were to get caught."

"Then I just won't get caught," she says, "but I'll need to leave Uni here."

Uni makes a questioning bleat. Sheila kneels down and scratches her behind her ear.

"I need to move quickly and quietly," Sheila tells her, "I love you, but I can't carry you all over the palace. And you can't be seen wandering around. You'll be safe here with Ariel, and I'll be back soon."

With that Sheila puts her hood back up, turning herself invisible, and sneaks out of the room. She slips through the halls, sneaking past robots and mutants along the way. Invisibly, she climbs the winding stairs leading up to the uppermost levels. She looks up at the ceilings and swallows a lump in her throat. Attached to the ceilings are laser gun turrets, rotating back and forth looking for something to aim at. Putting her head down to keep from looking at the dangers overhead, finally she reaches the top floor. At the end of a long hall are a huge set of gilded double doors. And standing guard along the walls of the hallway are several robot guards, at least a dozen per side. These four armed robots are standing perfectly still, almost at attention. The only movements they make are their heads, which turn back and forth constantly watching the entire hallway and the only indication that they're not shut off. Sheila takes a deep breath to steady her nerves and then carefully walks down the hall. She let's out the tiniest sigh

of relief as she reaches the doors without incident. Ever so slowly she eases the door open, once it's open wide enough to allow her inside, she slips in and pulls the door shut. Quiet as a mouse, Sheila places one invisible foot gently in front of the other, creeping slowly across the room. On a table next to the gigantic luxurious bed are Sabian's metal gauntlets and helmet. On a mannequin next to the table are his cloak and wizard's robes, but no key card. Sheila approaches the bed. Lying there, draped in a silken sheet is the wizard Sabian.

Sheila understands now why he wears the helm and gauntlets. She had overheard many of Ariel's tutoring sessions with Presto, and learned that abuse of magic in this world corrupts one both emotionally and physically. While Sabian's arms, legs, and torso are still very human looking and quite attractive, his hands have become horrible bestial claws. And his face is deformed, almost demonic, with wicked fangs and bony ridges along the brow and jawline. And attached to a chain around his neck is the key card. Lying in bed next to Sabian is an attractive young woman. She too is wearing nothing but the silken sheet draped over her body, and judging by the metal shackles on her wrists she's not there by choice. Confident that Ariel's stepfather wouldn't want his subordinates watching his more intimate encounters, Sheila dropped the hood of her cloak making herself visible once more. Stealing the key card is going to be more difficult than she first assumed and needed to be able to see what her hands were doing. Ever so gently, Sheila unhooks the clasp on the chain and removes the key card, slipping it into her pocket. She then re-hooks the clasp. Just as she's finishing up she looks over to see the slave girl looking at her with a panicked expression on her face. Sheila raises a finger to her lips indicating for the slave girl to keep quiet. The slave girl nods in agreement, rolls back over, closes her eyes, and pretends to go back to sleep. Sheila puts her hood back up, becoming invisible once more, and slips out of the bedroom.

Sheila gets to the vault with very little trouble. Her invisibility allows her to keep from setting off any traps or alerting any guards. She opens up the vault, and nearly faints as she sees several of the four armed robot guards inside the vault, likely as a last line of defense against anyone who got this far. Sheila quickly recovers then goes about disabling the guards just as she did in Ariel's bedroom. She makes herself visible, then gathers all of her friend's weapons into a sack. She tucks the sack under her cloak, then puts her hood back up making her invisible again. Then she hurries off to Ariel's chambers.

Later, Princess Ariel is heading down to the dungeons. She's carrying a large pot filled with some sort of stew and a stack of wooden bowls and her hands and feet are still in irons.

"What's this?" Asks one of the mutant guards.

"Food for the prisoners," Ariel replies, "Sabian's orders."

"I wasn't notified," says the other guard, "I'll have to clear this."

"Go ahead," says Ariel, "but I warn you, he's sleeping right now and he isn't alone. Do you really want to wake him for this?"

"Good point," says the guard, "okay go ahead."

The other guard leads Ariel to the cells where Thundarr and the others are being kept. He unlocks the first door, Thundarr's, and lets her in. Thundarr's just about to pounce, but stops himself just in time

when he sees it's Ariel. Then he hears Sheila's voice whispering in his ear.

"Wait until we give you the signal," she says.

Then Thundarr feels something press into the palm of his hand. He looks down, it's the Sunsword. Ariel and the invisible Sheila leave the cell, one by one they're each slipped their weapons and told to wait. Once everyone has their food and their weapons, Ariel starts to head toward the exit. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Uni appears and makes a mad dash down the hall.

"That's the little barbarian's pet unicorn!" Ariel cries, "The one that got away!"

"After it!" Shouts the senior guard, "Don't let it get away!"

They begin running after the baby unicorn, who's bleating out in terror.

"Uni!" Bobby cries, and he smashes his cell door down with a single strike from his Thunder Club. He steps out into the hall and glares at the two mutants. "Don't you touch her!"

Behind the two mutant guards, two more cell doors fly off their hinges. Thundarr and Hank step out of their cells, Sunsword and Energy Bow at the ready. Hank launches an arrow which wraps around the two mutants and ties them together. As they struggle to try and break free, the keys lift up off of the senior mutant's belt. Then Sheila appears, keys in hand, and begins unlocking the other cells. Meanwhile, Thundarr cuts the shackles from Ariel's wrists and ankles.

"How are you feeling, old friend?" Thundarr asks when they finally set Ookla free.

Ookla responds by picking up Thundarr and Ariel in an enthusiastic, crushing hug.

"I guess this means he's feeling better," Ariel gasps.

"It's really Sheila we have to thank," Thundarr tells him, "if not for her, none of us would have escaped."

Ookla then picks Sheila up in a grateful hug that nearly crushes the life out of her.

"Um. . . uh. . . you're welcome?" She says as she tries to breathe.

"I'd hate to break this up," says Ariel, "but we're not out of the woods yet."

"Yes," agrees Thundarr, "we must get the young ones to the time portal, then escape ourselves."

"So what are we standing around here for?" Asks Eric, "Let's go!"

Hank and Bobby shove the guards into an empty cell and Sheila locks the door. They then unlock all the other cells in that part of the dungeons and release any other prisoners stuck down there. Once they're sure the slaves are all on their way to the secret escape tunnel, Thundarr, Ariel, and Ookla guide the kids to the time portal.

13 - Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen

The nine friends head straight for the time portal. Along the way they come across several guards, both robot and mutant. Luckily their superior numbers, plus the power of their magic weapons, Ariel's spells, and Ookla's strength, allows them to immobilize the sentries and keep them from sounding an alarm. They get to the chamber which holds the time portal.

"We must be swift," whispers Ariel, "I don't know how much longer our luck will hold."

"Then let's make haste," says Thundarr.

"What he said," says Bobby.

"On the count of three," says Hank, "One. Two. THREE!"

They all burst into the room. Standing there waiting for them, with a whole army of nega-knights, is Venger. There's a clamoring noise coming from down the hall as reinforcements, both robotic and mutant, come running towards the chamber.

"I've been expecting you," says Venger with an evil grin, "I knew it was only a matter of time before you made your way here."

"Yeah," says Bobby defiantly, "well this time we're ready for ya!"

Ariel waves her hand at the doors, which glow a bright yellow and slam shut. Then a chain and padlock appear on the doors out of thin air.

"That should hold them for a while," says Ariel.

"You'll need more than parlor tricks to defeat me, witch!"

"Hey!" Shouts Presto, "She's a sorceress, not a witch!"

"GET THEM!" Roars Venger, and all of the nega-knights raise their weapons and charge.

Presto hikes up his sleeves and takes off his hat. "Venger crossed the line when he called Ariel a witch," he says to himself. He waves his free hand over the hat and says, "Magic hat help me quick, conjure up an oil slick!" and a steel drum of oil appears out of thin air. Ookla, howling in rage, kicks the oil drum and sends it flying into the nega-knights. The drum tears open and oil spills out all over the floor. The nega-knights slip and fall all over the place, their feet completely unable to get any traction. Ariel smiles at Presto's growing proficiency with magic.

"Nicely done," she congratulates him.

Presto shrugs. "I learned from the best," he says.

"Your spells are improving, young one," says Venger, "Too bad it won't be enough to help you!"

With that Venger starts hurling bolts of energy at the companions. Eric bravely steps into the front and conjures a magical force field with his Griffon Shield. Venger throws bolt after bolt but they all bounce harmlessly away. Venger tries in vain to conceal his frustration.

"How many can you block Cavalier?" Venger asks, "How long can you keep this up?"

"Longer than you can I'm guessing," Eric replies.

Just then the doors to the chamber burst open and in walks Sabian with the reinforcements. The robot guards and the mutants start shooting at them. Their lasers bounce harmlessly off the force field. Sabian throws his own magical blasts at the friends, and those bounce harmlessly away as well. Hank's energy arrows and Ariel's spells leap out from inside the force field effortlessly and knock out mutant and robots with ease.

"Where are you planning on going?" Asks Venger, "Even if you make it back to your own time, I will simply follow you there. And your weapons are useless in your own time. I will destroy your world, and there will be nothing you can do to stop me!"

"Maybe not then," says Presto, "but there's something I can do about it now!"

He takes his hat off and waves his free hand over it. "Abrakaboom. Hocuskamite. Give to me, a stick of dynamite."

Presto reaches into his hat and pulls out a stick of dynamite. He holds it out to Ariel.

"Got a light?" He asks.

"No problem," she says and snaps her fingers.

A tiny flame, no more than that of a candle, springs from her fingertip. Presto uses the flame to light the fuse of the dynamite, then throws it at the time portal. Then he drops down and covers his ears. Ariel does likewise.

"Get ready!" She calls out.

The rest of the group covers up as best they can, and the guards all scatter if they can. The dynamite explodes and the whole building shakes. Chunks of stone fall from the ceiling and crash all around. When the dust settles, the nine heroes are a little shaken but unhurt thanks to Eric's Griffon Shield. The nega-knights and many of the robot guards are destroyed, or at least badly damaged. The force of the blast sent Sabian flying out into the hall, where he lies unconscious. Venger is knocked out as well, and many of their mutant henchmen are lying injured on the floor. Where the time portal once stood, there's

now a massive hole in the wall. The hole leads to the outside.

"Demon dogs!" Says Thundarr when he sees the damage the dynamite has done to the palace.

"Now what?" Asks Bobby.

"Now we get out of here," replies Ariel.

"We can't fight our way past all the guards in the palace," says Sheila.

"Speak for yourself, Sis," says Bobby, "I say 'Bring'em on!'"

"I've got a better idea," says Ariel. She raises her hands and conjures a slide of pure magical energy.

"Go ahead," she tells them, "Bobby, you go first."

"C'mon Uni," Bobby says as he picks up the baby unicorn, "It'll be just like the water park back home."

Then he takes a running start and jumps onto the ramp and slides down. "WEEEEEEEE!" He says.

"Okay Sheila, your turn!" says Hank.

One by one, each of the companions slides down the magical ramp. Ariel goes last. Just as she's about to slide down the ramp, a group of mutant guards enters the room. She hops onto the slide and escapes. When she safely reaches the ground she looks back to see the mutants sliding down after her. With a simple gesture, Ariel causes the slide to vanish. The mutants sliding down fall to the ground and lay very still. Then they all run back to the farming community. Back at the barn, they sit around to contemplate their next move. The children are all very upset that they lost their way home again, especially after coming so close.

"So now what are we going to do?" Asks Sheila.

"I don't want to stay here," says Eric.

"Me either," says Diana, "but what else can we do?"

"I guess our only other choice is to go back to The Realm," says Hank, "Maybe we can even trap Venger here in the year 4000. Then we'll be free of him once and for all."

"At least in The Realm we'll have the Dungeon Master to help us," suggests Sheila, "and we might be able to get home."

"Especially without Venger always on our tail," adds Presto.

"It's agreed then," says Hank, "we go back to the amusement park."

"And Ariel, Ookla, and I will see you there safely," agrees Thundarr.

It takes many days of travel to arrive at the amusement park. Thankfully, the trip was extremely uneventful. They return to the Dungeons & Dragons ride where they met. Hank shakes Thundarr's hand.

"Despite everything, I'm glad to have met you," Hank says.

"As am I," agrees Thundarr.

Ookla picks up Sheila and Diana in a huge bear hug goodbye.

"We're gonna miss you too Ookla," gasps Diana.

Bobby wraps his arms around Thundarr's waist in a big hug.

"I'm gonna miss you," says Bobby fighting back his tears.

Thundarr kneels down and returns the embrace. Then he takes Bobby by the shoulder and looks him straight in the eye.

"I never really thought much about family," says Thundarr, "but if I ever have a son, I'd want him to be just like you." Then he takes off his animal tooth necklace and puts it around Bobby's neck. "Here," he says, "I want you to have this. For luck."

Then he and Bobby hug again. Ariel walks up to Presto. She places her hands on his shoulders.

"You're a fine young man," she tells him, "and you're going to be a fine sorcerer. Here, I want you to have something." She holds out her hand and conjures up a thick tome with a green cover. "This book of spells was written by one of the very first sorcerers to appear after The Great Catastrophe. It's very old and very powerful. I took it from my stepfather's library. I want you to have it."

"I can't accept this. . ." Presto begins.

"Take it," interrupts Ariel, "Study it. Become a great sorcerer, and a great man."

"But. . ."

Then Ariel gently kisses him on the lips. Presto looks completely shocked and surprised. Then he becomes embarrassed and blushes his deepest shade of red yet. Then the six young adventurers walk back into the ancient Dungeons & Dragons ride and return to The Realm once again. Thundarr, Ariel, and Ookla climb onto their mounts.

"Do you think they'll ever find their way home?" Thundarr asks.

"I'm certain they will," replies Ariel.

Ookla says something in his bestial tongue. "Yes," says Thundarr, "why are you so certain of it?"

"Because," says Ariel, "the name of the sorcerer who wrote that book, was Presto."

And with that she wheels her chestnut mare about and gallops off. Thundarr follows after her, and Ookla follows suit.

THE END