

Malach King and the Thrice-Cursed Ring

Fate,
far-sighted Daughter of Time, Life-weaver,
chose Malach son of Mathred as High Teloch,
King beyond Kings, Earl of the Iolish, Chieftain,
5 renowned in all time as first of the Ring-Wearers.

Malach, orphaned,
was raised by his people the Ui Lide Aesal
until he became a man full, and in full manhood
he was much like his father, strong, daring,
10 knowing not of fear. Malach stood above most men,
gold fell his locks, first always to laugh, yet unlike
his father he would first look for peace with a voice
tempered and sweet, gifted with music, though
the magic of the Baith shone less eagerly from him.
15 In his sixteenth year, Kaedwald, ruling Teloch
of the Ui Lide Aesal, died and Malach was resolved
to take his place.

The Ui Lide Aesal were strange
among the Iolish, for instead of choosing one
20 of the Teloch's kin, any man of the Tella may
become Teloch should he first prove himself equal
to the past kings; some men choose the sword
to prove themselves, some their own hands, others
choose the harp and word, through many means
25 may a man become Teloch of the Ui Lide Aesal.
Malach chose to prove the worth of his blood
by bull-leaping the white bull Donn Coracht,
who before killed any man who stood in his field.
Ten times he charged Malach son of Mathred,
30 but each time with grace Malach grabbed his horns
as they were lowered and vaulted the great bull,
landing unscathed, until at the eleventh hurdle
Donn Coracht submitted to him meekly,
for this he was named Malach Deft-Hand
35 and made Teloch.

As Teloch, his Tella thought
it proper for him to seek a wife, yet the young king
did not, for in his dreams Malach was tormented
with the sight of a great storm far off born
40 from beyond the sea which would sink forever
Ioland and all its peoples; so in fear of the storm,
Malach pursued not a wife but sought out
the wise man of Ail Meloch, great friend
of the great Mathred, and the wise man advised
45 the Teloch thusly,

“Dreams are seldom wrong,
for in dreams we look on the world with eyes clear,
though in waking our sight is again clouded.
A dream may tell you clearly what is fated,
50 but because we read them poorly, their message
often goes unheeded. I believe you are right to fear
this dream, and were even more right to tell me
of it. I often aided your father in counsel,
now I shall guide you.

55 “The Sea is the ancient enemy
of our people, many times she has tried to swallow
whole these lands, many times did your father
protect us from this fate, but he has since passed
beyond and we are left unguarded from her wrath.
60 By what means she seeks to break us I think I know.

“The people of Ioland
have long been divided by blood into many Tellas,
and long ago forgotten about the wide world,
but this does not mean the wide world has forgotten
65 them and while the Iolish looked inward, far sailors
from Eurol who trade with this land have spread
the knowledge of our divisions. Word will spread
to conquerors, for there have always been those
with an eye for blood and treasure, and to this land
70 shall come war. Only through uniting against
the storm can the Iolish survive.”

Malach, heeding this warning,
won first the friendship of the mighty Aamach Eas,
great warriors who live on the Aglach Telocha,
75 the River of the King, named the Aglach Roim
before the reign of Malach. The Aamach Eas
are few and build no walls, for they believe
that these make men weak. In custom they act
as those of the Ui Arden, for in their own stories
80 they are descended from the life-guard of Ert Dially,
Teloch of the Ui Arden, who was poisoned
by his second wife to see her son take his seat
before the son of his first, when the guard
of Ert Dially sought to hide the first son she raised
85 the Ui Arden to violence; the guard fought
all the Tella for five days, could not break them
nor be broken themselves, and so they gathered
their wives and escaped with their ward,
settling atop a hill beside the Aglach Roim.
90 The men of Aamach Eas hold Ert Dially’s bloodline
as sacred, allowing only the first son to rule as king.

For their part, the Ui Arden tell that Ert was cruel,
taking his second wife against her will,
and that his first son was of the same stock.

95 Malach then conquered swiftly
the Ui Arden, who were divided in the choosing
of their next Teloch between two brothers, making
both his supplicants, taking next the Ui Agla
and then the people of Helm Hailas, a people
100 not properly Iolish but which came over the sea
long ago from Eurol and settled the land between
Ail Meloch and the sea; and though they carry
themselves in the Iolish manner, speaking
the language of the isle mixed with their own
105 long forgotten one in a harsh tongue unpleasant
to the ear as the land they claim, for little grows
between the sea and the mountains, and have
dwelled in that barren land for generations,
they do not number as one of the Iolish Tella.
110 Malach had no difficulty in subjugating them,
gaining dominion over all of the East and
proclaiming himself High Teloch of Ioland.

The western Tellas grew afraid
of Malach and his sway over the isle, and moved
115 together. Swearing oaths of brotherhood,
the Telochs of the west gathered in the halls
of the Un Bolam, for they were nearest to Malach
and their hatred for his father terrible. In their halls
feasted the Ui Con Tara, Un Colta bar, Un Goll,
120 Un Salal, Un Londar Norna, Un Londar,
and the Drocht Baalon. As they gathered,
each Teloch demanded to be made High Teloch
equal to Malach, to place the many war bands
under their command, to be given a war-tribute
125 by the others. Each thought himself the only choice
and hoped to take from Malach his place,
to sit as the High Teloch while all Iolish bowed
to his meadbench. The Telochs spent five nights
arguing about how to begin the king-choosing,
130 each had wise men, charlatans, warriors, bards
and witches speak for them but few could be heard
speaking over the roar of shouting, and during
the day the Teloch's warband would fight in sudden
battles to place their kin above all others, using their
135 hands only so to not spill blood and bring shame
to their host. Soon the Un Bolam had no more mead
for their guests, and the men grew more restless,

eager to go to war. On the sixth night, the Teloch
of the Un Londar Norna, Bran Kededran refused
140 to have wise men speak for him but speak himself,
and in his speaking he spoke not unharshly
about other Telochs, especially on the character
of the Drocht Baalon who in his eye were vile
for separating his kin, the Un Londar, from his own
145 Tella. Hearing these words of spite, the Teloch
of the Drocht Baalon, Ceallach, was brought
to such a rage that he left the mead hall
and gathered his men for revenge, placing
themselves before the door.

150 When Bran left the mead hall
the Drocht Baalon rushed forward and grabbed him,
taking him before the waiting king Ceallach,
who demanded blood be paid for Bran's words.
The men of Drocht Baalon formed two circles,
155 with spears facing in and out so that he might not
flee, nor his men help him. Bran agreed to the duel,
so long as he was allowed his spear and shield.
These were swiftly brought to him, but Ceallach
took no weapon and used his fists. As soon as Bran
160 held his arms, Ceallach was on him, and Bran
could not stop the blows, nor his men reach him,
and he died beneath Ceallach's hands, his helm
crushed.

Ceallach, aware that the Telochs
165 would fear him and banish him from their host,
called them back to the mead hall to give the reason
for his actions, but they would not come unless
they brought their house guard and he came alone.
Ceallach agreed, for it was only through the Telochs
170 that he would be proclaimed High Teloch. He stood
before the Tella, on the table given for his people
and spoke his defense,

“At this table, I sat and listened
as the man whose blood now covers my hands
175 spoke vile treachery. I listened as he named
my blood to be the illness which has weakened
the Iolish to their present state, but if my blood
be so weak, why have his people not driven mine
from this island, why is his blood on my fists
180 and not mine upon his spear? I shall not claim
that his blood saps Ioland of its strength,
only his temper, so rash and vile, a failing
which many Iolish do possess. But what of mine,

185 I have just killed a man over words and many
will laugh as I speak of temper. You will call me
traitor to the guest-right we have been given
by the Un Bolam through their food and drink.

“You were here as well
when he cast dung-words at my Tella and all bore
190 witness to my temperament, rather than kill the man
with my hands where he stood, which I have shone
to be an easy task for me, I left this hall to spare
the shame it would bring my host to have his death
in their hall, so near his bed. Guest-right extends
195 beyond these walls, to all the extensive lands
of the Un Bolam, and yet I killed him in the lands
of our host you will next claim. I did so within
the proper bounds of guest-right, for I killed not
to revenge myself but for the honor of our host,
200 for though it is wrong to kill in the very home
of my host, so near his bed, it is more wrong
to permit such rudeness to my host go unpunished.
Each of you heard the filth which he used to fill
the home of our host, and yet you allowed him
205 to continue to speak, allowed him to continue
soiling the home of your host, while I alone took
action and avenged them.

“If there are any among you
who believe that I have acted unjustly, that I
210 violated the guest-right, let them come before me,
let us see those who would falsely claim
to champion our hosts, the Un Bolam; I will accept
all challenges, but know in your heart that you
are false before me, the champion true. To the men
215 of Un Londar Norna, you may challenge me
at any time without fear of falsehood, I have killed
your Teloch and a man of your people, all rights
to combat are yours.

“It is the temper,
220 of the dead man which threatens us Iolish,
in his mind the suffering of his people is the fault
of mine. Our people have had peace for many
generations, the same may not be said for his kin.
They have had many battles for control of each
225 other’s Tella, as recently as ten years past.
The Iolish have lived scattered for too long,
only under the threat of Malach, Teloch of the East,
have we come together to appoint our own
High Teloch. We each claim the lofty mantel

230 of High Teloch, but none of us know what that shall
be. We have no agreement if the High Teloch will
reign for one battle or for all his life, if we pay
him tribute of silver or of gold. I hold that
the High Teloch should rule over all of us that we
235 might end this petty squabbling which we are born
into, to hold judgement over each Tella and Teloch.

“I will be the High Teloch,
I will rule each of you and judge fairly, for I am
strongest, and if any man doubts my claim,
240 they are welcome to test my arms and do battle
with me. I will not refuse him. Kings, my case
is yours to judge.”

The Telochs were afraid,
unsure of what to make of his claims. Well they
245 knew of the renown of his strength and were
witness to the eagerness with which he killed,
but more they feared his words, which had placed
him beyond reproach, they sat silently afraid
that now they must yield to him the highest seat,
250 to stand above them and hold judgment over them
because they lacked the words to answer him, until
the young son of the Teloch of the Un Salal,
who had seen only fourteen winters, but was known
for the skill of his tongue and whose youth made
255 him unafraid of the strength of Ceallach, spoke,

“Your words have in them truth.
Here sit all the great Telochs of Ioland and none
of them defended their host from the unclean words
which were spoken in his hall. You are right
260 in defending this house and none of us would
be just in our judgment had we ruled against you.
Yet you are unwise if you believe this single action
gives the right of highest kingship of the land
to you.

265 “It is true that you alone acted,
and shame will forever weigh on those who here
today, but a good king must have more in him
than strength. A Teloch must have wisdom, pass
judgment justly, and be not rash. Yet we here seek
270 not to name a Teloch, but a Teloch above Telochs,
High King of all the Iolish people one who could
pass judgement on our kings, of all mountains
and oceans, all pebbles and streams. It is them
the High King will rule. Every Teloch is connected

275 to his land, thus the High Teloch must be connected
to all Ioland. The wind must take him as its king
and proclaim his will wherever it breaths, the trees
must bow and the mountains kneel as he comes,
the flowers bloom in delight, the waters shield him,
280 the grasses be his sword. It is them that must be
convinced, they who must bow. I propose that each
Teloch who desires to be named High King must go
to the river which flows at the foot of the Ail Bolam
and let the land chose our High Teloch for us.”

285 To this the Telochs agreed,
eager that Ceallach not be crowned as High King
in that hour, praising the speaker, whose name was
Noríín, and the Teloch gathered their retinue
to ride to the river Noríín had named, a ride of three
290 days. Ceallach was enraged for having his position
rejected by the other kings, but he was determined
and conceived a plan to trick the Telochs. Noríín
at the same time had talked to his father
and promised him that if he were named the next
295 Teloch of the Un Salal, over his brothers, he would
deliver to his father rule over all the island, to which
the Teloch agreed. Ceallach’s plan was this, that he
would wade into the river and ask of the land who
should stand as High Teloch, and a number of his
300 warband hidden would reply “Ceallach”. Though
renowned for his strength he was also shrewd
and he thought that Noríín had planned to do much
the same for fear of his power and had his waiting
men armed. His suspicion was not ill-founded,
305 as Noríín planned to ensure his father was chosen,
and knowing the other Telochs would plan their
own means to fake the favor of the land, the boy
sent his men ahead to find a wise man and to tell
him that the other Telochs planned to become
310 the High King without the approval of the land
they would rule, that he was needed to show
the true will of the land. His men flattered
the wise man and made him forget all his wisdom,
that he soon believed that the Un Salal were
315 warriors chosen by the Baíth themselves.

When all kings had come
to the river, they were greeted by this wise man,
who offered to them his judgement. All save
Ceallach agreed to submit to him, who instead
320 waded into the river and cried aloud for the earth

and water to select its High King and swiftly came
the reply “Ceallach”, but Norín saw through this
and sent his men to the forest where they discovered
Ceallach’s warriors. Fighting erupted as many men
325 were wounded, but at length these were forced from
the forest and Ceallach was disgraced. The wise
man cursed him that no matter how he might try,
by strength or by guile, he would never become
High Teloch, he would only serve those appointed
330 above him.

The wise man then gave
his judgment and the Un Salal were placed above
all peoples of the alliance, their Teloch named
High Teloch. For this, Ceallach in his heart named
335 the Un Salal as his enemies forever. The kings
returned to the home of the Un Bolam and began
their war planning. This took little time as all
Telochs but Ceallach were united under their High
Teloch. They left the halls of the Un Bolam
340 a fortnight after beginning the king-choosing.
In their march, the Un Bolam took the vanguard,
pride of place given to them for hosting the other
Tella, and the other peoples followed no set order;
save only that the Drocht Baalon followed after
345 the host, for Ceallach had little love for the other
Tella.

Their gathering had taken much time
and Malach had come to know their purpose,
swiftly he set out against them with all the peoples
350 of eastern Ioland. To him came the strong spears
of the Aamach Eas and the many swords
of the Ui Arden, the stout shieldwall of the Ui Agla
and the haggard hunters of Helm Hailas; those
desperate people who long languished between
355 mountains which drank away the water and seas
too salty to drink. The people of Helm Hailas
had fled to that barren land from some violence two
hundred years before the life of Malach, so great
was their need that they settled without complaint
360 the dry lands behind the Ail Meloch and named
it a paradise. The people of Helm Hailas, though
they came in number, had become few from years
of want and their villages grew empty, bar the cold
chief’s hall, their homes became small. No crop can
365 grow in such a land and flocks struggle to prosper
there, and by necessity the men of Helm Hailas

began to steal from others to sate their need, so that
the Ui Arden and Ui Agla came to fear the coming
of night when in darkness raiding bands would seep
370 into their lands in search of ready food and
livestock to take with them to their bleak homes;
and in their raids that which they came to prize
above all else, above sheep, above wives,
above gold, were the cattle well-tended by Iolish
375 husbandmen. Any man who brings back a bull
was raised above his fellows and given lands,
their raids for pride and place could lead them far
from their home, once encircling all Ioland in a raid
which lasted a full year. Through long years
380 they became similar to the Iolish, but separate they
still were. In the grandest hall reigned their Teloch,
whose blood came from the helmsmen who guided
them to that land. In Malach's time they were led
by Teloch Mebeb, she was both cunning and fierce,
385 and brought to Malach many lean warriors, but also
the cursed boy Reyech.

She presented the boy
to the High Teloch, naming him the guarantor
of victory as she spoke of his past. Reyech was born
390 in death, his mother passing from the difficult
birthing even as he took his first breaths,
and his father, distraught, placed his anguish
and pain for losing his wife and mixed together with
hatred at the mewling child which was her death
395 with his very soul to name a powerful curse upon
the mewling babe, that for all his life he would be
made to carry the dead which he made upon his
heart, a black mark unseen to fester there and weigh
on him until life was but weariness. The curse
400 placed against one so new to the world, his father
fell lifeless to the floor. At the age of fifteen, Reyech
had killed many men, for his queen and the tempest
of rage which lived inside him. Though not yet a
man he could battle ten and see victory, the speed
405 of his limbs so quick that no blade had ever left
its mark on him. Malach placed this boy in
the vanguard as his host left the Hall of Hala
to wrestle the western Telochs for dominion
of the isle.

410 He set his warband
in the woods of the Un Bolam, which the host
of the many Telochs neared carelessly, for they

were in their own lands and had not thought to place
scouts on their path. Malach fell upon the men
415 of Un Bolam with sudden ferocity, the way a storm
arises on the sea, and the Un Bolam ran, having
no order in their forces, their Teloch killed early
in the fighting. Reych felled all who came against
him and the vanguard was turned; but a great host
420 lay beyond and these men swiftly brought
themselves into a shield wall, for they did not know
that Malach's men were unordered from their battle
with the van. The Drocht Baalon did not join
the shield wall, instead moved to a knoll to see
425 the shape of the battle. Malach brought his men
back into order and led only a small number of them
to charge, and when the host of the West saw them,
they scoffed, thinking the Un Bolam cowards
for breaking before so few. Such was their
430 confidence that they broke their shield wall
and charged Malach, quickly surrounding him
and his men, but they were deceived and their
eagerness betrayed them as the rest of Malach's
force charged from the trees and hit them hard
435 behind. They were shattered, not by the force
of Malach, but through their haste, and the host
of Malach went far in their pursuit, killing all those
within their grasp, until at last they were alone
on the field, except for the Drocht Baalon,
440 for Ceallach had seen the battle and would not run
before speaking to Malach.

Malach's host, fresh in victory,
surrounded the Drocht Baalon and gave no path
for them to flee by, eager to see their victory
445 completed. Ceallach called loudly for Malach
to come to him, and upon his arrival he spoke,

"Hail Malach, son of Mathred,
son of Math. By force of arms the field is yours,
and the island waits with nervous eyes to see who
450 our first High Teloch will be. I stand here
as the first of the Iolish to bear witness to the kind
of ruler you are, the weight of time now set upon
your shoulders, and all days after this will bear your
mark, even till the end of this island. So be just
455 and true in thought and deed so all sons of this land
hold your name as the height of what a man may
become, but if your reign is false, and justice is not
loved by you, then I shall be the first of all

the Iolish to curse your name, and we will have
460 between us war. Be not assured that in this fight
victory will be yours, though you have defeated
all the sons of the west, before you stand
the Sons of Baalon, we who are descended
from that great warrior.

465 “The host who were here laid low
by the skill of your arms was not always united,
for we were many Tella, and between us there lay
deadly hatred from time past. We chose to end
our enmity to protect our own from the power
470 of your arms. In this choosing, new enmity
was born, for I was best suited for the leading of all
the west but the other Telochs feared my own
power, and took from me my right. I will admit
to you that after they took this from me, I sought
475 to reclaim my right through dishonest means.
I was not alone in doing this, for the Un Salal made
a wise man foolish, and had him chose
the High Teloch without proper knowledge,
an insult to our land. I chose an honest trickery,
480 and used my own men to win what is by right mine,
but all kings conspired against me and used
dishonest trickery to take the title from me.

“I have seen the battle
that you have fought against these dishonest kings
485 and I acknowledge you to be the High Teloch,
I freely lay aside the right I had at your feet,
though had I faced you, know it would have been
me who would rule the Iolish in your stead.
I now place before you your first judgment, I ask
490 of you to punish the Telochs who dishonored me
and to deliver to me the son of the Un Salal named
Noríín, for he is the one who brought the Telochs
to dishonor. High King, the land is yours, and now
you must earn its people, justice lies at your feet.
495 What is your judgement?”

Malach had listened with patience
while Ceallach spoke, his wounds of battle still
bloody, and when he finished Malach gave his
judgement,

500 “I have heard much of you,
Ceallach son of Cole, and the strength of your arm
is not to be doubted. I had not heard of the strength
of your tongue, however, and in all measures

it should be counted your strongest weapon.

505 The sons of the west have nothing to fear from me,
I shall not lay them low, instead I will raise them
to new standing. I am plagued by dreams of a storm,
borne over the sea, coming from the east to break
this isle. The strength of all the Iolish is needed
510 to turn away the storm. I am glad that you have
surrendered before my host, for the Drocht Baalon
are mighty warriors whose strength is needed
for our future.

“You have asked me

515 for judgment, that I give freely. In my judgement
both you and the other Telochs acted wrongly,
you by your own admission denied the land
its proper place as judge, and they by fooling a wise
man and believing the very foolishness which they
520 had given him. Therefore I command you, and all
Telochs who engaged in this foolishness, to perform
penitence before the river where this trickery took
place and to ask the river and forest to pardon you.
As for the son of the Un Salal, whose name
525 is Noríín, I will not deliver him to you, for I know
that his life would be not long in your hands,
and the death you would give him he does not
deserve, for both of you sought to cheat the other
Telochs. Then this is my judgement, that though
530 Noríín shall not be delivered to you, I do have
a sentence to pass against him. After you have
asked for penitence, you, Ceallach son of Cole,
shall come to my hall at the Hill of Hala, where you
will become my champion to deliver my justice
535 to those who would stand against it and my ear will
forever listen to your council, but Noríín, even after
his penitence, will be forever barred from
the Hill of Hala where the High Teloch will forever
reign. This is my judgement.”

540 Ceallach was pleased at the words
of Malach and swore to him that Malach would
forever be his king, and commanded all the Drocht
Baalon to do the same. Having sworn their oaths,
the Drocht Baalon went forth to find those who had
545 run from the armies of Malach, and slew them.
Now there was no army which could stand
against Malach and all of the Iolish paid tribute
to the Ui Lide Aesal. Their power was great,
and in victory his men began to seek again for him

550 a wife so their power might continue for all time,
and though by tradition he was to search among
his own Tella or else he might have taken for a wife
any woman from the powerful Tella, he chose
for himself the daughter of the Aamach Eas,
555 in whose blood flowed an ancient line of kings.
The Iolish are not like those on Eurol, where
the wife's house pays the husband's, but indeed
it is the opposite, and of the Iolish the Aamach Eas
demand the greatest proofs of a future husband.
560 So that even though Malach was the High Teloch
and they paid to him a tribute, they would not give
her to be his wife before receiving those proofs.
Malach came before the fathers of the Aamach Eas
and spoke,
565 "Fathers, your age and wisdom
has let you stand above all men of the Aamach Eas,
to render your judgment upon them. I am no son
of your Tella, yet I come before you, for in your
keeping lies that which I yearn to possess.
570 "I have already in my hands
that which no man has ever held. For now the Iolish
people hold me to be their High Teloch,
and all people are to be my people. I may no longer
claim any Tella as my own, to do so is to place
575 them first and all others into servitude. I must judge
true and fair, so the Iolish will become one people,
the way iron links are forged into mail. My future
will be the future of my people, my actions will
stand for ages. If I am just and good, then my
580 people will be for all time, but if I fall into cruelty
and unkindness, greed and treachery, they will
never rise above who they are now, and will only
fall into greater cruelty and mistrust, becoming
beasts of the land.
585 "As I stand, I am alone,
one man with the burdens of all peoples weighed
on his shoulders. I can bear this burden for a time,
I am still young. Yet youth is only a cloud, soon
fleeting, and age, hidden behind it, soon descends.
590 I must have sons to take my burdens and continue
my work. With them, the safety of the Iolish will
be secured, their happiness guaranteed. There are
many who would gladly see their daughters given
to me that they might secure their place above all
595 others and worm their way into my council.

Therefore I must place my trust in old friends who
joined me willingly.

“I have long heard stories
of your daughter Niola, the Iolish speak of her
600 and wonder that such beauty should belong to
mortal man, and not to the Baíth alone. Many have
come before you, asking for her hand, Telochs have
come seeking her, but they have each been turned
away. I am no Teloch, I am the Teloch above
605 Telochs, king beyond kings, and I have not come
here to set you above all the Iolish, rather I come
to show them an example of a just people
and to raise them to your height. Show them
your justice, and allow me to have her as a bride.”

610 The Fathers replied to him,
“Malach Deft-Hand,
it is true that you have in your possession that which
no mortal man has ever held, you have all the Iolish
under your protection, and you have the love of our
615 daughter, Niola Fair-Haired, who has long seen you
as her only rightful match. You desire her and she
desires you, yet we cannot permit this pairing today
for you have not given us proofs of your worthiness.

“You know nothing of her,
620 save of her beauty, and beauty is milk, either
consumed at once or else spoiled with time. Where
will you be, Malach, King of Kings, when her
beauty has vanished? It is a magpie who finds
something new and beautiful when the old silver
625 is tarnished. You must be no magpie, for you
are Malach, High Teloch and King of Kings,
and to resign to this fate would be most evil for our
favorite daughter, one we must avoid for her and all
the Iolish. You spoke truly when you named her
630 as beautiful as the Baíth. She is the morning sun,
the morning sun will reach brilliant noon if you let
it before dusk falls. Niola is to be the mother
of tomorrow and deserves a husband worthy of her.
There is more to her than what Ioland knows.

635 “You have lands, but these will
bring her no joy, you have power, but power cannot
love her, you have warbands, but these cannot feed
her, you have wisdom, but it cannot clothe her.
Malach, son of Mathred son of Math, what will you
640 bring her that she may not fear these? You may

sustain her today, but what of tomorrow,
what can you offer her besides you desire?"

Malach raged at their reply,
for refusal awoke something with in him which
645 had never before stirred, a vanity gained
in unceasing victory, the questions the Fathers gave
felt to him undeserved, and for the first time he felt
the stinging humiliations of defeat. Yet no man
conquers through surrender and Malach desired
650 above all to prevail, his will made of strong iron,
so he gave battle with the Fathers,

"Have I found an opponent
eager for battle against he who has not known
defeat? Very well, for I will not shirk from battle
655 when it is offered so freely to me. Do they think me
so skilled in battles of arms that I would neglect
to train my tongue for war? This is a battle I have
prepared for, they will not find me as green as they
would hope me.

660 "You have told me
by your own halting breath that Niola believes me
to be her only worthy match, and I believe the same,
yet you would refuse us each other. I am told it was
for our youth and her beauty that we are denied,
665 for fears I will grow tired of her as she grows old.
You fear that I might lose my seat, that my
meadbench would be burned and my people laid
low. These are just fears, however impossible,
one day the earth itself may shake me of my love
670 or my power, it may happen, perhaps the Baíth shall
rise from the earth to unseat me. Yet that day, black
day, will not find me eager to submit. I am
the High Teloch, King beyond Kings, on the day
that I die I will still be the High Teloch,
675 King beyond Kings and she beside me, my wife.

"I have heard of her beauty
it's true, so have all who live on our island; I am not
alone in possessing this knowledge and of those
who live around you, none speak of anything else.
680 If the people of this land do not know more of her
it is because you have hidden her from us. Teach
me of her if that be your requirement of her hand,
bring me a champion that I may defeat him if you
worry of my strength, bring all your armies against
685 mine if you doubt that my warband might defend

her, but if you hide her from me, know that this land belongs to me and my people and we will find her.

“You named me and my lineage,
each word you spoke true, I am Malach, the only
690 man to hold all the Iolish in his grasp. Now any man
may walk from west to east without fear or blood
feud by my power; my father was Mathred the one
who left no feud time to fester and when the Sea
stole from him his wife, he conquered it by his rage,
695 the sun and moon are separated by his hand,
his blood runs hotter than the blood of any mortal
man; my father’s father was a man of no ordinary
power either, for he was the wisest of the wise men,
so wise that a Baíth woman wed him in order
700 to learn his knowledge. This is the family you seek
to destroy, know that in our blood runs the magic
of the Baíth and we will not know defeat. Give her
to me that we might be friends and live in peace.”

Others would tremble
705 before these pronouncements, but the fathers
of the Aamach Eas took no notice of them,
one gave a call and from a door in the meeting hall
came forth Niola, daughter of the Aamach Eas, who
had been listening to the talking from behind a door,
710 and she spoke to the High Teloch,

“We also are the children
of ancient lineage, warriors born for the battle.
Our people have never surrendered to the enemy,
we have never left the field before our foes. Bring
715 your armies, King beyond Kings, bring all the Iolish
here to war with us, and you will find us ready
to fight, each man and woman of us. You will find
me in the warband, my spear bristling in the line,
we fear not one foe nor any multitude.

720 “They do not deny you
my hand for hatred of you, nor from spite, they who
were first to fight with you in your wars, forget not
our blood spilt for your conquest. They desired
to learn what your ceaseless wars have made you.
725 Your eagerness to look past our battles beside you
is a worry, but even this is not why you are denied
my hand. You are Malach, son of Mathred
son of Math, the blood of Ioland’s greatest heroes
is yours, they know well your blood well storied,
730 and do not hide me from yourself for the heroes

of your past. They deny you my hand because
the man you were when you began your conquest,
is not the man you are today. Your conquest was
begun from a fear for us, all peoples of this land,
735 that the black storm which rises in the east
would carve us away and so sought to unify
and bring us together to face this storm. The Malach
who stands here is not that Malach who took us
to war, for he before was humble and unproud.

740 “When your host marches
down upon us and we are fall beneath unceasing
hoards, what will happen to you next? Do you
believe that I will leave willingly with my people
slain without grave howes above them, will your
745 people who follow you continue to when
their Teloch has become a common thief? Your
wife-taking shall be the greatest crime and the songs
sung even until the wreaking of the isle shall name
you blackheart. Such action would be your undoing
750 and the ruin of all before the storm.

 “I am to be the mother of hope,
but my husband must be my equal. It is true
that there is little known of me by the people
of this land, but this was by design, for in keeping
755 secret my life they have allowed me to live as others
do. I see that the only one who could be my
husband is you, a man of destiny to equal the fate
placed on me, but only the Malach who began
in hopes of saving the land deserves me, not
760 the arrogant conqueror who stands before us today.
My life is given to great events, spun by Fate alone.
Though Fate demands I be surrendered
to long-planned designs, the Fathers are mortal
men, and will not yield so easily. We are prepared
765 to fight Fate until she yields, as your father once
gave battle to the Sea. We will not yield to Fate,
and we will not yield to you.”

 Malach was silent for a great time,
rooted to his place as a tree, but thought hard
770 on the storm of words which Niola had raised
against him, even after she walked out of
the mead hall. When he had gathered his thoughts
and spoke once more, his voice held its spirit,
though it had lost the rage it once held,

775 “Fathers, I have spoken rashly,
and in my speech I have fallen into great vices,
for I am a man who has dreamed great,
and achieved great, so in the conquest of my dreams
I forgot the waking day and my place in it.
780 I am merely a man who forgot his place and was
seduced by his own blood, convinced of its
righteousness. I am not Math, whose cunning
entrapped foxes and whose wisdom confounded
owls, nor am I Mathred the Undefeatable who
785 guarded this land through the virtue of his arms.
I am neither of these, I am Malach, and that will
be enough.

 “The pride which I have brought
to your home has shamed me, I has mistaken
790 to think that the men of Aamach Eas had broken
faith with me when they had never broken their
shield wall in battle. We are brothers, not by blood
but by hard days hard won, though I have brought
shame on that bond. I ask you to receive
795 my repentance and forgive my arrogance, permit us
to move past my folly and on to our work,
the preservation of the Iolish from that which is sure
to come.

 “Your daughter is yours,
800 I will not take her from you by force of arms,
such action is unworthy of our friendship, never
again will I hold myself in such bad airs, I will
stand the first among equals, not a master but
a father, a gentle hand not the iron rod. Brothers,
805 I am in your debt for refusing me. I wake from
the long slumber of dreams to find my friends
in need. You have spoken of Fate, of this terror
I believe no man is bound, I have seen a great
number of men die for fear of Fate. If your daughter
810 is held in its chains, tell me that I might break them
for you.”

 The Fathers spoke to him, joyed,

 “Malach, we did not seek
to humble you to laud our power over you, we have
815 none but that humble kind which is formed by
shared lives with friends. Remember that you are
the High Teloch, and that you must still protect
those who call you king and judge them too. You
are to lead all men of this island and so do not fear

820 to use that power which you hold over them,
but remember that you are also a man as all men
are, fated to die, that your power is for your fellow's
safety and not his subjugation.

“Fate should not be made light of,
825 for she is not the breeze but the ocean, she will feed
her favored and drown those she scorns. She should
not be ignored, for she has great love for traps
and only in keeping her in your sight will you avoid
them. We caution you not to think so little of her
830 who has given you much. He who is king today
will tomorrow be hungry, that ever is her device.

“Malach, Fate has grabbed Niola
as a hunting hound grabs hold of a hind, and Fate
will keep her. She was born with doom weighing
835 over her, for days her mother screamed in pained
labor and we rushed to summon the wise man
of Ail Meloch. He soothed the mother with herbs
and brought Niola into this world, but would not
long hold the child for he pronounced that a dark
840 fate ruled her, that she is to die in childbirth, that
her husband will have one heir only, that her child
would have no parent, and the fate of this land will
be bound to that child for all time. This is her doom,
this we have told her and she has accepted it,
845 but only if her husband is worthy of what Fate
had set upon her. Malach, knowing this end
and keeping the light of humility as your guide,
do you still wish to take our daughter as you wife?”

Malach did not fear any fate,
850 and was still steadfast in his desire for her, agreed
to pay any brideprice for her. This the fathers
forgave, his price was paid in his knowledge of their
shared fate. Malach was eager to be wed, but even
so gave the date of his marriage in three months
855 from that day, that his people might gather
to the Hall of Hala to see his wedding and so he had
time to give proper observance to his fathers.
The Iolish hold this law amongst all its peoples,
except those of Helm Hailas, that the fathers who
860 have died hold strong powers over the living,
watching over them and protecting them to such
a degree that they may appear on the earth as guides
for their children. They often take vows on their
fathers, cursing themselves should they fail
865 in upholding these, yet they never invoke their

mothers, for they gave them life and they dare not
vow against that gift. During the most important
moments of their lives they ensure their fathers
are at ease, out of fear that in their displeasure
they will seek to harm the living.

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In this time runners were sent
to each of the Tella of Ioland, calling them
to the wedding of the High Teloch. All the Tella
were summoned, save the boy Noriin, and each
Tella came, eager to sit near the meadbench
of Malach. To the Hall of Hala, home of the Ui Lide
Aesal, came the Aamach Eas, the Drocht Baalon,
Ui Con Tara, Un Goll, Un Salal, Un Londar Norna,
Un Londar, Ui Arden, Ui Agla, Un Colta bar,
Un Bolam, and those of Helm Hailas. Great gifts
they brought, each in hopes to shine brightest.
They forgot not their defeat before his forces,
nor his mercy. Each were welcomed by Malach
with great solemnity and friendship, not to diminish
them with his power but to welcome earnestly
friends to his hall. There also was the great friend
of Mathred, the wise man of Ail Meloch, who
of all the wise men of that day was the greatest.

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There is no ceremony
in an Iolish wedding, only a feast with a great many
speeches of friendship and bonds, and in a feast
of such importance as Malach's the feast was
of such size as would not be seen again for many
years. Fifty cattle were slaughtered for each Tella,
fowl of many kinds in large number, a great herd
of deer were hunted for the table, and a lake
of mead so that no man knew thirst. With all Tellas
seated before him, Malach made laws that Iolish
would abide to always. He named outlaw any man
who took a wife against her will, which was the
cause of many feuds. The feast lasted a fortnight
in endless revelry, so well did the mead satiate each
guest that ancient feuds were drowned by Malach's
generosity, except for Ceallach's hatred of Noriin,
though it lay forgotten during the feast. Indeed
he was rarely a man given to jollity, mead did not
bring him to happiness but instead made him more
fierce, but in the Hall of Hala all were joyed
by the union of Malach and Niola. It was on the last
night of the feast, when all were most joyous,

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that Ceallach stood upon the meadbench of the
highest table and spoke,

“In all time we are most blessed,
for never have we all gathered together in such
915 manner and such friendship, indeed never before
has friendship lived so freely among our peoples.
This friendship belongs only to one man, who
by his strength and charity gave to us this great gift.
No gift we give him will repay that boon.
920 Friendship belongs to Malach, peace belongs
to Malach, to Malach, to Malach.

“Brothers, for I feel not the illness
in naming each of you my own brother that I would
have felt before this feast, we are by him bound
925 to peace and he who tarnishes the memory of this
day will forever be foe to all, breaking a solemn
oath of guest right by which we are bound. No man
may break guest right while they stay in the hall
of their host. The host promises to feed and guard
930 those in his hall, and the guest vows to never take
arms against those who share his hall.
The Hall of Hala is not bound by these walls but its
borders extend through all lands of the Iolish,
to the very waves which crash on our shores,
935 for these are now the borders of his lands and we
guests in it, and Ioland shall be his hall so long as
his people stand and his heirs walk the green grass.
I vow that the people of this land will always be one
people so long as his heirs live, and that they who
940 design to take that which rightly belongs to Malach
or Malach’s heirs shall find their desire betrayed
and turned to ash in their mouths, their deaths swift
and cruel. This my first vow, one to be kept
all days, to Malach, to Malach, to Malach.

945 “Here is a bride most beautiful,
most kind, to wed the man who has given us
so much, may she bring him all he has sought, as he
brought us that which we have long sought.
Any man who seeks her will be my foe, though
950 the mountains fall and this land breaks, I will still
pursue vengeance against any who would touch her
and all who covet her. Any who harms her shall not
live more than a year. She is rightfully Malach’s,
the High Teloch, to harm her is to harm the very
955 earth. This is my second vow, which will last all
my days. To Malach, to Malach.

“All you know my strength,
and all know my pride, these vows I invoke are not
hollow, ever shall I follow them, though I wear thin.
960 The peace we have must always endure for the sake
of all our people, but if broken, the lifeblood
of Malach will always take revenge on those who
break it. Ever will their designs fall before
Malach’s. My last vow before all who stand here,
965 that those who betray the Peace of Malach will not
live to see their designs achieved. To Malach.”

His solemn oaths evoked,
Ceallach returned to the revelry as each of his oaths
were sworn also by the host. It was never before
970 that the peoples of the island would hold one belief
among all, for the island is large and a great many
people live there, but they all held Malach as their
High Teloch and were eager to serve him without
anger in their hearts. It was after the speech
975 of Ceallach that peace lived with all the Iolish
people. The wise man of Ail Meloch, after a time
of revelry, stepped before the meadbench of Malach
and spoke,

“Malach, son of Mathred,
980 son of Math, you are now the High Teloch
and the shepherd of a great flock. I am called a wise
man and with my wisdom I see that you are a great
man, to whom Fate has given much and who Fate
holds central to her plans. It is proper to give
985 to great men great gifts, for they are most deserving
of them. Two great gifts you have, the first, your
wife, fairer than all the stars, they will be ever
jealous of her. You hold the love of your people and
have given them Peace, this being the second great
990 gift which Fate has given you. Now I hope to give
a third, a work of supreme majesty.

“Long have I lived,
and now there is not a hair on my body which has
not gone to silver, my body is no longer
995 the strength of youth but the illness of age. It is
indeed a great difficulty, to stand and speak to such
crowd of the strong, many of whom will not gain
my age but fall in glorious battle. When in my
ruddy youth I learned great wisdom and stood at the
1000 side of your father Mathred, I first dreamed this
dream. For though in my possession was great
knowledge, ever envious of the boons which Fate

gave so willingly to Mathred, I desired to be thus blessed.

1005 “I began to collect
all the wondrous things of this earth to study them,
my journey taking me far from this land and into
the world of demons, creatures of great horror
and dread which fed on the wicked. Yet I walked
1010 not alone, and with Mathred by my side we stole
the ends of the rainbow, the sound of a cat’s
footfall, the redness of the sea, the voice of the
winds, and the stars which shined in daylight.
I promised my friend the boon was a weapon that he
1015 might defeat the ancient enemy of the Iolish,
the circling Sea, but I held a secret shame, that with
the boon I might become his equal in all things.
These things we took from the world and through
many years I worked to forge them together,
1020 but though I labored long, my skill was incapable
of such creation, the dream eluded me. Now much
time has passed, years bloomed and withered before
me, and though I did not surrender my pursuit
of this boon, I had other tasks which demanded my
1025 labor, my mind ever driven to the conquest
of knowledge in all its parts. Malach, in these long
years, I gained the power which I had sought,
and through my knowledge I forged together these
wonders into a single ring.

1030 “This ring, of all gifts most great,
holds within it a great power for good fortune; ever
shall the wearer’s possessions increase, from silver
it shall breed gold, the wearer need only keep
on this ring and witness as the good in his life
1035 increases with every day. It is the ring of Fortune,
of Fate, of the High Teloch, and is named
the Ring of Dain Thar Duin. Upon its face
is the Hart, king of beasts, and three gemstones
make its crown, forged from perfect gold woven
1040 with your blood to bind it forever to your line. All
who hold it will be remembered by the Iolish for all
time and stories of their life will be passed along
until the Sea washes over the land and all is made
anew. This boon has long been in my dreams, but
1045 I know that my age will soon take me and I have
deemed it fitting that the boon which I thought
would make me Mathred’s equal is better served in
making you his superior. I have great wisdom

and have learned that I have no need for this ring, I
1050 have become Mathred's equal by my own power,
but you must surpass him. He had not the great
burden upon him as you do, he was the Teloch
of only one Tella where you are Teloch to all. He
spent much of time pursuing challenges where you
1055 will spend the time allotted you ruling. You and
your line are the only true possessors of this ring,
for you alone will the ring will give abundance
and not excess, fill all your needs and end your
wants. King Malach, this is my gift to the line
1060 of Math."

Such wonder was on each face
of the host as they marveled at the boon given
Malach and each eye fixed hawkish gazes at
the ring, the smallest glint of gold filled their
1065 deepest desires. The ring on Malach's finger hushed
the host, and he began to speak, for the first time
in a fortnight addressing the hall entire,

"In all the Earth, of all tribes of man,
we are the most blessed, fortune has delivered us
1070 a time of ease and friendship where we no longer
grow strong from the conquest of our neighbor but
stronger by his peace. We have nothing to fear from
his wellbeing and much to praise, the good fortune
of one man is the good fortune of all his village.
1075 We are now one people as never before, the hungry
wolf forms a mighty pack to hunt. I have seen his
starvation, the doom of all his kind, and I saw us
scattered in his path. That is why I sought our
peoples to become one. Let this doom come, it will
1080 find us ready for any burden. We will not starve.

"I am given three great gifts,
loyalty, a wife, and a ring. These I have earned
and will continue to earn, for none of these are set
in the sky but must be won each day or they will be
1085 lost. In the coming years great trails will face our
people, only through these three great gifts can
the Iolish survive the doom. Through your loyalty
we will form a warband of such size that no foe
can face us, our shieldwall shall be unbreakable,
1090 our warcry shall shake them to their bones, the pack
unharmd from the hunt through its loyalty.
My wife shall give me heirs to continue this guard
the Iolish people, a line destined to guide our people
through all time, this line she gives us shall have

1095 your loyalty. Their blood is my blood and I bind
you to aid them as you aid me. The ring, the final
gift, most kindly given, will be the sign of my heirs,
it is theirs to possess for all time, and will always
find its way back to their hands, for theirs will be
1100 the only hands which may wield it, it will always
bring ruin through excess to others who falsely hold
it.

“With these three gifts,
the Kingdom of the Iolish begins, well may it
1105 weather the Storm which comes for it. Eternally
it will be bound to my blood, eternally made by
the friendship of your peoples. Let us vow peace
between ourselves, as I vow to protect all those
who hold me their High Teloch. I vow to love
1110 and uphold the virtue of my wife always. I call upon
all my ancestors to protect my line as it serves
the people of this land, may they guide my children
through all time. Now as your High Teloch, I call
you to hold these oaths as solemnly as you hold
1115 your fathers. When dawn breaks, the feast will
be over, let no food be wasted nor mead go
undrunk. Hail renowned guests, Hail Ioland
and the Hall of Hala.”

Thus the three great men
1120 spoke and such was their passion and power that
their words became law, immutable, held over all
the isle. This great feast of tribes which would never
unite again left the Hall of Hala in the dawn hour,
each returning to their lands unmolested, bound
1125 by the peace of Malach, each in their hearts holding
a secret, shameful, desire, a secret violence against
the peace.

In short time Niola grew heavy
with the child of Malach and the fathers of Aamach
1130 Eas wept knowing their daughter who would soon
die. Malach was unafraid of Fate looming over his
wife and continued to govern the people of Ioland
justly and love his wife as he had promised to do.
He would fawn over her in all hours of the day,
1135 filling every moment he did not govern with her
laughter, carving her love onto his memory. Her
labor was pained greatly, her screams lasting three
days and three nights, all the birds of the air and
beasts of the land were silent awaiting the cry
1140 of Malach’s heir, no mother gave birth during

Niola's labor that Malach's child would be born
above their own. The child was born the fourth day
of her labor with the coming of the dawn, Niola lay
greatly weakened in her suffering, but as the fathers
1145 of the Aamach Eas gathered about her to ease her
passing, they saw that she would not part from her
child and leave her alone in the world. Long she
remained ill, but fierce was her fire, she did not
perish and grew stronger with each day. The child
1150 was named Ilulean, named after the red-yellow
Dawn Flower which lives by the waters of the sea
and ever greets the sun. Her face shone with all
the beauty of all the island, never crying, for joy
eternal was her birthright, a gift given by all
1155 the Iolish peoples to her father. In the peace of those
times she grew quickly and in her fifth year she had
great locks of gold hair which her mother had given
to her, so that those in Hala named her Finnoan,
which is Gold-Haired. Never did she know tears
1160 while Hala stood, and she roamed the woods
and waters of the Ui Lide Aesal and the lands
of her people guarded her, no beast dared harm her,
teaching her the songs of nature so she might order
the forests as she pleased.

1165 Malach was well pleased by Ilulean,
her eyes bright with knowledge, her joy brightened
the Hall of Hala and all the court praised Malach
and Niola for her temperament. Malach believed
the fate given his wife was destroyed, set aside
1170 for his family and people. Great was his joy when
Niola was with child again, his final conquest
of Fate. As her eighth month passed, Malach called
many of his friends to the Hall of Hala to celebrate
his second child, and a son he hoped to be his
1175 successor. The wise man of Ail Meloch came
to the hall, as well as Ceallach and the Fathers
of Aamach Eas, though they still feared Fate.

Yet ill fortune was stirring
in the lands as Malach prepared his feast. Beyond
1180 the Ail Meloch, in the barren lands between
the mountains and the sea, greed festered in hearts,
five years beneath Malach was to them wearying.
For the good king Malach had outlawed their cattle
raids and gave to them instead prize cattle from his
1185 own herds, including the strong scions of the bull
Donn Coracht. Unable to name themselves warriors

for completing feats of strength and bravery,
the people of Helm Hailas could not claim honor
in the eyes of their ancestors and grew restless
1190 and hungry to do so once more. It was Teloch
Mebeb of Helm Hailas whose festering heart
desired the Ring of Malach, by its power she would
set the people of Helm Hailas above all others
and her above them; and though she feared
1195 the might of Malach and held his writ as sacred law,
she could not withstand the demands of her desires
as they grew more powerful with the passing days.
Her people, barred from raiding and hateful
of living under the giving hand of Malach,
1200 were eager for glory, and Queen Mebeb ruled
by her greed called her warriors to her hall
and in the night they left for a great raid.

Malach had much to celebrate
as his hall prepared for his second child; joyous was
1205 his hall, the feast smaller only to that of his
wedding. All his Tella, the Ui Lide Aesal were
at his hall and the Fathers and many warriors
of the Aamach Eas. Malach began the feast by
speaking to all guests, Niola was not at his side
1210 but beginning to give birth in her chambers.
He spoke,

“Here again the people of Ioland
have gathered in peace to welcome my child
to the world, though we are greatly diminished in
1215 number from our earlier feasts, I am no less grateful
for those who have arrived to the Hall of Hala,
the house of Niola the Fair, Ilulean Finnoan
the Kind, and Malach King. In this hall will soon
stand another to be welcomed, I eagerly await his
1220 arrival.

“Five years have I ruled,
five years has Peace lived freely in our lands
and all have prospered by her grace. The Iolish are
well prepared for that which will come, armed
1225 with this Peace they shall prevail though the trails
are unknown. We have conquered greater things
than men: old enmities which have stood as long
as Ioland, Fate so cruelly weaved against us,
it is by our bond of brotherhood that this land
1230 knows peace. May Peace reign alone for a thousand
years and may men be born and be placed in their
hallowed barrow without knowing anything else.

“My wife has given me a daughter
who by her charm will keep these lands from chaos.

1235 Now she gives me a son whose arm will conquer
those who break this peace. In all things we have
fortune, in all things blessed, so strong have we
become that my fears of the Storm have been
assuaged, and if the storm comes our people will
1240 be unafraid, though its torrents shake the very roots
of mountains and the trees be uprooted. Peace is our
shield and safety is our sword. By these pillars
the Iolish become again one people.

“This meal is endless in all time.

1245 Let all the ages pass yet all those heroes born
in after days will wish themselves seated upon the
lowest seat of the Hall of Hala to be in our presence.
Borne of fear was my desire to see this land in one
hall, but in glory unending shall be these great days.
1250 In this hall sits Ceallach, warrior of such strength
and cunning that no bear may ever defeat him,
and no fox outwit him, beside him the wise man
of Ail Meloch, whose wisdom is greater than all
other men together. Niola the Fair and Ilulean
1255 the Awe-Filled live here, and make this hall most
beautiful of all gardens. Malach King reigns here,
his hall all the lands, and in his hall no man goes
without food or has want of mead.”

Great was this feast,

1260 and though they were in number fewer than
his wedding, the host drank more mead than
before, Ceallach alone drank more than half
the island had at the wedding of Malach and Niola,
at his side the sword of Malach, given to him,
1265 forged four years prior when a bone-demon from
the deep sea washed upon the shores of Ioland.
Many trembled at the sight, but Malach named
the happening fortunate and had the long horn cut
off and made into the handle for a sword and given
1270 to Ceallach to keep Malach’s peace. Only three
times did he draw it and never did it drink blood,
so well he kept peace. It was in the early hours
of dawn that the host of Mebeb arrived as thieves
to the Hall of Hala, having left the lands of Helm
1275 Hailas three days thence, taking great care that their
movements go unmarked, their reaving host fell
upon any that saw them so that the men in the Hall
of Hala knew nothing of their approach. The cries

of Niola were great and terrible and all those awake
1280 listened eagerly to hear the cry of Malach's child,
but heard in his stead the war cry of the thieves.
In a fury the raiders burst upon the hall and began
their pillage. Mebeb sought not to become Teloch
above all Telochs as Malach had, nor to rule wisely,
1285 only to take his hearth and hall, to hold in her hands
all the works of Malach and claim them as their
own. She sent her people to take the crops,
and a number of warriors to take the livestock
of the Ui Lide Aesal, the bull Donn Coracht
1290 the great prize, for it was the Bull of Malach
and the selfsame beast whose offspring were given
to them without conquest; but the bull would not be
subdued with ease and killed three score men before
exhausting itself and the reavers could carry it off.

1295 In the Hall of Hala
blood flowed as free as the mead, for though caught
unawares, the men of the Ui Lide Aesal were
in great numbers and beside them the Aamach Eas
fought with that which they could find,
1300 for no weapon was permitted in the Hall of Hala,
save only for the sword of the champion, Ceallach.
Yet Ceallach had drunk too much and when war
came was found in a servant's cot and could not
be roused. Though no man of them lived through
1305 the day, it is known that the people of Aamach Eas,
even the women, fought as no other could fight.
Their blood was fierce and burned with a rage
which could forge iron, many raiders fell before
them. Close were they packed in the Hall of Hala,
1310 a melee without order as the raiders of Helm Hailas
entered wherever they could, into the chamber
of Niola came the reavers and speared her as a hind,
her last terrible cry shrilly ended. Malach in
sorrowed rage saw his house fall to ruin, for even
1315 the great power of the wise man of Ail Meloch was
brought to its ending. Malach was kind, but on
hearing the final breath of his wife above the din
of war, and seeing the many pillars of his house fall
before him, a rage came over him, for he had in him
1320 the strength of his father and through his blood
the power of the Baíth, so in his final rage he
seemed to grow to giant size, and with his hands
bare battled with a dozen men, his teeth his swords
and many were stabbed, one still stood supporting

1325 the House of Ioland. Malach cried
for Ceallach the last cry of the trapped stag calling
for his brother, and Ceallach was roused from
his slumber to see the house of his lord and brother
burned before him, those he stood champion for
1330 dead at his feet. In the fallen timbers and blood,
through the ashes dancing at the ruin of Malach,
Ceallach saw the child Ilulean who stood watching
her house burn. Drunk though he still was, Ceallach
rushed to Ilulean and spirited her from the Hall of
1335 Hala, the sword of the champion battling its way
from the sacred halls, slaying all who stood before
it, friend or foe, and into the lands surrounding fled.

Malach battled on against the horde,
even when his arm was severed by blades, until
1340 the flames consumed the timbers of the Hall of Hala
and they fell down upon him. The looters of Helm
Hailas ravaged its corpse, pulling gold from
the mighty ribs. Malach's body was found
and humiliated and the ring taken from his hand
1345 and given to Teloch Mebeb. The host returned
to Helm Hailas in a riot and at her seat she donned
the ring and claimed herself to be the Teloch above
all Telochs. They gave not a proper burial to any,
foe or friend, leaving them to the carrion birds,
1350 cursing their spirits from going beyond the island.
To her prized warriors she gave the livestock of
the Ui Lide Aesal, and to the greatest of these she
gave Donn Coracht, the bull which made Malach
king. This was the cursed Reyach, and he became
1355 hers. The fire of the Hall of Hala spread, word
of the fate of Malach came to each Tella, the land
fell to chaos as each claimed to be High King,
the few of the Aamach Eas who remained fortified
their home and would not let any enter.

1360 Ceallach ran with Ilulean
through the night of fire and blood, choking smoke
and ash, felling those who came against him with
a power so swift they could not see it, such as
the speed of the dread hand of Ceallach.
1365 Desperation and despair drove him as he clawed his
way from the Ruin of Ioland. Sun and Moon rose
and fell from the sky unmarked by him; he ran on,
the child in his arms, until after time uncounted he
stumbled. Recognizing his own weariness he
1370 stopped for brief rest in a dense grove, placing

Ilulean down that she might rest also, his sword
drawn that he might rise swiftly from his sleep
to battle, but before he rested he spoke
to the child.

1375 “The Isle is broken
and all the good which your father created
destroyed by fools and thieves. We shall be a ruined
people, a people long suffering, and this burden
shall remain to blacken our hearts until we are
1380 redeemed, though what could save the Iolish from
this crime I cannot see. Our guilt shall wreck us
as we strive forward from that dark deed, but long
shall it be ere we forget the Peace of Malach
and what it brought us. Yet you do not live beneath
1385 this guilt, your heart remains sinless, you alone
are free of this burden, it is we who have failed you,
last of the Ui Lide Aesal to walk this green isle.
I plan now to take you to my people,
the Drocht Baalon, for I fear that your kin did not
1390 survive in great numbers and are too weak now
to hide you from harm. Yet my people are as of yet
unmarked by the turmoil, and by reaching them
with swiftness can we stave the fall of one Tella.
There you shall be raised, protected from harm
1395 as the traitors who cast this terrible crime on Ioland
shall be destroyed, so rest now and worry no more.”

 Here he dropped from exhaustion,
and there he rested a full day; but Ilulean knew no
rest, ever before her eyes was the ruin of her house,
1400 the final anguish of her mother, and she wept until
she had no tears left.

 It was there
beside the sleeping Ceallach that Ilulean met
the Baíth. First she was afraid of the figures who
1405 came before her, thinking them to be the warriors
who had orphaned her, but she could not run,
for they surrounded her, rising from the trees,
and her screams could not wake Ceallach. Their
faces were strange, gaunt and fierce, tall they stood,
1410 taller than any man, and their eyes burned red.
Yet about them has a strange beauty, the beauty
of the earth itself, of flowers after rain, and as she
looked she grew less afraid of the strange people,
and especially for one who seemed kindlier than the
1415 others, in whose face Ilulean saw her father. Slowly
this Baíth reached forward and gave to the child her

hand, which though frightened she took,
and in gentle voice the Baíth witch sang,

“Child,

1420 blood of Baíth born, brought by bounded Fate here,
long on lark’s ell from lost languishing to the land
of kings crowned in combat, clear from the clashing
the bear has bolted before breaking from his burden;
rest now, retreat no further rella, rest and revenge
1425 shall swift see you stand, sorrow shall not sustain
you as revived rises the Ravager, the Reaver,
Doomcaller damning and damned by the deceitful
to perish as they pluck the prize so pridefully, you,
child, chance brings much challenge and change ere
1430 she grants guardianship o’er ground and sky,
blood must bury by blood before the Baíth
grant their gifts, time is short, the Good God comes,
gather yourself, we must go.”

The Baíth took Ilulean

1435 to the Hill of Hala, leaving Ceallach where he lay,
and there sang the Song of the Rains, their tears
drowned the embers of the hall and gave them rest.
The Baíth then gathered the slain who had been
disgraced without burial and gave each a barrow,
1440 a home for all time, they sang songs of sorrow as
each mound rose from the soft earth, doors of stone
carved with runes of easing, calling the dead to rest
in honor, and the smallest among them was buried
as a king, but for Malach and Niola the barrows
1445 were made to be larger than all others who had yet
lived, the stone doors twice the size of a man.
Around the Hill of Hala the barrows were set,
and in days after the Iolish were afraid to enter
the Grave of the Ui Lide Aesal, for it is said that
1450 the dead seek vengeance for the disgrace they
suffered by the raiders, and hold all Iolish guilty
for the Doom of the Hall of Hala. Their labor done,
the Baíth each entered the barrows and the kindly
Baíth took Ilulean by the hand and led her into
1455 the Barrow of Malach.

In Helm Hailas Teloch Mebeb

sat herself above all others and wore brazen the
Ring of Malach, and each day praising the arm of
Reych, that only he might be her consort by virtue
1460 of his strength. In her unending praise of Reych,
giving gifts of gold and herds of cattle to him alone,
was born a hatred of her for she would not see

virtue in any other and her poor rule threatened
the timbers of her hall, even as it was threatened
1465 from without. The death of Malach was known
through the entire island and war lived in the home
of peace, each Tella claimed to be the heir to
the Ui Lide Aesal and the true friend of Malach,
each claimed the right of revenge against the house
1470 of his enemy. The anger Teloch Mebeb bred into
her people grew into a dark serpent of malice which
coiled its way about her hall until her people desired
for nothing but her death, though none had the will
to stand against Reyech. It was one of her many
1475 charlatans of whom she was fond, named Keldiar
and who had long sought to sit beside her at
the mead bench, who could no longer resist his
hatred, and in the last hour of the night in secret
drew himself to her chamber and with vengeful
1480 dagger stole her life even as Reyech slept beside her,
taking from her body the Ring of Malach before he
fled.

The rage of Reyech
shook the Helm Hailas when he discovered his love
1485 slain beside him and the great prize removed,
he drew his sword and slew each charlatan in
the land before he took after the thief, searching for
the ring. The charlatan was far from Helm Hailas,
fleeing with great speed, eager to use his prize in
1490 safety, to bend the boon to his will and increase his
false powers through it, but news quickly reached
him of the rage of the hunter, that he was tracked
as a sow by hounds, and he fled further, hiding
in the great forest which grew on the sides
1495 of the Ail Meloch and there waited for his hunter's
rage to pass, though poorly did he judge the skill of
Reyech. It is from the unloving land of Helm Hailas
that great hunters were made, for they can run a full
day, needing only an hour's rest before continuing
1500 their chase. Wily are they, having great knowledge
of traps for they have little skill in wedding
the cattle to the plow and grow little, they have
in them a great mistrust of others and a shrewd
sense of smell. It is by his ability that Reyech found
1505 the charlatan quickly, but could not catch him
unaware, so swift had Reyech come that
the charlatan had only finished his hiding and set
his watch when the trees brought rumor

1510 of the hunter's approach. He fled with Reyech
behind him, and in terror he flung the ring into
the forest, marking the place, before running deeper
into the woods. Reyech would not allow his quarry
to flee and soon caught him, as the terror
1515 of the charlatan drove him carelessly crashing
through the forest, leaving many traces of his
passing. Reyech slew him without a word and left his
body to fester; but denied the ring he flew into
a rage, searching each warren and hollow, but found
it not though he searched for a year.

1520 He returned to his people
and found them in chaos, preying on each other,
taking from kin where before they took from others,
but at his coming they gathered to him, sensing
a great doom which rose from him as a fire, being
1525 bound to it, and they listened to his words,

“Blood for blood,
an old currency and just, the language of all men
and unendingly true. This price is paid, for he that
took the life of Mebeb has given his life to me.
1530 This debt paid, but more does he owe us for he hid
from us the Ring of Mebeb, her great gift,
that which belonged to her alone and has not been
returned to me, her heir; and so I will hunt it till my
body melts from my bones, but I will not hunt
1535 alone. Each of you will be beside me, hunting with
me, as ceaselessly as me, never resting till the ring
is ours again. I will bind you to me, your strength
become mine and you will live forever in me. What
have you to lose, for since the death of the Teloch
1540 there has been no life in this land, no end
to the days of death which have plagued you as your
brothers take your livestock. Now I call you to
honor her, and bind to me.”

Before they could move,
1545 he began by that twisted power taken from
the charlatans of that wretched land a dark song
of chains, each word swirling about them
and binding them where they stood, all the while
listening as the dark figure chanted their fate,
1550 vowing that they would not rest till he held in his
hand the ring. As the words fell out of his mouth
and poisoned the earth they did not flee though they
trembled in fear; and as the final words were
spoken, that diseased knowledge of the charlatans

1555 reached into their bodies and grabbed hold of their
 souls in their sacred dwelling and tore them from
 their homes, their bodies falling dead to the earth,
 their strength chained to the cursed spot on his
 heart, where in a swirling tempest they were bound
1560 to aid him in his search, as in howling madness the
 Hunter was born amid the bodies.