

This scene takes place at the end of *Sword of Atlas*' 5th level and marks the point at which the player's party learns the origins of the mysterious sword in their possession, as well as the true nature of the realm's militant emperor. I wrote the entire scene but other writers on the team did edit their own characters' dialogue during revisions.

The party approaches the sealed door to the temple's inner sanctum and they deposit the seven glowing runes they've collected.

**Greg:** Oh how wonderful, a composition come to life before us! These runes etch something new, let me try to jot it down for posterity's sake.

**Shylah:** What if this doesn't work...? What if - What's happening? There's strange glowing writing on the wall...

**Richa:** Strange glowing runes on the wall, strange glowing sacks... I'm out of my depth.

The writing that's illuminated the wall poses a riddle to the party:

"From Departure to Return,  
The belly of a whale to the Underworld's cold burn,  
What is it that the heroes of men never ever learn?"

**Greg:** Nef, a songbird I may be but a wordsmith I am not. Riddles weren't my cup of tea. They never learn... Oh! It is as if the weight of the world is upon my shoulders, I cannot figure this out.

**Shylah:** Nef, do you understand this? I imagine you would be good with riddles. I'm sorry, I'm not very good at them myself. Maybe that heroes have undying hope? That can't be it...

**Richa:** Nef, time to start making some sense. Is this a riddle? Let me think.  
Sacrifice is what allows us to remain free.

**Nef:** Hero and villain grow from the same tree.

**Narrator:** ...

**Narrator:** The cycle is unending.

**Richa:** Does anybody else feel the ground quaking?

**Greg:** An uproarious encore from the ground itself, who solved it?

**Shylah:** Oh gods! The ground is shaking!! What's going on?

**Nef:** It quakes as it did that day,  
when salt and kelp flooded the earth,  
and rock and mud buried the sky.

**Nef:** Silent as the deep, his servant comes to defend his place of ascension.

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** "It was here where he rose, and here where you'll sink."

**Narrator:** No no no... NO... I tried to fight him and I...

A magical blast sends the party flying in separate directions. When the smoke clears, a silent captain enemy stands before the door, flanked by a healer and a mage. They do not hesitate to attack the intruding party.

After the guardians are defeated:

**Narrator:** QUIET!

**Richa:** Was that the... blade?

**Greg:** Who is this mysterious baritone in our midsts?

**Shylah:** Who was that??? Did that sword just speak?

**Nef:** 'Twas always so. He was but muffled by the curse of our foe.

**Narrator:** You opened my eyes to my greatest mistake, mage. In the face of such a failure, forgetting was merciful.

**Narrator:** It's come back to me now. Lifetimes spent trapped in a blade, all for failing to protect my world. And I have learned nothing. I wish I could forget again. You've taken a step you never should have.

**Greg:** The sword has been hiding a voice such as this? Can we dwell on this a little longer for me?

**Shylah:** Wait... I don't understand. Why... why can the sword talk? Nef, why didn't you say anything about this?

**Richa:** Did your blade just speak? What is happening here?

**Narrator:** Before you found me, I had been asleep a long time. You should have left me to rust.

**Nef:** You were the hero who opposed Zhamen-Gor. Some say the villain who drew his wrath. Your fates were braided together in battle the day the world cracked in half. He's not the man he presents himself as, is he? And you are not the blade you pretend, are you, Ferro?

**Ferro:** No. I was not always a blade. My tragedy need not be yours. Just turn back from this quest, kid. Some stories are better left unended.

**Ferro:** Zhamen-Gor's corruption is not of this world. His current form is a farce sitting on a throne of filth. It's pointless to oppose him. If he has set his eyes on your home, it's as good as gone. Let's get out of this place.

The party enters the inner sanctum of the temple and we load a transition scene with a custom 2D background depicting a room in ruin. A great crack runs through the middle, plunging into the sky and sea far below. A dusty skeleton lays in the corner collecting cobwebs with a shattered shield by its side. Seashells and petrified coral litter the tomb.

**Ferro:** Zhamen-Gor is not of this world. He appeared as a man when I fought him, all those centuries ago, but when I finally drew blood he revealed his true self. I will not speak of what lies beneath.

**Richa:** We've seen many a beast. Don't spare the details for our sake.

**Ferro:** His power is beyond reproach. I was a fool to challenge him. I wish you hadn't made me remember it. My world ended that day. And I alone remain to remember the destruction.

**Nef:** Look upon the bones of your own myth.  
No more life to them than the shield by their side.  
They have forgotten. They lay as a trophy to our realm's tyrant.  
But you were reforged somehow, and carried by the ferries of a divine ride.  
You mustn't forget. You must pay your fare.

**Ferro:** Don't speak to me as if you know what I've seen. I failed. End of story.

**Ferro:** And you'll fail too. If you don't turn and run as far as you can now, you'll die anyway. Or worse, he'll make you a twisted servant of his will. You'll lose what makes you, you. We're all better off far, far away from this place.

**Greg:** So... Zhamen-Gor is not... human? That makes sense! I wish it didn't make sense, but it makes sense! I've seen the Citadel. I grew up there.

**Greg:** Those who visit his grandiose, overrated marble steppes always come back a little different. I thought it was the elevation, but maybe something more sinister is afoot.

**Greg:** He turns my fellows into monsters. He has the gall to remove everything that makes them human, removes any semblance of culture and music and joy, and taints the very place I long called home?

**Greg:** This fight is bigger than one village, after all. This fight affects us all. And maybe we few adventurers aren't equipped to stand up to him alone, but I bet I know someone who is.

**Shylah:** You know a hero who can stand against Zhamen-Gor?

**Greg:** I have a friend. A family friend really. More of an acquaintance. She's always been very outspoken against the current political climate of the Citadel.

**Greg:** She heads the opposition. If we can get this sword to her, maybe she can do some good with it. Turn Ferro into the symbol he should be!

**Ferro:** Only a fool looks at the long-dead corpse of a pariah and sees a symbol. Toss me into the sea, go live a life of your own. I won't be privy to your beggar's revolt.

**Richa:** It dawns on me that this coward of a cutlass has no choice in the matter. I see now that my fight is not finished until my village, until the world, is safe from this monster.

**Richa:** I'll follow your plan, Gregory. Who's with me?

**Shylah:** To turn back now would be to return to the dark.... I'll face the monsters with you all.

**Nef:** Adventurer, your sinew is stitched to the hilt of this blade.  
I know not what will happen if you sever the tie.

**Nef:** I do know that the hero of the past will not avoid his fate,  
no matter how many years pass us by.  
Not all things can be re-ordered,  
but what life do we live if we do not even try?

**Greg:** What will it be?