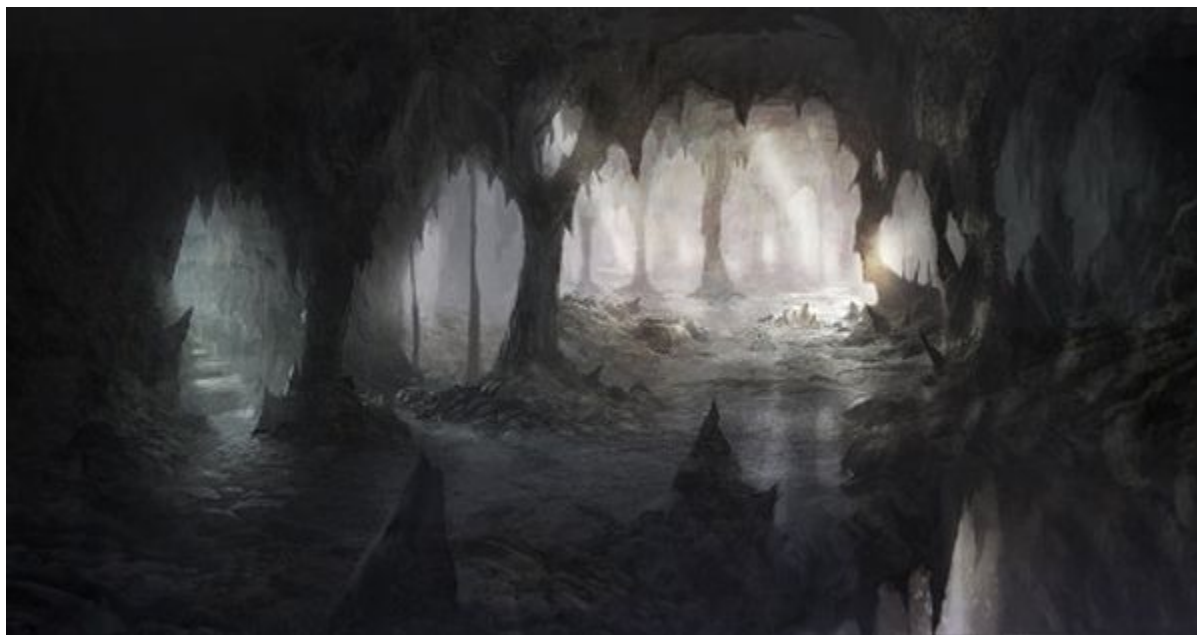


Demon Hunters: Part 6 - Dawn In The Underdark



Story and setting based on the Out of the Abyss campaign produced by Wizards of the Coast. Demon Hunters is written by and original characters by GM4Him. Some descriptions of characters, places, events, etc. are taken directly from the Out of the Abyss campaign. And, of course, MAJOR SPOILERS for the Out of the Abyss campaign... though not really any spoilers in this particular part of the story. This part is original.

Chapter 1: Reunions and Revelations

“Eromani...”

“... Eromani...”

All at once, she was standing on a cliff overlooking a swamp. It was the middle of the day, but there was a mist that diluted the sun's light. ‘The sun!’ she thought, and immediately she was full of joy. It had been so long since she'd seen it. She'd almost forgotten what it was like. The mist was cool, and the air was crisp. A calm breeze caressed her as if the wind suddenly possessed fingers that brushed her cheeks and ran through her hair.

The scene was pleasant, reminding her of home. The smell, however, was contrary but familiar. ‘Putrid water. Rotting vegetation. Evronar,’ she concluded.

Then the waters below bubbled like a hag's cauldron, and he emerged, rising to the height of the bluff she stood on. She was strangely unafraid even as his massive head loomed before her, his snout and horns almost touching the edge.

“What do you want?” she asked him, her expression hard.

He grinned as if with sinister intent. “I have done it.” His voice boomed. “At last, I have made contact with your subconscious mind.”

“I'm dreaming? I should have known. Nothing was making sense.”

“Dreaming. Yes. A few more days down, and a lot more to go before you'll feel well again,” he told her. “A small price for my servitude. Wouldn't you agree?”

She didn't answer. She just glared at him with seething hatred.

He chuckled as he examined her. “Your countenance is frightening, My Dear. You truly are my daughter.”

“Why must I forever be tormented by you?” she asked him.

“Don't be ridiculous,” he replied. “It is YOU who chose to be connected to me. I did not choose you.” Then he laughed once; a sharp and terrible bark. “Well, I suppose the demons made our bond inevitable. Didn't they? It wasn't like you wanted this. I know.”

‘He's acting like he cares,’ she thought. ‘Why is he being nice to me?’

“Suspicious?” he said as if reading her mind. “As well you should be, I suppose. I have always been known as a rather deceptive one. I am a charlatan with many personas.”

Then, all at once, he vanished with a swirl of dark energy. It wove and danced through the air, snaking around Eromani until it touched the stony ground further along the path behind her. When it did, it took a new physical form. At first, it was humanoid with no features. It was just a black figure of shadow with no substance. Then, within moments, pointed ears appeared along with jet black hair, gray skin, and red robes with black pants and a dirty white shirt underneath. He had shimmering blue scales on his neck and face, black eyes with silver irises, and soft blue

markings cascading on each side of his face and neck from his scales to his neckline. Instead of Evronar, the dragon, Eromani beheld a dark elf sorcerer.

“Ah. Yes. I rather like this one.” He smiled charmingly. His voice was no longer booming, but it was still deep and grim and slightly sinister. And yet, it had a quiet and soothing tone to it. He had a certain charisma about him, and he emanated power. “Greetings, My Dear.” He bowed. “I am Zrathentil, a sorcerer with blue dragon heritage. I am a troublemaker, a con artist, and a powerful enemy. There are drow females in Menzoberranzan who are searching for me, for they want the power that flows through my body.”

Eromani’s right eyebrow raised, but other than that, her expression didn’t change. “What is this?”

He chuckled and waved a hand dismissively. “Just one of my many disguises, Child. Seriously, you need to expand your mind a bit. You know the Alter Self spell. You can change your appearance as well. Therefore, you can also take many forms. What? Do you think dragons such as myself only ever choose one form to transform into if we choose to no longer be in dragon form?”

“What do you want?” she decided to ask once more, no longer caring about his current appearance.

He shrugged. “Well, I already told you. For one, just connecting to your mind like this, that was one of my objectives. Now that we’re bonded...”

“Stop saying that,” she snapped, interrupting him. “We’re not bonded. I will be rid of you.”

He paused, letting that hang in the air a bit. “Do you really think so?” He acted as if he was pondering that for a few moments. “I suppose your death would sever it, but I don’t think that’s what you’re going for. Am I right?”

“Are you going to get to the point of this soon, or can I just leave?” She then closed her mind’s eye, trying to will the entire scene away. For a moment, everything rippled. ¹She could feel him slipping away, but he was stronger.

“You’re too weak to resist,” he said. “It’s a side effect of using the sword, I’m afraid. Come on. I’m not all that bad to converse with. Am I?”

Eromani growled in frustration. “What do you WANT?”

His expression became hard and cold. For several more moments, he said nothing. Then, he replied, “Surely, you must know. If we get to know each other better, we can learn one another’s strengths and weaknesses. This gives us the ability to manipulate one another so that we get what we want.”

“I’m not interested in playing your petty games.”

“Doesn’t matter. Whether you like it or not, that’s how the world works. It’s how the universe works. True power is the ability to manipulate people, places and things. The better your ability

¹ Wisdom save, DC 15. Eromani rolled 12 with Disadvantage. Failure.

to manipulate, the more power you possess. And knowledge is the power behind manipulation. The more knowledge you have, the greater your ability to manipulate and control.”

“I hate people who manipulate. I don’t like playing games with people. I’m not that kind of person.”

“Aren’t you?” he asked, raising his right eyebrow in a similar manner to her. “Come now. Don’t deceive yourself. Deceiving yourself weakens you. You need to at least know yourself, for if you don’t, you will only wind up discovering the truth when it blindsides you. By then, it may be too late.”

“The truth about lies, My Dear, is that everyone lies. They lie to themselves and to one another, but the greater of the two evils is lying to themselves. After all, convincing yourself that you are one thing when you are not only leaves you exposed to discovering the horrible truth and being utterly devastated by it.”

“For example, Derivell believes himself to be this holy and righteous person. Do you think he does not do anything that is evil? Do you think that he is somehow better than you? Bah! No. His holiness and righteousness are his armor and shield which protect him so that others like you don’t see his true self.”

“Want to prove it? Try to seduce him. Start making moves on him. Watch as your influence over him begins to increase. Then start to ask him to make little compromises here and there. To please you, he will turn on his goddess without hesitation. He will break his oaths without a thought. All you have to do is maneuver inside his protective persona. Then you will see the REAL Derivell.”

“But here’s the best part. If you were to slip inside his outer shell, you could manipulate him and get him to do whatever you want. Then and only then would he suddenly realize who he truly is. You see. He’s lying to himself. He truly believes he IS Derivell, the aasimar holy knight and champion of Selune. He believes he is righteous and moral and upright. Fool! He hasn’t even truly been tested. Wait until Miralin finally gets her hands on him. Then he will discover the truth. He is just as vile as the rest of us.”

“Spare me your lectures,” said Eromani confidently. She had every barrier up that she could muster, trying with all her might to keep his poisonous words from sinking into her soul. “A person IS who they choose to be. Yes. Everyone has the potential to be evil. Everyone is prone to temptation, and everyone has their weaknesses. However, just having the potential to do evil doesn’t mean that you will choose to do so. Good and evil are all about what you CHOOSE to do. They aren’t actual entities that control you. At any moment, an evil person can start to choose to do good, and a good person can start to choose to do evil.”

“It’s all about the heart. If a person’s heart delights in evil things, they will continue to do evil. If the heart delights in good things, even if they do evil because of moments of weakness, they will return to doing good because their heart delights in good and hates evil. Derivell does good because he loves good and believes in it. He believes that being good is the best for him and others, and I agree. THAT is who he truly is. THAT is who I truly am. We may screw up over and over again, but regardless, we return to who we are - who we want to be.”

Evronar's face was stoic as he stared at her in thought. "Where did you pick up that rubbish?" He sneered. "Ah. Tamara." He shook his head. "That was the worst thing to ever happen to you."

"You know nothing about it," Eromani snapped.

"I know everything about it. We share thoughts now. Remember?"

"Not all of them. Leave me alone."

"You will never escape your heritage, Eromani," he promised her. "Black dragon blood flows through your veins."

"As I said, I am who I choose to be," she retorted, her rage boiling up within her to an overflow stage. "What blood I have flowing through my veins has no bearing on who I am. I defy you with my whole being; body, soul and spirit. Just because YOU are a vile person, I don't have to LET it dictate to me who I am. I reject your vile essence. I don't ever have to be anything like you. I am the ruler of my own destiny."

And once again, he let silence fall between them. Then he smiled. "How cute! Spoken like a true dragon."

She awoke with a gasp, clutching her chest as if something was squeezing it tightly. Rini and Zen jumped in fright, as did several others. Vlynrifane was guarding the camp at the entrance to the small cave they'd found, and she sprang to her feet, scimitar drawn.

"I'm fine," said the sorceress. "Sorry. Sorry, everyone. It was just a nightmare. Sorry." Then she got to her feet and hurried away towards the exit where Vlynrifane stood.

"Where are you going?" asked the druid. "It's not exactly safe to go out alone."

Eromani blew past her, talking without even looking back. "I just need a moment alone. I'll be fine." And she was gone.

She didn't go far. She didn't need to. There was a stalagmite in the adjoining cavern that she darted behind. Pressing her back against it, she closed her eyes and fought to control her breathing. '\$#@ \$ you!' she directed her thoughts at her father. '\$#@ \$ you to the Hells!'

'No thanks,' came his reply. 'I've been there before, visiting Tiamat. Avernus is a wretched place. I prefer the Material Plane.'

'Gods! This sucks,' she replied. 'Are you going to constantly talk to me now?'

She could feel him smiling. 'Not constantly, but I will be with you... ALWAYS...'

'I have to find a way to destroy the sword. I have to find a way to be rid of you once and for all.'

Just then, movement caught her attention. She dropped into a defensive stance, drawing her sword. The creatures before her jumped in fright, hands raised in the air in surrender. She relaxed. They were individuals she recognized. "Topsy? Turvy? What are you doing here?"

‘Don’t trust them,’ said Evronar. ‘They aren’t what you think they are.’

‘Shut up!’ she snapped mentally.

It was, indeed, the svirfneblin pair, and Topsy stepped forward with a friendly grin. “Sorry to startle you,” she said. “We just saw you here, and - well - we’ve been looking for you.”

“Looking for us? Why?” asked Eromani. “I thought you were happy to go off on your own.”

“We changed our minds,” said Topsy. “The stupid drow split up, and we overheard their plans and...” She sighed. “We decided to warn you.”

“Not that we care,” Turvy remarked sourly. It seemed that reuniting with their former companions was Topsy’s idea.

“We followed Helyn and her group for a bit,” Topsy explained. “They did, indeed, head for Velkynvele. Helyn couldn’t let it go, I guess. She and her core group of companions agreed that they couldn’t leave the Underdark knowing that there were a bunch of innocents who were being held captive in a barely guarded drow outpost. Once we learned they were determined to go there, we decided to circle back and check on you.”

“We arrived at Darklake just in time to see Demogorgon,” said Turvy.

“Gods!” said Topsy. “That was scary. Sorry, but we hid.”

“What’s going on?” Vlynrifane was approaching, and the rest of the party was behind her. They heard the voices and came to investigate.

“It’s Topsy and Turvy,” said Eromani, and she stepped around the stalagmite so everyone could see that she was unharmed. “They’ve come back.”

Derivell actually seemed relieved by this news. “Really?” He looked past her to see, and the gnome twins waved. “Welcome back! I’ve been worried about you and praying for your safety.”

Both of the deep gnomes exchanged glances. They weren’t sure how to take that. “You’ve been... praying for us?” said Topsy. “We didn’t think anyone would really care.”

“Of course we care,” said Derivell. “I didn’t want you to leave in the first place. I didn’t actually want anyone to leave. You are friends, and I’m glad you’re back.”

‘They aren’t friends,’ Evronar’s voice returned. ‘Can’t you see they aren’t what they appear to be? Open your eyes, Child. They’re shapeshifters.’

‘What? What are you talking about?’

‘Remember back at the fortress?’ said Evronar. ‘Topsy was battered around quite a bit by the statue. Wasn’t she? And yet, she didn’t seem to have a scratch or bruise on her. She’s immune to bludgeoning weapons, and probably piercing and slashing as well. Go ahead. Try to stab her with a regular dagger. Don’t attack with a magical or silvered weapon. Watch what happens.’

Topsy was explaining to the others what she'd already told Eromani. 'What do you think they are?' the sorceress reluctantly asked.

'Not sure quite yet,' he replied. 'Were-somethings, to be sure. I think they're probably wererats, but that's just based on size and behavior.'

"Wererats?" she said aloud, and everyone looked at her in surprise.

'Quick! Look at their faces!' Evronar advised, and Eromani's gaze instinctively fell upon the pair.

Topsy's eyes were wide with horror. It was clear. Their secret was written all over her face. Turvy, on the other hand, glared at her as if she had just transformed into a troll and was salivating hungrily as she studied them.

"What did you say?" asked Derivell. He was totally oblivious, and as Eromani looked at the faces of the rest of her companions, she saw that they were as well. No one seemed to have made the connection.

She looked at Derivell and shook her head. "Sorry. Still affected by my dream last night. My - shall we call him - 'blood donor' has managed to work his way into my dreams and my mind. He's talking to me even now. It's quite annoying."

"What? Seriously?" said Fiovay. "He's messing with you right now?"

She nodded. "I'm hoping that once I recover, maybe I'll be strong enough to just force him out."

'Not likely,' he told her, but she ignored him.

"You've got to get rid of that sword," said Rini. "Bury it or something."

Eromani rolled her eyes at this. "I'd LOVE to. Trust me. But I can't. It's too dangerous if it falls into the wrong hands again. Besides, I'm not entirely sure that would rid me of him."

'You're right. It wouldn't,' said Evronar. Once again, she ignored him.

"You said 'wererats,'" said Graiyla. "Why?"

Topsy and Turvy both looked very nervous and antsy, but Eromani continued to keep their secret. "Don't worry about it. He's just messing with me." Then she quickly shifted the focus of the conversation. "So, I think you mentioned that you wanted to warn us. What happened after Darklake?"

'See?' said Evronar. 'Look how quickly you just manipulated everyone. And you think you are somehow different from me.'

'Shut up!'

The deep gnome pair relaxed, and Topsy returned to her usual, perky self. "The drow fled the fishy village as the big monster-thing tore through it. We followed them from the shadows. It was pretty easy because they were moving too fast to even care. Once they got a decent distance away, Ilvara said she was going to Blingdenstone to continue pursuing you.

Meanwhile, she sent that Jorlan guy and her baby priestess minion through a portal to cut you off from Gracklstugh.”

“We followed them through the portal,” said Turvy. “But we lost them after that. By the time we found them, you’d already dealt with them.”

“Well,” said Topsy. “We lost them mainly because we decided to go back and find Helyn and her companions first. We knew they weren’t moving very fast towards Velkynvelve, and we were able to catch up to them. We warned them about Ilvara going to Blingdenstone and that they shouldn’t go there after Velkynvelve. We also told them about what happened at Darklake and that it wasn’t safe there either. I think they plan on saving people from Velkynvelve and then heading this way to rejoin you. Since Ilvara took the bulk of the forces to Blingdenstone, this is the safest route, and if you got captured, Helyn figured that maybe they could rescue you.”

“We came back this way and through the portal after we warned them,” Topsy continued, wrapping up her story. “But when we got here, you were fighting with them already. There was no way for us to get up to where you were to help you, so we hid at the chasm floor.”

“They’re not dead,” Turvy reported. “Well, not all of them anyway.”

“Jorlan and Asha survived along with four others,” added Topsy. “They sent three of their remaining guys to round up the remnants of their three other units - or something like that - and they’re coming after you. Jorlan said that they now know how many you have with you, your strengths and weaknesses, and where you’re going - and such.”

“They’re going to try getting ahead of you since they pretty much know what route you’re taking,” said Turvy. “They’re going to set a trap for you so that once you get there...”

Topsy clapped her hands together loudly, making their point. “So, we decided it best to warn you.”

“That’s very nice of you,” Eromani was quick to point out. ‘They didn’t HAVE to do this. So, maybe they’re not evil and selfish people. Aren’t wererats and such supposed to be evil? I’m just saying. They’re going out of their way to help us.’

Evronar didn’t reply, but she could feel his thoughts. ‘They’re not helping just to be nice. They’re helping because they have nowhere else to go. Ilvara has cut off the route to Blingdenstone. Demogorgon has cut off Darklake. The only real path is Gracklstugh. Safety in numbers. If they’re going this way, they might as well rejoin our group and hide in our midst.’

Then Evronar did speak. ‘Manipulation.’

‘You always have to have the last word. Don’t you?’ Eromani replied.

Even though he didn’t reply, she felt as though he did. By not saying anything, he spoke volumes. ‘I don’t always have to have the last word - just when it works in my favor. It’s all about timing. There’s a time and place for everything. Know when to speak. Know when to act. Know when to be silent, and know when to restrain yourself.’

“Yeah. Well,” said Topsy bashfully. “I guess we like you guys.”

Derivell closed his eyes as he tried to process this new information. Meanwhile, everyone else began exchanging brief conversations, commenting about their situation. "Maybe we should have climbed down to the chasm floor," Fiovey was saying. "Maybe we should have tried to finish them off."

"There's no way we would have survived," said Eldeth.

"We were just as bad off as they were, or worse," Havvah added. "We barely took out the four elite that we did. Four more and a priestess would have finished us."

"I think we could have taken them," said Rini. "I could have hit them from long range perched on a stalagmite or whatever."

"You couldn't even see them at that range," said Vlyn. "And besides, THERE WERE FOUR ELITES! I don't care what you say. There was no way we were going to finish them."

"You didn't even try," Rini argued.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Arla, trying to interrupt their dispute. It was obvious that the two had been quietly fighting ever since the Silken Paths.

"Like it or not, continuing on to Gracklstugh is our only option," said Graiyla. "We'll just have to be ready to face them again, and probably soon."

Eromani saw Derivell's eyes open once more. He'd made a decision. "Graiyla's right," he said, pointing at her. "We can't keep second-guessing our decisions. We need to keep pressing on towards Gracklstugh. At least, though, we know what they're going to try to do. Maybe we can pick up the pace. If we can stay ahead of them..."

Fargas then cut him off. A thought had popped in his head, and he ran with it without giving it too much consideration. "We could go to the Lost Tomb of Khaem."

"The what?" asked Derivell, surprised by this new, sudden, prospect.

"The Lost Tomb of Khaem," he repeated. "My adventuring party and I were down here looking for it. I know the way. I have a map."

"You have a WHAT?" asked Vlyn, more than a little upset. "You have a MAP? How much detail does this map have of the surrounding area?"

Fargas looked at her sheepishly. "My apologies," he said, fishing in his pack for the scroll. Producing it, he laid it flat on the ground and unrolled it. "I forgot I had it until now, to be quite honest. My companions and I were attacked, and I fled. I swear. I wasn't intentionally withholding from you."

Everyone looked, Rini holding her glowing mace high so it illuminated the tattered parchment. Sure enough, the map detailed pathways from Gracklstugh to Darklake. One of which had an "X" on it which was labeled "Khaem". The Silken Paths were also drawn out in vague detail, just northeast from that location. According to the map key, it looked like the tomb was probably a good six miles away.

Suddenly, Fiovey dropped next to him, setting her own pack beside her. She rummaged around through it and produced her own scroll. Unrolling it, the entire party was surprised to see that it was also a map. However, it detailed their entire journey thus far from Velkynvelve to Darklake and then to the Silken Paths; even to where they were presently camped.

"Where did you get that?" asked Arla.

Fiovey beamed. "I'm a cartographer by trade. Remember?"

"A wha'?" asked Yuk Yuk.

"Mapmaker," said Vlyn. "She makes maps for a living."

"I've been drawing this map the entire time," she told them. "Others too. I've got a map of the stupid demon fortress - as much as I could remember of it - Velkynvelve, Darklake, the kuo-toa village - well, what I can remember of that too... Look. I've even marked where Ilina died and where we parted ways with Helyn and company."

"What if we were captured?" asked Havvah. "That map would help our enemies locate Helyn and her companions."

Fiovey shrugged. "No offense, but I wouldn't care at that point, now would I? I'd be dead. Besides, they might know where we've been, but the map doesn't exactly tell them where anyone's going. It wouldn't help the draw that much. It's not like I put an arrow on it saying, 'Helyn and company went this way.'"

She returned to her map and put it down next to the map to the tomb and Gracklstugh. She seemed supremely enthused. "Okay," she said after a moment of comparing both. "Based on what I can tell, the person who drew this map wasn't that good. These proportions are all off. That means that the distances are messed up. That makes a HUGE difference."

"That would explain why we were having so much trouble finding the tomb," said Fargas. "The guy we acquired the map from was obviously not its creator. He was one of those treasure hunting types."

"Like you?" said Eldeth, but Fargas ignored her.

"He was a real... How shall I put this?" said Fargas.

"\$#@?" suggested Dalazaril with a smile. Though he was with the group and no longer being held prisoner, most still didn't feel comfortable giving him weapons, and Graiyla was always watching him, among others. At present, the yuan-ti woman was even standing directly behind him.

Fargas laughed. "Bingo. He set a trap for us and tried to kill us in order to rob us. That's how all this started for me. We took him out, basically, and all his belongings became ours. We inherited the map from him."

"This is still a fairly decent map," admitted Fiovey. "It's very helpful. Notice." She ran her forefinger along several passages. "These numbers indicate how many offshoots the passages

had that the person ignored. These numbers indicate how many days it took for the person to get from one place to another. He then did some calculations to determine roughly how many miles between. Unless he's moving faster than us, though, his calculations have to be off. I have tracked that we move at roughly six miles per day. He's counted eight to ten, and that's thrown everything all off. Still, it will be very helpful for me to guide us."

Then she looked up at Derivell and Eromani. "More importantly..." She pointed further to the southwest on the map. "... we have a fairly exact course from where we are now to the tomb and then to Gracklstugh. I believe the person who drew this was attempting to find a way from Gracklstugh to Darklake. It looks like they got lost and found the Lost Tomb of Khaem by accident - based on these notes here." She pointed near the tomb's location to some scrawl written in Sylvan. "Then they wandered up to the Silken Paths and got lost again. From there, they wandered about, mapping out more passages and stuff - much to our great benefit. Finally, they did wind up at Darklake. I wonder what happened to them after that."

"Well," said Eromani. "Doesn't seem like we really need to debate this. Am I right? Any objections on taking this route to the tomb and then on to Gracklstugh?"

Hemeth said something to Eldeth who laughed. Then she translated. "He says that he is certainly all for taking that path. There are many duergar rumors and myths about it containing tons of treasure. He says it's a no-brainer - a win-win, in his book."

"Well," said Sarith sarcastically. "As long as Hemeth agrees."

Derivell gestured to Fiovay. "After you," he said, and the party set out with the kitsune and her maps as their guide.

Zrathentil



Chapter 2: The Lost Child

²After acquiring the map from Fargas, the party made its way fairly quickly through the passages as they continued on towards Gracklstugh. For the first time since they'd left Velkynvelve, the journey was uneventful. They didn't get lost, and they didn't run into any natural hazards, pitfalls, traps, or especially drow or demons. There were a few caverns with faerzress wisping about like magically laced fog, threatening to enshroud the group, but they managed to carefully avoid it each time.

At last, at the end of the second day, as they were making their way through a particularly jagged and narrow tunnel, a soft feminine voice sounded out in their minds, faint and distant. Initially, they thought it might belong to Miralin, but the more the woman spoke, the more they reasoned that it must be someone else.

"Hello? Is someone there...? Oh please, I need your help! I have been trapped in the dark for so long... so very long. Please, won't you help to free me?"

And then, all at once, they each received an impression of the direction to the tomb. Beyond the path they were on, they needed to go to the right, on a little further, descend a natural set of steps, and on to a narrow side passage which would take them to a dirty marble wall with a deep-set door made of bronze-encased stone, green with age.

"Hello?" said Derivell in reply. "We're not here to harm you if you aren't planning on harming us. Where are you, exactly? How are you trapped?"

There was no reply at first. Then, the woman's voice returned. "Please. Please help me."

"Can you hear me?" asked Derivell.

"Maybe we shouldn't be shouting," advised Graiyla. "The last thing we need is to tip off enemies that we're here. We don't know who this woman is. She might be some undead lich trying to lure us to our dooms."

"She's right," said Sarith. "She said she's been here for some time. That doesn't sound good."

² Survival check, DC 10. Sarith, Dalazaril, and Hemeth worked together, gaining Advantage. Roll of 11. Success. Random Encounter roll = 4. No encounter. Party took a long rest. End of the first day after leaving the Silken Paths. Party met Topsy and Turvy the next morning. Survival check, DC 5. With Fiovey and the maps to help guide them, the difficulty was reduced by 5. Survival rolls of 12, 18, and 17, taking two short rests and a long rest. Random Encounter rolls = 8 and 8. No encounters. End of first day after meeting Topsy and Turvy. Next day, the distance was farther than the map indicated. Survival rolls of 10, 19, and 16, taking two short rests and a long rest. Random Encounter rolls = 6 and 16. 20 days remained until Gracklstugh, for the Silken Paths had knocked a few days off of their journey. However, the distance from the Silken Paths to the Lost Tomb of Khaem was more than 6 miles. It was closer to 12. 1st Random Encounter occurred as the party approached the Lost Tomb at the end of the day. Rolled a 5 on Random Creature Encounter and then a 1 on Escaped Slaves table. 1d2 Moon Elf Commoners. Since I had already run this encounter (which was how the party acquired Anarillia as a member), I decided to tweak it. I already had my own encounter that I eventually wanted to bring into the story, so I decided that this was the time to do it.

Derivell glanced at Eromani who only shrugged. Then, without another word, he proceeded to lead them on towards the entrance, a bit more cautious than before. Still, the woman's voice continued to plead softly in their minds, urging them to hurry.

As they came out of the tunnel, though, another voice called to them. This was a younger male; soft but confident. There was a hint of sadness in his tone, mixed with trepidation and relief, all at the same time.

"Greetings," he said, his voice echoing slightly. It was difficult to make out exactly where it was coming from, for the acoustics caused soundwaves to bounce around. "I hope you meant what you said about not harming me if I don't harm you, because I REALLY don't want any more trouble. If anything, I need help. I need LOTS of help."

The party tried to find him, but the owner of the voice was nowhere in sight. "Can you show yourself?" asked Derivell. Though he didn't feel threatened, he kept his shield and sword up, ready for anything. "I give you a solemn vow that I won't harm you as long as you don't plan on harming us in any way. I am Derivell, a paladin of Selune; a knight of the Order of the Celestial Moon."

The young man appeared. He had been crouching behind a particularly large boulder, and he remained next to it as if prepared to jump back should they try to attack him. He was a half-elf with collar-length, straight, light brown - almost blonde - hair that he feathered back behind his pointed ears. A trimmed beard dusted his chin and jawline, connecting to sideburns and mustache. His piercing blue eyes flashed in the light of Derivell's sword. Although the aasimar got the impression that he was, in fact, rather young, he noted that he carried himself with confidence and maturity, as if he was much older than he truly was.

³Then he noticed the glistening red scales peeking out from under the man's tattered, plain, no-longer-white shirt. "You're dragon-blooded," Derivell pointed out. "Are you a sorcerer?"

"Maybe," the man replied. He wore a stoic and grim expression, so it was impossible for Derivell to read him. "Would that be a problem?"

⁴Eromani decided to step in. "I'm also a dragon-blooded sorceress," she told him. "Black dragon."

This, at least, caused a reaction. Both brows lifted for a moment in surprise. "Small world," was all he said.

"Why are you here?" asked Fiohay. In her mind, she'd just found a brand new specimen; a new mystery to unravel. "Where'd you come from?"

"Can we have a name first?" asked Rini. "I'm Rini."

"Aelun," was his response. "My name's Aelun. I'm from Dagger Falls in Daggerdale. I came here in search of my father. Well, that is, I went to Urmlaspyr in search of my father."

³ Perception check, DC 10. Derivell = 13, Eromani = 18, Fiohay = 22, Rini = 10, Vlynrifane = 21, Havvah = 12, Graiyla = 14, and Arla = 21

⁴ Insight check, DC 10. Arla = 9, Derivell = 14, Eromani = 22, Fiohay = 19, Havvah = 8, Rini = 17, Graiyla = 6 and 18 (she did not trust him, but she knew he wasn't a fiend), and Vlynrifane = 16.

“Not you too!” said Fiovay. “We were in the marketplace as well when the slavers dropped those poison gas bombs and knocked us out. So, were you in Velkynvleve as well?”

He shook his head. “My adopted mother and I...” He choked. Something painful had occurred, and he was struggling to cope with it.

Rini immediately caught on, and she became instantly sympathetic. “I’m so sorry. Is she lost, or did she pass?”

He met her gaze, and she was surprised to see that although there was pain in his eyes, his expression did not reflect it. “She’s dead, unfortunately. Orog shot her as we tried to flee.” He swallowed hard, fighting down the grief. Then, he added, “We weren’t captured. We came down here following the trail of the kidnappers. We were trying to rescue the victims. Never in a million years did we expect that it would lead to this.”

Everyone softened. They could feel his pain, but more than that, his words shot straight to their hearts. “You... You came down here to save US?” asked Fiovay, and she was clearly, instantly, on the verge of tears. “Your adopted mother... Oh gods! That’s the worst thing I’ve ever heard. We’re responsible for her death. We have to try to do something. Right?” She looked around at the others. “Where did she die? Maybe we can find her body and find a Raise Dead scroll or something to bring her back.”

Aelun shook his head firmly. He had obviously come to accept her fate. “Even if I could find my way back there, she was taken down by Orog. I doubt they just left her body lying there. And even if they did, I’m sure something else has come along by now. It’s been days upon days.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Derivell. “I can’t even imagine what you’re going through.”

“How old are you, if you don’t mind me asking?” said Eromani, trying to shift the topic to something less tragic. Also, like Derivell, there was something about the man’s manner that indicated he was young. Still, since he was half-elf, it was too difficult to truly ascertain. She wanted to know whether they were dealing with an inexperienced whelp or a veteran merc.

“Sixteen,” he replied without hesitating.

“Whoa!” said Fiovay. “No way! Get out! I’m seventeen. You seem way older than me. You’ve got to be at least as old as Deri-Der over there. He’s like a million, I think.”

“I’m sixteen too,” said Rini. “Welcome to the club.”

Derivell gave Fiovay a harsh, sideways glance, but he smiled. “I’m not that much older than you, you know. I’m twenty-two.”

“What?” said Fi. “Are you serious? Did we discuss this previously? You can’t be only twenty-two. You act like you’re fifty.”

“Nini’s forty,” said Rini with a short laugh.

“Rini!” snapped Eromani. “What the heck!”

"Wait, so Nini's the oldest person here?" said Fiovay. "Get out!" Then she paused. "Have we discussed this before? I'm pretty sure we have. Haven't we? I'm feeling a sense of déjà vu."

"Can we focus?" asked Eromani, more than a little put out. She quickly addressed Aelun to move the conversation along. "As you can see, you won't be the youngest person here. Welcome to the party."

"Just like that?" asked Aelun. "Aren't you afraid I'm not who I claim to be?"

"Yes," said Sarith, and Dalazaril obviously agreed. He gave a crisp nod.

"I don't know," said Havvah. "What if he's Habrax or Miralin in disguise? They can appear to be someone else, you know. This could just be a clever ruse of theirs to lure us into a false sense of security."

"Nah," said Graiyla. "He's no fiend. I'm not sure we can trust him, but I don't think he's either of those two."

"You don't trust anyone," said Fiovay. It was a partial tease, but she felt it was also quite true.

"And you flirt with every male," Graiyla retorted.

"Oh-ho HO!" said Fiovay, delighting in the reverse partial tease. "She recoils and strikes back. A venomous retort!"

Graiyla rolled her eyes and groaned. "That was terrible. I'm done talking to you." And yet, there was a hint of a smile threatening to creep its way onto her face.

Derivell finally seized control of the situation. "I think what we're trying to say is that you are welcome to join us. And yes. Just like that."

"There are certainly others who seem shiftier than you in our group," added Eromani. She glanced over at Sarith to make her point. He caught her meaning. "So what brought you to this spot, exactly?"

Aelun shrugged. "Lost. I've been totally lost and alone for days. I happened to wander into this area. Then I started hearing that woman's voice calling me. So, I found the door. I was tired, and I decided to rest first. After all, who knows what's actually in there. I wasn't about to go in without being at full strength. Then you came along."

"Resting sounds wonderful, actually," said Fiovay with a yawn and a stretch. "I think he's got the right idea."

"Me too," said Rini.

"It has been a long day," said Vlynrifane. "Resting before going in is probably best."

No one disagreed. "It's settled then," said Derivell. "But let's at least camp somewhere far enough away that we will no longer hear the woman's pleas. I don't think we'll be able to sleep with that constantly playing over and over in our heads."

And so, they backtracked a short distance until the woman's voice was gone. Then they found a decent spot in an open cavern where they spread out and prepared to get a good rest. As they ate, Eromani sat down next to their newest member and said, "Aelun. That's actually a very beautiful name. It means 'child of a new dawn'. Right?"

He nodded. "Tilurna, my adopted mother, was a cleric of Lathander. She gave me that name. She said that she believed that I had a bright future ahead of me. She also said I was like a ray of sunshine - a new start - for she had suffered the loss of her own son, Orin, just a few years before."

Fiovay then sat on his left, a sympathetic look on her face. She had taken human form while no one was looking, and she immediately placed her hand on his arm as she said, "Wow. How tragic! I'm so sorry."

He looked at her, and a curious expression followed. "Um. Hi?" he said, a bit confused.

Fiovay gasped, withdrew a little, and covered her mouth. She was embarrassed, for she hadn't considered how changing into human form might leave him wondering who she was. "Sumimasen! Sumimasen!" she cried, her face turning bright pink. She was so thrown off that she failed to realize that she'd resorted to apologizing in her parents' native tongue. "I'm Fiovay. I'm the fox-girl. See?" She pointed to her clothes. "Same outfit. I'm a kitsune. I can change from fox-girl to human - well, and back, of course."

⁵Derivell sat next to Eromani, and he turned his face away, looking off into the dark to hide his smile. 'She likes him,' he thought. 'She likes him a bit more than she's liked anyone else so far. Usually, she's teasing and flirting. Not so here. She's trying to genuinely impress him. That's why she took human form. She wants him to be attracted to her. She even got him to look at her body by guiding his attention to her clothes.'

And he was a bit relieved by this. He liked Fiovay, but not in that way. She was cutesy and fun, and he enjoyed her company. However, she was more like a little sister to him than a romantic interest, and when she'd tease like she was interested in him, he often wondered just how serious she was. Seeing how she was interacting with Aelun, he now knew that all previous romantic advances were pure fun and games.

⁶"Fiovay," said Aelun as if he was attempting to familiarize himself with her name. A half smile then crept onto the right side of his face. It was quite charming, and Fiovay blushed all the more. "A kitsune. I've read a few books about your kind, but I've never actually met one. Fascinating!"

"Fascinating?" asked Fiovay. "You think I'm fascinating?"

Eldeth, who sat opposite the scene, rolled her eyes and turned to Hemeth. "By Moradin's beard," she said in dwarvish, "the new boy's got these girls all titillated. Look at how they're hovering around him." Eromani was on Aelun's right, Fiovay on his left, Vlynrifane was on Fiovay's left, and Rini was on her left with Zen. Arla was on Derivell's right, and Havvah was on her right. Derivell was the only male in the cluster.

⁵ Insight check, DC 10. Eromani = 6 with disadvantage. Derivell 18. Aelun = 8. Arla = 9. Havvah = 20. Rini = 7. Vlynrifane = 8.

⁶ Arcana check, DC 15. Aelun rolled 23. Success.

Hemeth chuckled briefly. "I don't see what they see in him. I mean, he's got a beard, which is something, I guess. But it's a sad, scraggly looking thing without any real volume."

Eldeth laughed. "It's certainly not something a girl can grab a hold of."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Looking for a beard to grab a hold of?"

Eldeth smirked. "In your dreams," she replied, but there was something about the way she reacted that indicated he might stand a chance if he kept working at it.

"Yes," Aelun replied to Fiovay, bringing everyone's attention back to them. "Why wouldn't meeting a kitsune from Kara-Tur be fascinating, to say the least? Any time I experience something I've read about in one of the books in Tilurna's library, it's exciting."

Derivell put his hand to his mouth, hiding his smile with the pretense of pondering something serious. 'He's oblivious. He absolutely has no idea she's trying to hook him and draw him in.' He decided to intervene a little, partially for fun. "Did Tilurna have a sizable library?" he asked.

Aelun nodded. "I spent so many long hours there, studying everything I could get my hands on. I've been searching for my parents ever since I was six, so anything I could learn that might help me connect to my past - might help me find them - I consumed it."

"What happened?" asked Vlynrifane, and Derivell noticed that she was also quite interested in him. She was just hiding it a bit better than Fiovay. "How were you separated from them?"

'I hope that's not going to be trouble,' thought the knight. 'Please, Selune. Let's not have any kind of jealousy or rivalry. We've got enough to worry about. We certainly don't need that.'

"I remember very little about my parents, actually," said Aelun. "Mostly impressions. My father was a sorcerer of considerable power, if I recall correctly. I mean, I was pretty young. He could have been a petty mage, and I'd have thought he was the God of Sorcerers. Still, he seemed truly powerful. I don't think it was just because I had a young, impressionable mind."

"My mother was like a mama bear. She was warm and loving and kind to me, but to others, even to my father a lot of times, she was blunt, dominating, and even fierce. I mean, I wasn't totally exempt. If I disobeyed her, she was quick to snap, and I learned a great deal of discipline from her. She was incredibly protective of me, and yet she let me be free; to roam and play wherever I wished."

"My father was quiet and reserved, always observing and contemplating. I remember that it seemed he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders at all times. Even when he was supposed to be resting, he seemed to be working. He cared about me very much, though. I could tell, for he was always trying to teach me. And yet, he had a difficult time showing it in any other way. He never told me he loved me or anything, but I somehow knew anyway."

"Can you tell us anything else about them?" asked Eromani. "Any kind of description could help. One of us could have met them at some point. You never know."

Aelun closed his eyes, imagining them as best he could. It was clear that it took a great deal of effort. The memories were quite fuzzy. "My father had medium brown hair, I think, and a beard like mine. My mother was blonde, but more like a darker blonde, almost brown."

"Like your hair?" asked Fiovay.

He shrugged. "I guess. Maybe darker. It's hard to remember. I think they were both half-elves. I mean, I don't think either was human or elf, but I could be wrong. I do remember that it was my father that passed down the draconic bloodline to me, though. Ironically, he always wore a soft expression, while my mother was hard and strong with piercing eyes. You'd think she was the dragon-blooded one, but no."

Derivell watched everyone's expressions. No one seemed to have met either person that they could recall. "Anything else?" he asked.

Aelun considered this for a moment. Then, he replied, "No. I don't think so. I mean, it was ten years ago. My last memory of my mother was that she left me in the street of some village we visited frequently while she went inside this building to talk to a bunch of friends of hers. That's when the kidnapper took me. I don't even remember how it happened. I just remember waking up on the guy's horse, strapped to his saddlebags and bouncing violently as he rode swiftly down the road."

"That must have been terrifying," said Fiovay, her voice breathless. She was hanging on his every word.

Aelun shrugged and nodded. "Well. Yes," he replied. "To make matters worse, the guy wore a skull mask, hood, and he dressed all in black. I only know he wasn't actually undead because later I saw his face."

"What did he look like?" asked Vlyn.

"I don't remember too much," said Aelun. "One night, he got drunk, and the shadows clung to him. I remember he was sinister with a slightly crazed look in his eye. I think maybe he was clean-shaven at one point prior to the kidnapping, but a beard was starting to grow in by the time I got away."

"How did you get away?" asked Arla. She also seemed to be heavily interested.

'At least Eromani isn't enamored by him,' Derivell thought. This was also a relief to him. He looked at the sorceress again, studying her reactions and mannerisms. 'Yes. She seems interested in his story, but it's more like she wants to help him. She feels a kindred spirit with him. It's not the same.'

"One night," Aelun continued his story, "the man had a little too much to drink. He said to me, 'Don't worry. I'm not going to kill you. You're a tool; a weapon. My master is going to use you, you see, to get his revenge. You can thank your parents for this. This is all their fault. They played like they were gods, and they ruined my master's plans.'"

"Then he smiled wickedly at me, his mask removed to reveal that he was a human. 'Nothing is more important to them than their kid, eh? So, we're going to turn you against them. We're

going to fashion you into our weapon, and YOU are going to be the one to exact my lord's revenge."

"He got right up in my face, and he didn't realize that I had special abilities. I breathed fire on him, engulfing his head in flames. While he screamed and clutched at his injuries, I snatched up a dagger, cut myself loose, and I stabbed him in the belly. Doing as my mother and father had taught me, I did not just stab. I twisted and sawed, making the wound impossible to mend without magic. He was the first person I ever killed." There was a hint of remorse in his eyes when he said this.

Fiovey was shocked. "At the age of six? I can't even imagine what that did to you."

"My first kill was at five," said Vlynrifane. "Well, if I recall correctly. Maybe it was six." She waved the comment aside. "I was young, and my mother wanted me to know what it was like. She told me that it was vital to a child's survival to learn how to kill and to get used to it. I don't know. I don't think it was necessarily a bad thing. It was definitely a skill I had to learn to rely on later. That's for sure."

Aelun displayed no reaction to either. Instead, he said, "Well, I'll spare you all the details. Suffice to say, I met Tilurna soon after, and she took me in. She promised to help me find my parents when no one else would." Pain returned to his eyes, and he fell silent for a few seconds. Finally, he added, "I sure do miss her." He then gestured to Rini. "You actually remind me of her a little."

"Really?" asked Rini, more than a little surprised. "Was she a halfling?"

He nodded. "Cheery disposition. Being a cleric of Lathander, she was full of life and cheer and excitement. She really did know how to brighten a room or mood no matter how dark it was."

"Sounds like Fiovey," said Havvah. "Always joking and laughing and playing and so forth."

Fiovey beamed at the praise. "I try," she said with feigned modesty.

"Rini also tends to be perky and upbeat," said Fargas, smiling at her as he said this.

Rini blushed as badly as Fiovey had just a few moments before. This got the attention of the two goblins. Yuk Yuk nudged Spiderbait and half sang/ half spoke in goblin. Thinking no one could understand him, he did not really lower his voice. "Looove! It's in the aaay-hair, it's true. And I wonder who's ho-ldin' who-ooo-ooo... Toniihight. Magic's in the air."

Spiderbait reciprocated with a wide, mischievous grin. "Derive-hell, and Eromani, it's true. Now Fiovey and Aeluuuhoon. They be gettin' it on... along with Rini and Faar-gasss."

"Toniihight," said Yuk Yuk, "I was thinking that Eldeth might... get in Hemeth's pantaloo-oo-hoons!"

"What about Vlynrifane, and Arla and Havvah tooohooo!" finished Spiderbait, and the pair burst out laughing riotously.

Everyone regarded them curiously, having no clue what they were singing and saying; everyone except one person. Aelun suddenly responded to their outburst, also in goblin, "And what about

the two of you? Or should I not ask?" And with a lifted brow and a slight grin, he implied that the two were a couple themselves, and the fact that he could speak their language, along with what he implied, sent the two into a second uproar.

After a moment, Yuk Yuk said in Common. "'e's go's class, 'e does! Speaks our language roigh' noice too. A'roight. I definitely says we keep 'im. 'e's earned me respect, 'e 'as."

"I agree," said Fiovey. "I think he'll definitely make a great apprentice for our present sorceress."

"Hopefully Rini won't get jealous of him stealing her mama away," teased Eldeth.

Rini shot her a mean look. Then she stuck her tongue out at her, and a few in the party had a good laugh.

Derivell chuckled as well, but he couldn't stop thinking about Aelun. There was something there. He couldn't put a finger on it. He possessed a certain quality, a certain charisma that drew people to him. 'He's important,' the aasimar realized. 'There's something that makes him truly special. He has a destiny. I can feel it. One or more gods are watching him and pulling at the strings of his life. His mentor and adopted mother died so that he would be free to fulfill whatever purpose he is "meant" to fulfill.'

'And that means that we've been brought into his life by one of those said gods to help him achieve his purpose,' he also realized, but this thought did not bring comfort to the paladin of Selune. 'Who knows what we might go through now? Not only do we have our own puppet masters fighting to control us, we have to deal with his as well.'

Eromani noticed his far-off look, and she nudged him. "You okay?" she asked.

Derivell started, but he quickly recovered with a smile. "Yeah. I'm fine."

She let him know by the look on her face that she didn't believe him. "What is it?"

The others were continuing to joke around and enjoying the camaraderie, so he felt safe to share with her. "Him," he replied with a nod in Aelun's direction.

"Do you think he's deceiving us?" asked Eromani.

"No," said Derivell. "I think he's important. I think by taking him in, we're going to lure even more enemies to us. That's all."

Eromani frowned. "Oh," was all she could say.

"It's not like I want to ditch him," he told her. "I'm just saying that it adds a new layer of complexity to our situation."

Eromani considered his words for a moment. Finally, she said, "Okay. I hadn't really considered that, but now..." She sighed. "We'll have to prepare ourselves the best we can."

"I guess it doesn't really matter that much," said Derivell. "I mean, quite frankly, CAN we really prepare anymore than we already have? What's one more really nasty enemy at this point?"

Eromani laughed and nodded. “So true. Dragon or fiend, drow or quaggoth or giant spider or spectator... Why not add something else like a mind flayer - or shoot! A god?”

Derivell nodded. “Right. Exactly.”

Aelun



Chapter 3: The Tomb of Khaem

Their rest was unhindered. In the “morning”, they returned to the tomb entrance where they had met Aelun, and they stood before the deep-set door made of bronze. Indeed, it was green with age, just as the supernatural insight they’d been given had indicated. Everything was just as they’d foreseen it.

The first thing they did was examine the entranceway. ⁷Fiovay searched for traps and found none. Then she tried to shove the door open - for it had no handles or knobs - and with a bit of effort, she managed to succeed. The door pivoted on a central axis, creating narrow openings on either side. And so, carefully, the party entered the tomb, splitting into two columns as they did.

The room beyond had a fifteen foot ceiling. They expected no light whatsoever, so Derivell and Rini both cast Light to help guide the way. ⁸Nevertheless, Aelun pointed out, “There is a very soft glow on the walls, ceiling and floor. This place is fused with faerzress. Magic will be a bit unstable here. Divination spells will be hindered.”

“On the plus side,” said Sarith. “We don’t have to worry as much about demons teleporting into the place. Faerzress also tends to hinder teleportation magic.”

“We can probably douse the lights, if we want,” suggested Dalazaril. “Those without dark vision can probably see well enough without them.”

Graiyla noticed that neither Derivell nor Rini took this to heart. Derivell kept his shield lit, and Rini her bow, so that they could more easily survey the room. She smiled. ‘For once, I don’t mind,’ she thought. Recently, she had been feeling uneasy. It was that sixth sense that a person gets when they think someone is following them; stalking them. Ever since they left the Silken Paths, she’d been glancing over her shoulder frequently, watching every shadow that she could and swearing she saw things that weren’t there - or were they?

The party spread out a bit. The entrance room was roughly thirty feet square. A stone diorama stood to the right, depicting what looked like a mage - a woman, perhaps. There were servants of some kind surrounding her along with other trappings symbolizing wealth and power. Aelun was studying it closely. On Graiyla’s left, there was a vista of fantastic floating cities. It covered the entire wall. Across from the entrance, empty stone torch sconces flanked a dusty staircase which descended deeper into the structure.

⁹ “I’m not sure who this is,” said Aelun over his shoulder to Eromani. “I’ve done a lot of studying on Netherese...” He gestured to the floating cities on the vista as he said this. “... but I feel like I’m missing important clues here. Any ideas?”

Eromani nodded. “It’s undoubtedly Brysis Khaem,” she told him. She then gestured to Fargas. “Fargas gave us a map that leads here. It is labeled ‘The Lost Tomb of Khaem’. Does that help?”

⁷ Perception check, DC 10. Fiovay rolled 19. Success. Athletics check, DC 15. Fiovay rolled 18. Success.

⁸ Arcana check, DC 10. Aelun rolled 11. Success.

⁹ Arcana check, DC 15. Aelun rolled 8. Failure. Eromani only needed 10 since she had learned from Fargas the name of the tomb. She rolled 10 with disadvantage. Success. Arla rolled 4. Failure

Aelun nodded. "Okay. Thank you. That explains it."

"It does?" asked Fiovay, coming up on his left. "How?"

"Brysis Khaem was a Netherese noble," said Aelun. "This is obviously her in her prime. These are her attendants, slaves, and so forth."

"So this is a Netherese tomb," said Arla. "Isn't that Shar's people?"

Eromani turned to face her. "No. It's a common mistake to make, though. Today, many consider all Netherese to be Shar worshippers, and all Netherese magic is Shadow Magic. This is because when the Netherese Empire fell over a thousand years ago, an arcanist named Telamont Tanthul was experimenting with Shar's Shadow Weave. He managed to shift his entire enclave, called Thultanthar, into the Plane of Shadow. Seeing the destruction of his people on the Material Plane when the empire fell, he decided to stay there, thinking he'd protect his people whom he considered the last truly gifted wizards."

"While in the Plane of Shadow, they became corrupted by Shar. Many were twisted into beings known as Shadovar. About a hundred years ago, they returned to the Material Plane, and they waged war on a LOT of people. This includes Sembia and the Dales."

"Okay," said Arla. "Which explains why I even know about them at all. So who were the original Netherese, then?"

"Netheril was an ancient empire of humans that ruled vast amounts of land in the north," Aelun told her. "They were governed by powerful wizards, and many ancient magical texts, scrolls, spells, runes, etc. come from them." He pointed to the floating cities. "They were so powerful that they even created those flying citadels."

"There aren't many true Netherese left in the world today," said Eromani. "This is why most think of Shar when they hear the name. The only Netherese they know of are those who returned here from the Plane of Shadow, wielding incredibly powerful Shadow Magic, back during the Time of Troubles."

"So, who was this Khaem person?" asked Derivell. "If this is her tomb - you said Khaem was a woman, right?" Eromani nodded. "If this is her tomb, should we expect a lich? Should we actually continue?"

"I've been thinking about it," said Eromani, "and I am wondering if the voice we hear in our heads that is pleading for help is maybe Khaem herself. She keeps saying that she's been trapped in the dark for so very long. If her soul was somehow trapped here, then she's been imprisoned in this tomb for over a thousand years."

"Do you think she'll be hostile?" Graiyla asked. That was really all she wanted to know. "The last thing I want to do is battle a lich."

"I'm with her," Eldeth added. "If she's trapped here, that's probably because she did something to get herself trapped here. I don't mind helping someone in need, but if she's going to try to kill us or enslave us..."

“And how will we know until it’s too late what she’s going to try to do to us?” asked Sarith. “I say we get out of here. We don’t need to explore this place. Let’s hurry on to Gracklstugh.”

“Oh my gosh!” said Fargas. “What’s wrong with you? Where’s your sense of adventure?”

Rini immediately supported him. “And this poor spirit is trapped in here. I wouldn’t feel right about just walking away. We need to do what’s right, no matter the risk.”

Once again, Graiyla noticed that Derivell seized command. “Those who don’t want to continue, you can wait outside. Those who do, let’s go. The stairs seem to be the only way.” Then he placed himself by them and turned. He was waiting to see who would join him and who would leave.

Sarith, Dalazaril, Topsy, Turvy, Stool, and Anarillia left. The rest joined Derivell, including Bastion, the horse. The animal was, at that point, even more smitten with his new owner, and quite loyal. One night, Vlynrifane spoke to him, and he had confessed that no one had treated him with the same respect and care as the aasimar. The more he recovered his former strength, the more he felt a need to protect the knight, and he felt that he couldn’t leave his side. If he did, something bad might happen to him.

And so, the party descended roughly twenty feet to a landing. Set into the back wall was a Netherese calendar stone. It was completely illegible. Beyond this landing, the staircase resumed, stopping at three more landings of bare stone and continuing a total of roughly a hundred feet before arriving at the next chamber.

This was a shrine where shreds of dusty tapestries lay scattered across the floor. Friezes on the walls were defaced with deep gouges, making them unrecognizable. An altar of pale gray marble stood gouged and cracked against one wall. Fiovay and Aelun immediately stepped up to it, stooping to examine it more closely. ¹⁰ “What do you think?” asked Fi.

Aelun shrugged. “I have no idea what made these marks or why.” He turned to Eromani. “You?”

Eromani joined them. “Beats me.”

It was Rini who gave them some insight into the matter. She was examining several marks on one of the friezes as she said, “The damage is relatively recent, I think. The creatures that caused this, though, left no tracks of any kind in the layer of dust on the floor. Interesting.”

“Recently?” asked Arla, now a bit concerned.

Graiyla set her jaw. “Tomb raiders, no doubt.”

“Flying tomb raiders,” added Havvah. “If they left no tracks on the floor, they are likely hovering in the air. Imps maybe?”

“Crap!” said Eldeth. “More fiends. That’s all we need.”

¹⁰ Investigation check, DC 13. Aelun rolled 7, and Fiovay 5. Failure. Eromani rolled 19 and 5 with disadvantage. Her total was 6. Failure. Vlynrifane rolled 3. Rini rolled 13. Success.

"It's just a guess," said Havvah.

"Well," said Derivell. "Which door would you like to try first?" He gestured to the one directly across from the stairs. "Door Number One, or Door Number Two?" He concluded by gesturing to the door to the right of the stairs.

"When in doubt, go right," said Fioyay. "Didn't I hear that from somewhere before?" She indicated Door Number Two.

"Two seems just as good as one," said Graiyla. "Let's not stand around debating." She didn't mean to sound agitated, but that nagging feeling in the back of her mind was setting her on edge.

As a result, Arla asked, "Something wrong, Gray?"

Graiyla shrugged off the question. "Sorry. I'm fine. I'm just uneasy, especially after hearing we might run into flying tomb raiders." Then she hurried to bring the conversation back to their decision. "So, am I good to shove the door open?"

No one protested, so she gave it a good push. ¹¹The door didn't budge. "... the \$#@?" she said under her breath, embarrassed. She tried again, throwing more of her back into it. This time, the door spun open on its axis with a whining, grinding noise that echoed far too loudly through the place. Graiyla swore again as she maneuvered into the next chamber, the others right behind her. Hopefully she didn't literally wake the dead.

The first thing Graiyla noticed were two stone blocks. One was set against the wall to her left while the other was in the back, right corner. Both were carved with niches, inside which rested a dozen clay canopic jars containing desiccated organs. The yuan-ti woman grimaced in disgust and clutched her sword tighter as she continued on to the room's central feature.

This was a sarcophagus which rested atop a black marble bier in the middle of the room. The lid was inlaid with dust-covered mosaics depicting great floating cities high above a beautiful landscape. It looked really heavy, as if it might require several rather strong individuals to move it, but Graiyla made no attempt to test it.

Instead, she turned to her companions. "Dead end, it seems," she commented.

"Can we not use that term while in this place?" asked Arla. It was then that Graiyla noticed that the former glass blower was struggling to maintain her courage. The further in that they went, the more unnerved she was becoming, and the sight of the organ jars definitely didn't help.

"You could join the others back outside," suggested Rini who also noticed her disposition.

Arla shook her head and clutched her hammer and shield more firmly. Her knuckles were turning white. "I'll be fine. It's just..."

Fioyay maneuvered up to the sarcophagus. "Should we open it?" she asked as she carefully checked for traps.

¹¹ Athletics check, DC 15. Graiyla rolled 7. Failure. Second roll. 24. Success.

"I don't know," said Aelun. "Places like this are usually guarded by..."

¹²Fiovay shoved on the lid, and it surprisingly slid open without much resistance. "Huh," she said happily. "Must be enchanted with some ancient magic of light weightedness, or..."

All at once, a voice boomed with incredible volume, shaking the chamber and forcing everyone to clutch their ears. "You have disturbed the tomb of Brysis of Khaem! Accursed are you, most miserable of creatures!"

¹³Then just like that, the event ended, leaving all but a few rather shaken. "\$#@ \$ it, Fiovay!" snapped Eldeth without restraint. "What the \$#@ \$! He was just saying how there might be guardians and \$#@ \$ here, and you just did it anyway. Who knows what crazy \$#@ \$ you've unleashed on us."

"Holy crap! Holy crap!" Arla was reaching full blown panic stage. "Whatta we do? Whatta we do? What's happening to us?"

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Fiovay cried, still holding her ears. She was also crouching in fear, not only because of what she'd done but also because she was afraid of the wrath of her friends.

"Get away from it!" Derivell ordered, and he rushed to Fiovay's side. Then he grabbed her and yanked her back, throwing himself between her and the sarcophagus. There he stood, like a statue, waiting for whatever might appear.

The room fell terribly silent as the party watched and waited, expecting some foul monstrosity to make itself known. But nothing did. Slowly, Derivell made his way to the edge and peered inside. After a moment, he relaxed, but only a little. "Weird," he said, stepping to the side and gesturing for Eromani and Aelun to approach. "It's just some statue. I don't see anything else. Do you?"

The pair gave it their own inspection. Then Eromani said, "He's right. Looks like a life-sized statue of Brysis. It's sculpted and painted to make it appear that she is sleeping comfortably. I don't see any treasure or anything."

"It's a false tomb," said Aelun. He then nudged the statue. "The statue is affixed to the inside, it seems. I don't see any buttons or levers or switches of any kind, so it doesn't seem like it's a secret door for the real tomb."

"Was it just meant to scare us?" asked Arla. She was finally starting to regain her composure.

"I don't think so," said Aelun. "I think Fiovay set off a magical trap, for sure. The apparition said we were cursed. I'd assume that to be true. We need to be even more careful now, expecting that we may suddenly find our luck has been turned against us."

¹² Strength check, DC 10. Fiovay rolled 12. Success.

¹³ Charisma save, DC 15. Vlynrifane = 2, Fiovay = 14, Havvah = 3, Rini = 13, Arla = 14, Eromani = 7, Derivell = 13, Zen = 9, Eldeth = 1, Fargas = 17, Shreiken = 9, Spiderbait = 16, Yuk Yuk = 2, Bastion = 7, Hemeth = 8 and Graiyla = 16. Everyone is cursed except Fargas, Spiderbait and Graiyla. They receive disadvantage on attack and saving throws for at least 24 hours or unless someone casts Remove Curse on them. There is only one other way, not mentioned at this time.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry," Fiovey repeated again. This time, it was more weak and pathetic, as if she was fully feeling the weight of her guilt mixed with extreme paranoia that she may have just doomed them all.

"It's okay," said Derivell at last, trying to comfort her. "Let's just not do that again. How about we all agree on what we're going to do before we do it? Okay?"

Fiovey was on the verge of tears as she looked at him and nodded. "Okay. Okay. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"Fi," said Derivell, holding her gaze and trying to renew her confidence. "It's okay. It'll be okay. I promise. Even if we're cursed, we'll get through this. You made a mistake. We're not mad. We'll be fine."

"Y-You promise?" she said, still unsure. "Gods, Derivell! If I've killed anyone here because of this... If anyone dies... I... I..."

"Try not to dwell on that," said Derivell. "Let's just focus on getting through this place, seeing if we can find the trapped soul, and get out. Can you do that?"¹⁴ Fiovey nodded. "Okay. Now take a deep breath with me. Breathe in... and out..." Fiovey complied, and they did this several times until she finally got a hold of herself.

At last, he turned to the others. "Okay. From now on, maybe I'll lead the way. Everyone stay behind me. Let's go check the other door."

"And if anyone is having second thoughts about continuing," said Eromani, "now's the time to go ahead and head back to the entrance. No one has to feel ashamed if they don't want to finish this."

Graiyla then noticed Arla's insecurities playing havoc with her face. She was on the verge of bowing out. In fact, she was just about to do so when Yuk Yuk cut her off. "Come on, den. Le's do dis alrea'y. Ain't nobo'y goin' back, Girly. Dis is adventurin' a' i's foines'. Dis is livin', eh? Stop babyin' ev'rybo'y alrea'y and ge' to i'." Then he turned to Spiderbait and commented in goblin, "Sheesh! What's adventure without a bit of risk and danger? These people are as boring as they come. I'm starting to wonder why we decided to stick with 'em."

"You said it," said Spiderbait. "They play it too cautiously. And what's with the fox-girl freaking out? For what? She didn't do nothing wrong. She was just checking out the coffin. Who wouldn't? Yeah. That wasn't right, the dwarf screaming at her. If she didn't open it, I would have. I mean, what do you come into an ancient tomb for but to loot all of its stuff? Right?"

Aelun smiled, reminding them that he could understand them. "Well," he said, also in goblin. "I don't disagree with you about Fiovey. I think the dwarf was a bit too hard on her. Still, if you guys like danger so much, you are more than welcome to lead the way." He gestured toward Derivell as if he was a waiter showing them to their seats at a fine restaurant.

"Hey!" said Yuk Yuk, a bit indignant. "We love adventure, but we're not stupid. He's the meat shield, not us."

¹⁴ Persuasion check, DC 10. Derivell rolled 11, barely succeeding.

"Yeah," said Spiderbait. "We do our role, and he does his. He draws the attention of all the baddies, and we snipe them from the back."

"Chssshh!" snicked Yuk Yuk. "Greenie. That's what he is." He jerked a thumb at Aelun. "Nothing but a greenie."

"Ain't got no sense," Spiderbait replied in agreement.

They arrived at Door Number One, and Derivell made the attempt to shove it open. ¹⁵It didn't budge. He fell back a pace, examining it, and Graiyla saw that he was just as surprised by the greenish, aged, bronze door's stubbornness as she had been with the last one. She couldn't help but smile to herself. 'At least I wasn't the only one.' He tried it again, throwing his full weight into it, just as she had previously, and with a similar whining and grinding noise, it rotated open.

Four stone sarcophagi marked the resting places of what could only be the most faithful servants of Brysis Khaem; one in each corner of the room. 'Who else could they be?' Graiyla thought. The lid of each bore the sculpted image of a robed human figure in repose. Other than these, the room had no other furnishings or decorations. There were also no other doors.

"Odd," said Rini. "This room is also a dead end?"

"There must be a secret door somewhere," suggested Aelun. "Either in this room or the previous one."

"Let's not touch the coffins. Agreed?" said Eldeth.

"The trigger to the secret door could be in one of the sarcophagi," said Aelun. "If we can't find it anywhere else, we might want to open them one at a time and check."

"Where are you?" Derivell then asked the air, shouting once more at the voice that was still echoing cries for help in their heads. "Can you hear me now? How can we help you? How can we free you?" There was no response.

"You people are trying to get us killed," said Eldeth, scowling.

The party slowly fanned out, searching everywhere for a hidden device or switch. Each was careful not to touch the sarcophagi, just in case they might trigger another trap. ¹⁶At the back, right corner, Vlynrifane was the first to note, "This one looks like it's built on stone rollers." She crouched. "I think it can be slid aside."

Derivell, Arla, Fiovay, Eromani and Rini all dropped down next to her. "I think you're right," said Eromani. "Think we should do it?"

"I don't SEE any traps," said Fiovay. "But, you know..." She jerked a thumb back in the direction of the fake tomb chamber. Then she started to back away as if terribly afraid she might somehow mess up a second time.

¹⁵ Athletics check, DC 15. Derivell rolled 11. Failure. Second roll. 15. Success.

¹⁶ Perception check, DC 15. Vlynrifane = 24, Havvah = 4, Derivell = 15, Arla = 16, Fiovay = 23, Eromani = 15, and Rini = 16.

“What other choice do we have?” asked Derivell. “Do you see any other way to go?”

“I’m waiting out in the next chamber this time,” said Arla, no longer able to battle her fears.

“I think I’ll join her too,” said Eldeth. “If you guys get trapped in here, we might be the only ones who can get you out.” She slapped Hemeth on the shoulder and told him what she was doing. Then they made their way out into the adjoining room.

“Well?” said Derivell, looking at the faces of his remaining companions. “Any objections?” Graiyla shrugged, but no one else made any show of what they were thinking. And so, Derivell, Eromani, Rini and Vlynrifane all grabbed the sarcophagus and shoved. ¹⁷It slid to reveal a four-foot square hole in the floor. Beyond was a similarly sized chamber.

That’s when the door spun shut, and four howls of fury arose from the four sarcophagi. Then specters burst upward, through the stone lids, and they screamed as they dove to attack.

¹⁷ Strength check, DC 10. Derivell rolled 17 with advantage, since he had help. Success.

Chapter 4: Always Darkest Before Dawn

¹⁸The four guardian specters dove at Derivell, Eromani, Rini and Vlynrifane, but they managed to spin and weave out of the way in time. Havvah rushed to her son's aid, hacking one in the back. She then followed up with a jab of the axe's top spike, but it seemed to pass right through the corporeal being.

¹⁹Rini dropped her bow, dowsing its light, but a split second later she whipped her Mace of Disruption and shield out. Her weapon glowed brightly as she immediately clubbed the one attacking her in its ghastly face. Instantly, the magic in her mace ended the undead's existence, causing it to vanish like a vapor.

²⁰Aelun threw a fiery missile at the specter attacking Derivell. Then Bastion jumped to his master's defense, screaming like a nightmare and kicking violently. As he did, Zen bounded with Rini on his back at Eromani's foe, but his jaws snapped at nothing. This put the specter directly into Fiovay's path. She leapt into the air and came down upon it, ramming her two daggers into both of its sides from behind.

²¹Meanwhile, Shreiken jumped and attacked Vlynrifane's adversary, snapping the ghost's right wrist and causing it to snarl at him in return. As he landed back on the ground, Yuk Yuk's arrow whizzed past, hitting the back wall. Fargas, of course, joined Rini and Zen, but his blade sang for no one. Eromani decided to save her spells, fearing that this was not the most difficult battle they would face that day, and so she swung Evronar's Essence. However, being sick and probably due to the curse they'd just acquired, she found herself moving way too slow.

²²A split second later, Spiderbait's arrow joined Yuk Yuk's as it also bounced off the far wall. As it fell, Vlynrifane ignited her Flame Blade spell and slashed, but like the others, she could not connect. The curse was, in fact, at work. Graiyla, however, managed to at least put a decent gash in one specter's side with her lightning infused longsword, but it was too difficult to tell whether it was ready to give up the ghost yet.

²³Derivell thought the same way as Eromani. He had a feeling that this was only the beginning. The worst was yet to come. And so, he did not waste his spells. He hacked the one fighting him with his sword, only marginally wounding it.

That was when another horrendous shriek, more terrible than all the ones before, filled the chamber. It welled up from the secret room below. After it screamed, the foul apparition laughed chillingly. "FOOLS!" the wicked, feminine voice mocked. "You have fallen into my trap. Bound! I have been bound to this tomb until I can steal enough life force to leave it. I have arisen now from my sarcophagus to feast upon your souls! Your deaths shall surely free me from my prison, and you shall serve me even in DEATH!"

¹⁸ Specter 1 = 8, Specter 2 = 11, Specter 3 = 13 and Specter 4 = 7. All missed Derivell, Eromani, Rini and Vlynrifane. Havvah rolled 22 and hit, dealing 15 damage which was reduced to 7 because of resistance. She used Action Surge, but rolled a 10 the second time and missed.

¹⁹ Rini = 21, dealing 10 damage. Wisdom save, DC 15. Specter rolled 7 and failed. Mace of Disruption destroys undead on a failed save if they have less than 25 HP and are hit.

²⁰ Aelun = Critical Miss. Bastion = 13, dealing 5 damage. Zen = 7. Fiovay = 12 and 19, dealing 13 total damage with her daggers.

²¹ Shreiken = 16 and 10, dealing 3 damage. Yuk Yuk = 7. Fargas = 10 and 10.

²² Spiderbait = 7. Vlynrifane = 8. Graiyla = 13, dealing 7 damage.

²³ Derivell = 14, dealing 5 damage.

At the same time, Aelun heard a different voice. It was the same as when they'd first found the tomb; the one calling for help. "In the sarcophagus!" it cried. "I can help you!" That was when he knew for certain that the one calling for help was not Brysis of Khaem. 'A weapon,' he realized. 'There's some sort of magical, intelligent weapon down there that can destroy the ghost of Brysis Khaem. If I can get to it while the others distract...'

The battle didn't even pause while the two voices spoke. ²⁴Derivell deflected his opponent with his shield, but Eromani felt the chill touch of the grave as the specter facing her raked her left shoulder painfully. Vlynrifane also deflected hers with her shield while Havvah hacked Derivell's specter once again in the back.

²⁵Then Rini's mace came to the rescue once more. Zen reared up, Rini swung hard, and the specter that had injured Eromani just a moment before was no more. Aelun bided his time, launched another fiery bolt, and Bastion kicked a second time. Aelun's shot just barely missed, but Bastion bashed the apparition in the head. Like Rini, the valiant horse ended its "life".

²⁶One specter remained, so Zen lunged for it. This was the one closest to the secret entrance to the lower chamber. As Zen snapped at the ghostly construct, out from the lower tomb came the wraith of Brysis of Khaem. Seeing Rini as her greatest threat, she tried to suck her life from her. But Rini was just a bit more capable than she'd expected. The halfling bashed her spectral hands aside, a look of fierce determination in her eyes. Rini REALLY hated undead.

That was when Fiovey sprang into the air and descended like a bird of prey. 'Take out the minions first,' she thought. 'Then we can all focus on the boss.' And so, she landed behind the last specter, bringing her blades down like a cobra's fangs. She was disappointed in the end, however, to discover that she barely even scratched it.

Shreiken went for Brysis, but he simply couldn't get high enough. Yuk Yuk and Spiderbait thought as Fiovey had. Take out the specter first. Then go for the wraith. This time at least one of the goblins hurt it, or so it seemed, for the creature screamed in pain. This was actually a duet, not a solo, for Eromani hit Brysis at the same time with magic missiles. The wraith was furious, not expecting her victims to be such a threat.

²⁷Vlynrifane managed to scorch the specter with her fiery scimitar, and Graiyla blasted Brysis with Witchbolt, the energy chain presently connecting the two combatants. Then Derivell charged as he uttered a blessing upon his blade. There was a flash of bright light. Brysis screamed both in pain and fear, for it suddenly struck her that she might actually be destroyed. The knight's weapon had not killed her, but it had shaken the magic that was sustaining her to its very core.

²⁴ Specter 1 = 14. Specter 3 = 21, dealing 10 necrotic damage to Eromani. Constitution save, DC 10. Eromani rolled 13. Success. No Max HP drain. Specter 4 = 7. Havvah = 16, dealing 4 damage.

²⁵ Rini = 20, dealing 7 damage, ending Specter 3. Aelun = 11. Bastion = 14, dealing 3 damage, destroying Specter 1.

²⁶ Zen = 11. Brysis = 11. Fiovey = 9 and 20, dealing 1 damage. Shreiken = 5 and 6. Yuk Yuk = 12, dealing 2 damage. Fargas = 9. Eromani = 3+3+4+5=15 force damage for Magic Missile. Spiderbait = 8.

²⁷ Vlynrifane = 16, dealing 4 damage. Graiyla = 17, dealing 4 damage. Derivell = 13, dealing 23 damage to Brysis.

²⁸Nevertheless, all was not lost for the undead. The specter lashed out at Vlynrifane a moment later, bashing her in the left side of the head. The drow druid gasped as she felt some of her life drain away. When she recovered a bit, all could see that her skin was paler, almost white. She was shaking, but she managed to stay on her feet.

²⁹Havvah tried to help her, but she only managed to graze the construct on the left shoulder. Rini took a fierce swing at Brysis, but the wraith deftly avoided the deadly weapon. Zen switched targets, focusing on Brysis as well, and he managed to sink his teeth into her ethereal side. Still, the wraith seemed unharmed.

As for Aelun, he finally found his gap. Weaving in between combatants, he dove into the hole head first, catching the ladder on his way down and righting himself about halfway to the floor of the true tomb of Brysis of Khaem. He landed roughly but without injury, and he hurried to the sarcophagus, hoping there wasn't some sort of trap.

³⁰Brysis saw Aelun's descent, but she was not particularly concerned about him. At present, she had a plethora of enemies who she felt were much bigger threats. He didn't appear to be as dangerous by comparison, even though she knew he might acquire a certain treasure from her sarcophagus that could aid him in killing her. 'If I can kill these first, and raise them as specters, he will be as nothing to me, even with the weapon.'

Then she feigned a swipe at Rini who threw up her shield, just as the evil wraith expected. Brysis then spun and slashed the halfling across the right cheek, leaving what would later become a jagged scar - if she survived. Rini almost fell off of Zen's back, it hurt so much, but she gripped her mount tightly with her knees, holding on with what little strength she had left in her.

That's when the last specter died. Fiovay managed to stab it through the chest with her magic dagger, breaking the spell that sustained it and sending the undead on forever to the afterlife. She then spun and tried to slash Brysis, but the wraith slid sideways effortlessly. Shreiken and Bastion couldn't get in close at that point, for there were too many allies in the way, but Yuk Yuk, Spiderbait and Fargas unleashed a volley of bolts and arrows; though with little effect.

As for Eromani, Mama Bear wasn't holding back. Her little girl was close to death. She could tell. The halfling was quaking with the chills of the grave. That single blow to the face had left her pale and sickly. She was about to drop. There could be no doubt.

³¹So, once again, the sorceress unleashed a barrage of magic missiles. Each one tearing into the vile apparition with the heat of their mistress' vengeance. Brysis screamed like a banshee, her "life" threatening to leave her. Fury and fear kept her there. She refused to be defeated. She refused to be sent to the Hells, for she knew that once she was there, undeath would seem as if it had been a paradise filled with untold pleasures by comparison.

²⁸ Specter 4 = Critical Hit. 13 damage. Constitution save, DC 10. Vlynrifane rolled 3. Failure. Her Max HP was reduced by 13 until the next long rest.

²⁹ Havvah = 19, dealing 5 damage. Rini = 10. Zen = 19, dealing 4 damage. Aelun used Disengage to weave through his companions and down the ladder into the lower tomb chamber.

³⁰ Brysis = 19, dealing 22 damage. Constitution save, DC 14. Rini rolled 10. Failure. Her Max HP was also reduced by 22. Fiovay = 18, dealing 7 damage to Specter 4 and destroying it. She then rolled 11, and missed Brysis. Yuk Yuk = 6. Fargas = 14, dealing 3 damage. Spiderbait = 10.

³¹ Eromani = 2+4+2+5=13 damage from Magic Missile. Vlynrifane = 9. Graiyla's Witchbolt did 6 damage, destroying Brysis. Those that were involved in the fight gained 200 XP each.

Vlynrifane tried to stab with her fiery sword, but she missed. It didn't matter. At that moment, Graiyla set her jaw with determination, and she honed her focus. With everything she had in her, she sent a final surge of electrical energy through the chain connecting her and Brysis. The sheer magnitude of the blast shattered the last fragments of magic that anchored the soul of the ancient Netherese mage to the Material Plane. With a flash, as if a bolt of lightning had struck instead, Brysis was gone.

Eromani ran to Rini and snatched her up, holding her tightly. "Are you okay?" she asked. "Are you okay?" Then she held her at arm's length, Rini's tiptoes barely touching Zen's back.

"Nini," said Rini weakly. "I'm fine. I'm fine." Though she said this, her voice was anything but strong, nor was it confident. She was also still shaking from the trauma. And yet, there was a huge smile on her face. She was happy to see her mother's concern.

Eromani immediately felt foolish for reacting so hysterically, and she set her daughter back on the wolf's back. "I'm sorry," she said awkwardly. "Sorry. I just... It was a wraith. I... Wraiths can... If it'd killed you, it would have made you into a specter, and..."

Rini realized where she was going. "I'd be gone. There'd be no saving me from that. No. Trust me. I understand."

"Me too," said Vlynrifane. She was now resting against the wall in an attempt to recover her senses. "I definitely don't feel well."

"ey!" said Spiderbait. "Look on da broigh' soide, eh? No one doied, an' da curse is lifte'." He paused as he considered this for a moment. "Well. I fink, anyway. Feels loike i'." Neither Rini nor Vlynrifane liked him very much at that moment, and Eromani gave him a scathing look as well.

Meanwhile, Aelun had no idea the fight was finished. He reached the sarcophagus and paused to examine it for traps. There was a thin gold sheath covering it and nothing more. 'Seems just for decoration,' he thought. 'Probably worth a few hundred coins.' Then he quickly pried it loose with his dagger and looked inside.

There was Brysis's withered and mummified corpse. Lying atop her was an ancient, gilded longsword hilt. ³²Aelun didn't recognize it from any books or tomes that he'd read, and he felt himself instantly curious about it. He wanted to know more, but he cast such thoughts from his mind. 'My new companions are in trouble. I need to find the weapon that was calling to me.'

'Thank you!' the woman's voice returned. 'Thank you! You are truly a saint. Dawn has come once more.'

"Please!" said Aelun aloud. "My friends are fighting a wraith. Where are you? How do I use you to kill the wraith?"

'Do not fear, Friend,' she replied, and her voice was serene. 'Stop for a moment and listen. She is gone. Your friends have won.'

³² Arcana check, DC 15. Aelun rolled 6. Failure.

Aelun paused and did as she instructed. Sure enough, he could hear them talking. He left the sarcophagus just to make sure, looking up through the entrance. "Hey!" he called. "Is everyone okay up there? Is the wraith gone?"

As he said this, the door to the tomb slid open allowing Eldeth and those with her to enter. The dwarf and her companions had been pounding and shoving during the entire battle, but the door wouldn't budge. Now, though, when the wraith died, the tomb's magical locks failed. They were able to walk right in.

"Everyone okay? What happened?" asked Eldeth at the same time as Aelun.

Derivell answered her while Fiovay dropped down and joined Aelun. "All good," said the kitsune with a smile. "Ding dong, the wraith is dead, and none of us are. You okay? Did you find anything good?"

She looked around them, taking in the final tomb chamber. She whistled. There were murals on the walls decorated with rich pigments and inlays of semi precious stones. The sarcophagus stood atop a stone bier along the far wall.

"Wow," she said. Then she walked past him to analyze the area for just a few more moments. Finally, she looked over her shoulder at him. "You know, all this gold could really help a lot of families for a long time. This would save so many people who are struggling up there... back home."

Aelun was surprised by this. "You like helping people in need?"

She smiled sweetly. "It's my passion. I take from those who are stingy, greedy, miserly, and abhorrent, and I use it to help those who truly need it. This tomb, and others like it... They sicken me. All this wealth, and what good is it doing here? It's buried with this \$#@ all the way down here in the Underdark just because she thought she was more special than everyone else. Then, just to be a total \$#@, she made herself into a wraith and had specters guarding all of it, just so no one else could use it after she died. Wench!"

Aelun considered this, and he was about to say something when he remembered the weapon. "Well, there's an intelligent weapon down here that shares your sentiment," he said as he returned to the sarcophagus. "She's been trapped down here for who knows how long and all for the reason you just stated."

Fiovay joined him as he peered once more into the extravagant casket. "She?" she asked. Then it dawned on her. "Oh! The female voice who's been calling to us. It wasn't the evil mage wraith lady. It was a weapon?"

Aelun nodded. "But the only thing I can find in here is a hilt." And he gently picked it up, examining it from every angle.

'And so, you have found me,' said the weapon with delight. 'Hello. Allow me to formally introduce myself. I am Dawnbringer; tremendously at your service and ever grateful that you have freed me. PLEASE do not put me back in there, and PLEASE take me with you. I promise you, with every fiber of my being, I am yours. I will serve you fiercely. I will smite your foes on every side, bringing light into darkness and destroying every enemy of the sun.'

Fiovay giggled. Then she shouted back towards the others. "Derivell! We have a new sword for you. I think you and her are going to be the bestest of friends. You'll fit together like two newlyweds on their honeymoon."

Derivell appeared, sticking his head through the hole in the ceiling. "What? What's going on down here? Fi? Is Aelun with you?"

"Yep," said the kitsune. "And BOY have we found something good. It's a weapon..." Then she looked at it and realized that it was just a hilt. "Wait! What the heck? You ain't no weapon. Dawnbringer! You're just a hilt."

Dawnbringer laughed lightly. 'I am a sun blade. Those who are attuned to me, who would wield me as their own, they can summon a blade of pure radiance. I'm rather effective against undead and all those that hate the sun.'

"I hate you right now," said Fiovay. "We REALLY could have used you just now."

"She called to me," said Aelun, a bit sheepishly. "I tried to get down here in time, but it looks like I was a bit too slow."

Derivell then joined them, and the others followed. "What is this about a weapon?" asked the knight.

Aelun held it out for him to see. "It's called Dawnbringer. She's an intelligent blade, a sun blade, and she's the one who has been trapped down here for a long time."

"She LOVES light, Deri-Der," added Fiovay. "She sounds a lot like you. That's why I thought you'd make a great fit."

Derivell took the hilt and examined it. Eromani and Vlynrifane looked over his shoulder as he did so. Then Vlyn said, "You know, you can already infuse your sword with radiance. Although this sword does match your goddess, it somewhat negates your effectiveness."

"How so?" asked Derivell, totally curious as to her reasoning.

Vlynrifane considered how best to explain herself. Then, after a moment, she said, "Why not have two people with radiant blades instead of just one? You can infuse any blade with radiance, so why not let someone else who can't do so use this sword?"

Derivell smiled. "I like the way you think." Then he looked around the group. "Graiyla can infuse her blade with lightning. Eromani has Evronar's Essence."

"Don't remind me," she replied softly.

"Rini has her mace," Derivell continued. "Fiovay prefers daggers. Arla has the warhammer. Eldeth?"

The dwarf shrugged. "Nah. I prefer my bow, actually, to anything else. When I do fight up close, I go with my hammer."

"Vlyn?" asked Derivell.

"You should have asked her first," scolded Fiovey, but she was only kidding. "You met her before Eldeth, so she should get dibs."

Eldeth grunted. "Nice, Fi. Now I know who YOU like better. But that's okay." She pretended to be hurt. "I understand."

Fiovey glared at her through slitted eyes. "Good," she replied, and she stuck her tongue out at her.

Vlynrifane waved the hilt aside. "I use my Flame Blade spell. Your mother's probably the best person for it."

Derivell turned to her and held it out. Havvah regarded it for a moment. Then she said, "Dawnbringer. Who would you choose?"

Dawnbringer's voice made it clear that she was touched by the gesture. "... I don't know what to say," she answered. "I don't recall anyone ever asking me if I wanted them to wield me. Most just decide for me. That is rather commendable of you."

"Does that mean you choose Havvah?" asked Fiovey. "I have to say, that does fit. Havvah's an angel. You're a gleaming sword of the sun. It's like a match made in Heaven. ..."

'But I would choose him,' the sword replied. 'I would choose the one who first removed me from the darkness.'

"Me?" asked Aelun, a bit surprised. "But I am not very proficient with swords. I'm more of a sorcerer and a scholar than a melee fighter."

Eromani grinned as a thought came to her mind. "Child of the New Dawn," she said. "It's appropriate, if you think about it. It's almost like you were destined to find her."

'I don't understand,' said Dawnbringer.

"My name," said Aelun. "The name my adopted mother gave me. Her name was Tilurna, a cleric of Lathander. She called me Aelun, and it means 'Child of the New Dawn'."

'Aelun,' said Dawnbringer. 'Also means 'Child of New Beginnings' or 'Child of Fresh Starts'. Yes! I felt it. I knew it the moment you drew near to the tomb. You say you are not proficient, but you can learn. Can't you? I mean...' She seemed to withdraw her enthusiasm. 'I mean... I'm sorry. I do not mean to impose. If you don't want me...'

Fiovey giggled again. "She sounds like a desperate girl hoping that the boy she's been pining after for ages will marry her at long last." Then she became overly dramatic. "Will you, Aelun? Will you take her? Will you have her? Will you make her your own?"

Aelun actually smiled at this. Then, much to Fiovey's delight, he played along. He was, in no way, very good at being dramatic, but he tried his best. "Okay. Okay. I'll do it. I'll take her." Then he snatched up the hilt from the aasimar.

“Are you saying yes to the Dawnbringer?” asked Fiovey with great vehemence and much clapping. “Are you saying yes? Say yes! Say yes!”

“Yes,” said Aelun, his grin widening. “I already took her. She’s mine now. No one else can have her.”

“Hooray!” cried Fiovey. “And there was much rejoicing. Everyone imagine confetti flying and fireworks exploding.”

“Can we get out of here now?” asked Eldeth. She was only a little amused, but she hid it behind her more prominent emotion; annoyance. “As much fun as this place has been, it seems to be cleaned out, so let’s get back on our way towards Gracklstugh.”

“I agree,” said Arla who was not totally sure that the place was, in fact, cleaned out. “Can we just leave and never think of entering another place like this one ever again?”

“Sure,” said Derivell as he waved for them to follow him to the exit. “Let’s meet back up with the others at the entrance, rest a bit, and head out.”

“Do we need to rest for the night?” asked Eromani as she followed them. “Rini and Vlyn might need to recover from the life drains.”

“I don’t want to,” said Rini. “I don’t want to waste an entire day like that. We need to keep moving. Who knows how far behind Jorlan and Asha are?”

“She has a point,” said Vlyn, “and I agree. We’ll be fine.”

Aelun was about to join them, but he noticed that Fiovey wasn’t budging. He paused. “You okay?” he asked. “Something wrong?”

Fiovey gestured around her. “Yeah,” she replied. “They’re just leaving. We cleaned out this place of evil, and they’re just leaving the treasure. Heck no. They’re going to rest a bit before leaving. I’m staying and properly cleaning out the place. Wanna join me?”

Aelun considered it and said, “Okay. Sure. Good point. We found Dawnbringer in here. Who knows what other relics we might find that could help us get out of the Underdark?” Then he looked back towards the ladder. “Shouldn’t we tell them, though?”

Fiovey shrugged. “Nah. They probably won’t even miss us, and if they do, it won’t take them long to find us. The tomb’s actually not all that big.”

Aelun considered it just a few seconds longer. Then, he said, “All right,” and he gestured for her to lead the way.

It wasn’t long before she found an invisible chest at the foot of the sarcophagus. It was unlocked, and it contained four thousand silver pieces, twelve hundred gold, eleven zircons worth fifty gold each, a necklace that Aelun identified as being able to cast fireballs, a philter of love, and a potion of greater healing.

After taking everything, they made their way back into the previous room and looted all the sarcophagi of the guardians. Within, they found two gold bracelets worth fifty gold, a ceremonial

wand (non magical) made of chiseled ivory that was worth twenty five gold, an onyx ring worth fifty gold, a silver necklace set with two azurites and a carnelian worth roughly two hundred and fifty, a ewer made of beaten gold worth twenty-five, a gold censer with platinum filigree worth two hundred and fifty, and a walking stick worth seventy-five. The walking stick was made of varnished yew with a golden handle shaped like a scorpion.

"A tidy score, to say the least," said Fiovay when they were finished. "Thanks for helping."

"It was quite rewarding," said Aelun who now had Dawnbringer fastened at his right hip and the necklace of fireballs around his neck. The necklace had nine beads in total. "These will especially come in quite handy."

"This too," said Fiovay with a wink as she held up the philter of love. "A few drops of this, Aelun, and whoever I desire won't be able to keep their hands off me." She then blew a kiss at him.

He raised an eyebrow in return, still completely oblivious to her advances. "Just be careful what you wish for," he replied with a slightly amused look on his face. "And don't accidentally put it in the wrong cup or dish. Can you imagine? What if you used it on one of the goblins? Or worse! What if you used it on that really crabby drow guy with the red sores?" He shuttered and laughed as he made his way towards the exit.

Fiovay's playfulness died as she trailed behind him. "Thanks for that imagery," she said sarcastically. Then, sensing the moment had been utterly mutilated, she decided to shift directions. "I was also thinking that this is perfect timing. We'll need a lot to barter with when we encounter the duergar at Gracklstugh. Right? If we want to gain their help to get out of the Underdark... Money talks, after all."

He nodded. "Good thinking. You're pretty smart, Fiovay. I'm so glad to be a part of your party."

Her smile returned, along with a blush. "Glad to have you too, Aelun. And thanks. I'm happy that you think I'm pretty and smart."

He chuckled and shook his head, but once again he didn't take the bait. He just kept silent until, less than twenty seconds later, they were outside where their friends were waiting for them.

Chapter 5: Finally Getting Somewhere

³³The party rested only a short while. Then they set out once more for Gracklstugh. Fortunately, the remainder of the day was uneventful, and they made fairly good progress. They avoided getting lost, again with the help of the map, and they found a quiet resting place inside a dark cave. Just outside, the larger cavern beyond was filled with faerzress, providing a “natural” light so that they didn’t have to use any spells.

³⁴The next day, Yuk Yuk and Spiderbait informed everyone that their amusement had reached its end. After the tomb, the pair had debated about how everyone was much more cautious than the goblins had initially believed. They’d only been continuing with the party because they thought there was going to be much more excitement.

But the fun had worn off. “Soirry,” said Yuk Yuk. “But yous guys is borin’ now. Nuffin’s ‘appenin’, an’ even when i’ does, yous ge’s all nervous and scared.”

“Yeah,” said Spiderbait. “Don’ loike ta take no chances.” Then he made a farting sound and stuck his thumbs downward.

“So we’ll be takin’ our leave,” said Yuk Yuk. “If’n ya make yer way back through the Silken Paths, look us up. Maybe we can ‘ave some fun again. Til then. See ya!”

The party wished them well, and continued on. After about an hour or so, Vlynrifane confessed, “I miss them. I never thought I would, but I do.”

“Me too,” said Fiovay. “They had spirit.”

“I can’t say that I do,” said Eldeth. “They smelled and they were a bit too reckless for my tastes.”

“Agreed,” said Sarith moodily, and that’s all he said about it.

“I’m sorry, Vlyn,” said Derivell sympathetically. Then he smirked. When he spoke again, he was doing his best Yuk Yuk impersonation. It wasn’t very good, but that made the drow druid and a few others laugh all the more. “Bu’ ya knows. Gobwins is a doime a dozen, dey is. A doime a dozen. Maybe we’ll run into a few mores ‘afore we reach da surface. Eh?”

“ROIGH!” said Fiovay, enjoying his good humor. “‘e’s roigh’, ya know. ‘Afore long, we’ll be in deep, an’ da’s when POOF! Gobbos’ll pop up outta nowheres, an’ we’ll ‘ave our pick o’ da li”er.”

Not for the first time, Sarith shook his head. “Idiots,” he muttered.

³³ During the short rest before leaving the tomb, Eromani used 2 Hit Dice to heal 9 HP, almost healing her to full. Rini only had 9 HP remaining, and she couldn’t heal because of Life Drain, and Vlynrifane had 14 HP remaining, also unable to heal because of Life Drain. After setting out, a Survival check was made to determine if the party got lost, DC 10. Rolled 10. Success. Rolled Random Encounters. 4. No Random Encounter while they traveled that day. 19 days remained until Gracklstugh.

³⁴ Survival check, DC 10. Rolled 5 with advantage. Party got lost for (1d6) 3 hours. Rolled Nat 20 with advantage. Party resumed journey. Random Encounter Roll = 14. Random Encounter occurs. Rolled 9 on Terrain Encounters chart. Lava Swell.

Not long after this, they became lost for roughly three hours. After which, they found their way once more due to a particular symbol on the map that matched a rock formation in one of the caverns they entered. Things were going pretty well until, around midday, a tremor shook one of the passages they were in. It reminded them of the incident that took Ilna's life. The ground split open, and lava spewed upward. ³⁵Zen and Arla passed out from the sheer intensity of the heat, and several others suffered as well. Rini, however, used Cure Wounds to restore them to health.

Not long after, they took a rest near an underground river, ate a few mushrooms they found, and recovered from the event. Then they set out. ³⁶The remainder of that day went well, and they stopped for the night at the edge of a small lake. They camped far enough away from it to ensure that nothing would ambush them, but they were close enough that they could easily wander down to the edge and fill their containers with water. They also found a plethora of mushrooms, and they stocked up on them to use as food.

"Not that we don't appreciate the berries, Vlyn," said Rini. "But by the gods! We've been eating your magic berries for weeks. Mushrooms! Lots of mushrooms! Maybe we can even cook 'em and have a decent meal for once." And that they did, and they had plenty of roasted mushrooms left over to last them for days.

In the morning, they reached a crossroads, and the map guided them on through a passage just under a massive mushroom that rose a good hundred feet into the air. The cavern was huge, and they were grateful that they knew to take the path "2nd to shroom's right". About an hour later, they entered a small den that held two beholders, and Havvah and Eromani were about to attack when Fiovay and Vlynrifane sprang into their direct paths.

"Wait!" cried the kitsune. "We've encountered this before. Remember? They're not beholders. They're gas spores."

Sure enough. The beholders didn't attack. Eromani sighed in relief. "Almost made a serious mistake," she replied. "Good catch." A short ways later, they rested again for the night without incident.

³⁷The next day, they encountered a small deep gnome caravan. "Merchants?" asked Arla, a bit surprised. A few of them were riding on giant lizard mounts laden with wares.

³⁵ Dex save, DC 10. Derivell = 12, Eromani = 18 with disadvantage, Rini = 7, Zen = 4, Vlynrifane = 3, Shreiken = 20, Fiovay = 18, Arla = 4, Havvah = 13, Aelun = 12, Hemeth = 17, Graiyla = 13, Bastion = 11, Anarillia = 12, Topsy = 22, Turvy = 8, Sarith = 12, Fargas = 4, Eldeth = 11, and Dalazaril = 12. Everyone who failed received 22 fire damage. Fortunately, the Life Drain had worn off of Rini and Vlynrifane. Zen and Arla were rendered unconscious, but Rini was able to heal them with her spells. Fargas had 5 HP remaining. Turvy had 11 HP remaining.

³⁶ Survival check, DC 10. Rolled 13 with advantage. They didn't get lost. Random Encounter = 15. Rolled 14 on Terrain Encounter. Shelter. The party finds a good spot to rest without threat of Random Encounter. 18 days remained until Gracklstugh. Survival check, DC 10. Rolled 22, 16, and 11 with advantage. They didn't get lost. Random Encounter = 16. Creature Encounter = 6. Fungi. Rolled 2 and 2. 2 Gas Spores. Nature check, DC 15. Derivell = 15, Eromani = 14, Fiovay = 21, Rini = 16, Vlynrifane = 21, Havvah = 5. Random Encounter = 1. No encounter. 17 days remained until Gracklstugh.

³⁷ Survival check, DC 10. Rolled 17, 13, and 16. They didn't get lost. Random Encounter = 16, 19, 1 and 4. 4 Deep Gnome Traders. The party gains Inspiration.

"The Underdark has them too," said Dalazaril casually. "How do you think civilizations thrive down here without trade?"

"Do you think they'll tell anyone where we are?" asked Eromani.

"Always a chance," said Sarith.

"But I doubt the svirfneblin will offer up the information willingly," added Dalazaril.

"This could be a good opportunity to sell a bunch of our stuff," said Fiovay. "That way we don't have to lug it around anymore. We might be able to get some good supplies too. Maybe we can enhance our quality of life a bit?"

Derivell looked around to gauge everyone's responses. No one seemed to mind the idea. And so, they approached. The deep gnomes were more than happy to barter, and in the end, the party was quite happy for it. Besides getting rid of a lot of gear they didn't need, Rini acquired a Raise Dead scroll. Gaiyla got a suit of half plate armor and a heavy crossbow. Fiovay got a few more thieves' tools to ensure that if hers broke, she'd have spares, and she also purchased a second magic dagger.

Besides this, she bought more oil for her lantern, and she smiled at Rini as she did so. "No more darkness, if we don't want it."

Rini looked quite relieved. "It's the little things..." she replied.

Meanwhile, Arla and Havvah convinced the group to buy them some much needed upgrades. They both acquired plate armor and heavy crossbows, and Havvah found a magic greatsword that called to her.

After this, they purchased a good deal of water and food so that they were set for the remainder of their journey to the duergar city. This was a great relief to them, for they now had cooking utensils and pots and pans, spices and ingredients so that they could make "real food". Indeed, it was just as Rini had said. It was the little things that mattered. This improved their morale a hundredfold. They didn't have a whole lot of money afterwards, but they didn't care.

³⁸That night, the road led them to a smaller version of the Silken Paths. A larger cavern was laced with webs. Fortunately, no spiders lurked in the area, and the party lit torches and set fire to everything in their way. This made short work of the obstacles in their path, allowing them to pass freely.

Along the way, they spotted three drow meandering through the web-filled zone. Each was wearing packs laden with supplies. They, like the party, were working their way through, but they were hacking instead of burning. As they approached, the group doused their torches and hid. Vlynrifane transformed into a giant spider, and she weaved some webbing to help cover her companions from view. Then she made some movements so that she could be seen by the drow who gladly worked their way around her in hopes of avoiding being her next meal.

³⁸ Random Encounter = 20, 20, 20, 6, 2, and 3. Webs and 3 Drow Traders. No spiders. 16 days remained until Gracklstugh.

³⁹The next day was completely uneventful, but the day after that, they rounded the bend in a tunnel and found themselves face to face with more than a dozen giant fire beetles. The creatures were scouring for food, and when they spotted the travelers, they assumed they would make for some tasty meals. They were hardly a threat, and the party dispatched of them before they even drew close.

That night, Arla noticed that Graiyla was looking a bit uneasy and had been for some time. And so, she sat down next to her. "What's up?" she asked. "You've seemed a on edge lately. You okay?"

Graiyla seemed unsure as to whether she should share, but Arla's innocent expression won her over. After a few seconds of inner turmoil, she replied, "I... I've been feeling like we're being followed. I don't think it's the drow either. It's..."

"Do you think it's the demons?" asked Arla, concerned. "Shouldn't we warn the others?"

Graiyla shook her head. "It's not Miralin and Habrax. Well, I don't think it is. No. I think it's... HIM."

Arla misunderstood immediately. "HIM?" she gasped. "Do you mean... Demogorgon?"

Graiyla almost burst out laughing. "No! Gods! I'd certainly have told everyone if I thought HE was chasing us. Sorry. No. I mean my stalker. I'm talking about the fiend who was... WITH me. Ky'jim."

"The nasty, black shadow creature that came out of you?" asked Arla. She winced. "Why do you think he's so attached to you? What does he want with you?"

Graiyla shrugged. "I'm not sure, to be quite honest. He's just always been with me ever since... ever since my family died."

"What happened?" asked Arla. Then she realized that she might be intruding on Graiyla's personal life, and she backpedaled. "I mean... If you don't want to tell me..."

Graiyla considered it and shrugged. Arla was sweet. She had proven time and time again that she had no agendas. She was just trying to survive, and Graiyla was frankly quite impressed by just how far she'd come in such a short time. Besides, it felt good to finally let go for once. It felt good to trust someone.

"Don't worry about it. I don't mind," said Graiyla. "I mean, I think I previously told some of what happened. The long and short of it is, for the first six years of my life, I lived in a small village near Hillsfar."

"Oh. In the Dales. Right?" asked Arla.

³⁹ Survival check, DC 10. 16, 14, and 17. Success. Random Encounters = 8 and 1. No random encounters. 15 days remained until Gracklstugh. Survival check, DC 10. 12, 18, and 17. They didn't get lost. Random Encounter = 16, 8 and 15. 15 Giant Fire Beetles. The party killed them before they even got a chance to attack. Therefore, I did not include the combat here. Random Encounter = 5. No encounter that night. 14 days remained until Gracklstugh.

"Right," said Graiyla. "It's on the southern coast of the Moonsea. My family and I did everything in our power to integrate into normal society away from the trappings of our race - for my parents were rebels, refusing to live any longer as demon worshipers."

"Then IT happened. I don't even know what IT actually was. Our village was attacked by some monstrous serpent demon-thing that was merciless and unstoppable. We tried to escape, but it found us. It sought us out, and it killed my parents right before my eyes. It came for me. It should have killed me."

"But SOMETHING attacked it. SOMETHING with me or IN me lashed out at it. I still do not know much about it - about HIM. All I know is that the vicious beast that slaughtered my parents and my village was grievously wounded by him. It fled from me. It fled from that thing that the fiends called Ky'jim."

"Since that day, I have been alone. Ky'jim has been my only companion. I called him my 'Guardian Devil', for it seemed that he was anything but an angel and yet he protected me. Still, he asked for nothing in return, and he has saved my life more than a few times. He used to speak to me too, and I would talk to him. Sometimes, people would see me and think I was crazy, for he never showed himself unless it was to save me. Until recently, he never left me."

"Do you know who is responsible for the snake-demon attack?" asked Arla.

Graiyla shook her head. "I can only assume it was someone from my own people who was seeking revenge against my parents for their rebellion. It doesn't matter, though. I have chosen the life of a blood hunter; a demon hunter. Because of all I have been through, I will spend the rest of my days destroying the monsters that ruined my life so that they do not ruin the lives of others."

"I was seeking out one such demon in the Underdark here, one who might know more about my past, when the drow from Velkynvelve found me," she concluded. "I'm hoping to still track it down. I WILL make it talk. It will tell me more about the snake-demon that wiped out my home all those years ago. Then... I will end it."

"Was it one of the demons we've met already, or have we not run into it yet?" asked the former glassblower.

Graiyla sighed. "So far, I haven't seen it. It's supposed to be some sort of shapeshifter, though. I have been afraid that it may have taken the form of someone or something else."

"Like it could be one of the members of our group?" asked Arla. She was a little frightened to hear this.

Graiyla nodded. "That's why I've been reserved. That's why I have a hard time trusting people. And yet, I know what the signs are to watch out for. Demons might be able to fake being nice and such for a time, but eventually their true natures start to seep out."

"So far, I haven't seen anyone who is traveling with us who fits. Also, I have what some refer to as 'Hunter's Bane'. This allows me to track fiends and such with a sort of supernatural instinct. They can't surprise me, and I'm like a bloodhound. I can smell them a mile away. I mean, it's not full proof, but it's hard for a fiend to get the drop on me."

“That’s awesome!” said Arla. “So, you don’t think I’m a fiend?”

Graiyla laughed. “You’d be a REALLY good, deceptive fiend if you were.”

And that was the end of their conversation. It was interrupted by Rini who brought dinner over to them. Then the group enjoyed a nice rest and set out again the following day. ⁴⁰At the end of the day, they passed through another faerzress-suffused area containing fist-sized chunks of quartz that gave off a dim glow, and they decided to camp there.

⁴¹But their sleep was disturbed by Vlynrifane who gave a quick cry of alarm when she saw six goblins slip from one cluster of crystals to another. The party immediately jumped to their feet, weapons ready, and the goblins cowered before them. A quick discussion with the intruders revealed that they were former slaves who had escaped from Gracklstugh and had been wandering for days scouring for food and water. They were hoping to steal it from the party while they slept, but Vlynrifane had thwarted their plans.

Derivell shared some of his own rations with them, and the creatures turned from fearful to thankful in moments. As they were hurrying away, though, Aelun thought he heard one of them call the aasimar a sucker. The young sorcerer let it go. ‘No sense in tarnishing the knight’s views. He’s one of the noblest people I’ve ever met. I’d hate to see him turn into anything but,’ he thought.

⁴²The next day, the journey was momentarily paused when they came upon a fifty-ish foot high cliff. At the top was a rope ladder all rolled up. Vlynrifane easily climbed as a spider, and she knocked the rope ladder down for everyone to use. Within a few moments, they were well on their way.

⁴³Around mid-afternoon on the following day, Fiovey suddenly stepped on a crack just as hot steam erupted out of it. Fortunately, she was nimble enough to dive and roll in time, so she avoided any real harm coming to her. The day after that, they came upon a band of goblin raiders who thought twice about meddling with a well armed and sizable group such as theirs. The party outnumbered them more than three to one, so they fled.

A few more days came and went, and the party encountered very little opposition. When they were roughly five days from Gracklstugh, according to the map, Eromani awoke that morning and suddenly realized that she felt better. The illness that she’d been suffering from because of summoning her father was finally gone.

⁴⁰ Survival check, DC 10. 10, 10 and 11. Success. Random Encounters = 9, 19, 3, 5, 4 and 6. They encountered Crystal Clusters and 6 Goblin Slaves. 13 days remained until Gracklstugh.

⁴¹ Stealth check, DC 15. Goblins rolled 15, 6, 13, 19, 8 and 8. Vlynrifane spotted all but 2.

⁴² Survival check, DC 10. 20, 12, and 13. Success. Random Encounter = 18, 2, 4 and 4. Cliff and Ladder, and Goblin Slaves. Since I already did Goblin Slaves, I decided to ignore that roll and just went with the Cliff and Ladder encounter. Random Encounter = 10. No encounter that night. 12 days remained until Gracklstugh.

⁴³ Survival check, DC 10. 15, 10 and 9. Rolled 2. The party was lost for 2 hours and found their way again with a roll of 10. Random Encounter = 15 and 17. Steam Vent. Dex save, DC 12. Fiovey rolled 14. Success. Random Encounter = 13. No encounter that night. 11 days remained until Gracklstugh. Survival check, DC 10. 17, 11, and 16. Success. Random Encounter = 17, 15, 4 and 6. 6 Goblin Raiders and 1 Goblin Boss. Random Encounter = 16 and 7. Fungi. I ignored this encounter for fear of redundancy. And, after this, I decided to ignore all future rolls, for I was losing interest in the excessive random encounters. 10 days remained until Gracklstugh.

"Thank the gods!" said Rini as she cooked breakfast. "I was beginning to think it was never going away."

"You and me both," replied the sorceress. "At least I have a better idea, now, what the price is for summoning him. It's no fun, to say the least. I fully intend on avoiding it as much as possible. It sucks being sick for weeks."

"I bet," said the halfling with a cheery smile. "Well, I tell you, Nini. Things have been really looking up for us. I feel like we're finally getting somewhere. You know? Ever since we left the Silken Paths, we've made some REALLY good progress. I mean, we're only days from Gracklstugh, and quite honestly, the journey since the tomb hasn't been so bad. It's actually been kinda nice. I've even gotten used to the dark - well, more used to it anyway - especially since we have other light sources that we use from time to time."

Eromani was relieved to see her more like her old self. "Glad to hear it," she said. "I hope you continue to feel this way. The atmosphere always feels lighter when you're happy."

Rini handed her a bowl of mushroom soup. "You too, you know."

Habrax snorted as he watched the scene from the shadows higher up on the cavern wall. "Gods, they can be so revolting."

"You're the one who wants to 'dominate' her," replied Miralin who crouched next to him.

"I want to control her and her father," said Habrax. "There's a difference. Of course, having my way with her is a perk. She IS rather attractive, and I don't need to put up with her grating personality while I'm having a little fun."

"True," said Miralin. Then she paused to consider something else. "They're stronger now. Have you noticed?"

Habrax scowled. "The Underdark has a way of either killing a person or refining them into a more powerful weapon. Frankly, this is good for me. I need her a bit stronger but not too strong. Strong enough to more effectively control her father, but weak enough that I can control her." He sighed. "I was hoping, though, that she'd still be sick by the time we spring our trap. She'd have been easier to seduce."

Miralin nodded. "True, but we needed the drow to maneuver into place to provide the proper distraction. Don't worry, we can still weaken her before you attack. If the drow and their poisoned bolts don't do it, I've got a few spells."

"I truly hope this works, Miralin," Habrax growled. "I don't want another disaster like the Sharran fortress or Darklake."

"Don't remind me," she replied, scowling. "Come on. Let's remain focused on the task at hand." Then she turned and began to walk away.

He joined her, following a few paces behind. "Oh, I am focused," he said. "This time, I will NOT let Eromani get away."

Giant Fire Beetles



Chapter 6: Night and Day

⁴⁴Chanting! Darkness! Not even the light from Derivell's sword and Rini's bow could penetrate it. Explosions followed. An eruption occurred. The world around them shook. Dust choked them. Missiles flew. Someone fell. Havvah shouted. Chaos reigned.

⁴⁵Instinctively, Aelun drew Dawnbringer, igniting the blade and holding it aloft. The darkness fled as quickly as it appeared revealing a bloody quaggoth that was battling Graiyla, Arla, Fiovey, Derivell (who was presently mounted on Bastion), Havvah and Eldeth. They were all at the front. Another quaggoth already lay dead at Havvah's feet.

Near Aelun, Vlynrifane lay unconscious with Shreiken standing on her chest protectively. Anarillia was clutching a crossbow bolt which was sticking out of her left shoulder. She was sitting and crying out in agony. With the darkness lifted, Eromani, Rini and Zen sprang into action, leaving his side.

Behind, the fifteen-foot wide valley they were passing through was completely barred by boulders. Smoke and dust were rising from there and from ledges on either side that were roughly thirty feet above. It was clear, explosions had created an avalanche that had sealed off their escape. Sarith and Dalazaril were near this location, choking but searching for a way out - or maybe for enemies.

Then he noticed that the bulk of the enemies were on the ridges. Roughly a dozen drow were firing upon them from behind cover. Besides them, a scarred drow male was crouched behind a

⁴⁴ Surprise Round. Asha casts Darkness. Elite 1 = 12 because of disadvantage due to Darkness against Derivell. Elite 2 = Crit Miss against Eromani. Elite 3 = Crit Miss against Rini. Elite 4 = 9 against Fiovey. Drow 1 and Drow 2 lit the explosives, creating a cave-in thirty feet behind the party. Drow 3 = 7 against Hemeth. Drow 4 = 14 against Fargas, dealing 3 damage. Constitution save, DC 13. Fargas rolled 19. Success. Drow 5 = Crit Miss against Turvy. Drow 6 = 19 against Anarillia, dealing 3 damage. Constitution save, DC 13. Anarillia rolled 15. Success. Drow 7 = 16 against Vlynrifane, dealing 7 damage. Constitution save, DC 13. Vlynrifane rolled 7. She fell unconscious. Drow 8 = 16 against Graiyla and missed. Jorlan = 11 against Rini and missed. Round 2. Asha cast Guiding Bolt at Rini = 15. Miss. Graiyla couldn't see and rushed forward out of the magical darkness. Then she cast Witchbolt on Asha = 18, dealing 6 damage. Concentration check, DC 10. Asha = 12. Success. Eldeth joined her and also fired at Asha. Eldeth = Crit Miss and Crit Hit, dealing 8 damage. Concentration check, DC 10. Asha = 15. Success. Sarith ran back the way they had come and took no action. All opponents were in hidden. Quaggoth 1 = Crit Miss and 9 against Graiyla. Quaggoth 2 = 17 and 23 against Eldeth, dealing 12 damage. Topsy ran to the cavern wall and crouched. Derivell rushed forward and joined Graiyla and Eldeth while riding atop Bastion. He attacked Quaggoth 2 = 17, dealing 1 damage with Smite. Dalazaril joined Sarith, taking no action. Shreiken hovered over Vlynrifane protectively, taking no action. Havvah joined Derivell attacking Quaggoth 2 = 24, dealing 14 damage using Distracting Strike. She uses Action Surge and attacks again. She rolled 18, dealing 16 damage and killing it. She used Maneuvering Attack, allowing Graiyla to withdraw from Quaggoth 1 as a reaction without provoking an attack. Arla ran up to Graiyla and attacked Quaggoth 1 = 4. Miss. Action Surge = 21, dealing 5 damage.

⁴⁵ I have considered Dawnbringer a magic item emitting magical sunlight that is stronger than a 2nd level spell, since Daylight is a 3rd level spell. The Darkness spell says that it blocks nonmagical light, but Dawnbringer is magical light. Also, Dawnbringer's description specifically describes it as a Legendary weapon that is "meant to bring light into darkness and to fight creatures of darkness." This, to me, implies that unless it is truly powerful magic, Dawnbringer can defeat the darkness. Round 2. Elite 1 = 19 without disadvantage against Derivell. Miss. Elite 2 = 9 still with disadvantage against Eromani. Miss. Elite 3 = 12 against Rini. Elite 4 = 13 against Fiovey. Miss. Fiovey rushed out of the darkness and attacked Quaggoth 1 = 13 and 23, dealing 17 damage.

stalagmite just at the edge of Dawnbringer's light. Near him was a female, a priestess of Lolth. She looked like she'd taken an arrow to the right arm, and lightning was shooting from Graiyla up to her, crackling violently.

Aelun willed for Dawnbringer to increase her radiance, and the light of the sun blazed in the Underdark. The drow, being sensitive to it, recoiled, as did Hemeth. ⁴⁶The duergar hurled a javelin at a soldier that was firing at him, but his aim was way off. The brightness that had exploded to life was just as bad for him as the magical darkness that had engulfed them moments before. The javelin bounced off a stalagmite and clattered to the floor.

Just then, Sarith gasped as a bolt grazed him. Hemeth growled as another sliced through his left leg. And much to everyone's dismay, Anarillia took a second bolt to the chest. She fell backward at an odd angle, smashing her skull. A pool of blood began to quickly form.

Meanwhile, Fargas slipped into the shadows behind Bastion. Then he shot Asha. The priestess staggered and started to make her way back towards the safety of Jorlan's stalagmite, but Eromani finished her off with a magic missile. Asha dropped like a stone, vanishing from sight and ending Graiyla's Witch Bolt. A second later, the last three missiles the sorceress had launched struck Jorlan in the side.

⁴⁷As for Rini, she only cared at that moment about the fact that Anarillia had been shot in the heart. She lay dead on the ground, her soul beginning to depart from her body. The halfling dropped off of Zen's back and whipped out a Revivify scroll as she ran to the woman's side. Then she fell to her knees, ripped the bolts out of her, unrolled the scroll, and quickly chanted the words on the parchment. Willing Anarillia back to life with everything she had in her, and praying Mielikki would hear her, Rini was rewarded when the words on the page faded, the scroll crumpled to dust, and life poured back into the poor elf's body.

At the same time, Jorlan darted from cover, popped the cork on a healing potion, administered it to Asha, and he danced back behind the stalagmite. All this he did with incredible speed before anyone could react. With Asha lying there and still out of sight, both were no longer targets, at least for the moment.

Therefore, Graiyla turned towards the quaggoth and slashed with everything she had. Blood spewed everywhere as lightning coursed through the creature's body. It staggered but didn't fall until an arrow from Eldeth's bow thunked into its forehead. The dwarf then spun and fired up at the drow that had temporarily killed Anarith, clipping him in the shoulder and forcing him back behind the boulder he was using as cover.

⁴⁶ Hemeth = 11 with disadvantage from sun sensitivity from Dawnbringer. Drow 1 = 18 against Sarith, dealing 6 damage. Sarith rolled 16 to resist poison. Drow 2 = 12 against Dalazaril. Drow 3 = 17 against Hemeth, dealing 4 damage. Hemeth resisted with a 20. Drow 4 = 9 against Fargas. Drow 5 = 6 against Turvy. Drow 6 = 15 against Anarillia, dealing 6 damage and killing her. Drow 7 = 11 against Eromani. Drow = Crit Miss against Graiyla. Fargas = 18 with advantage for hiding. 10 damage with Sneak Attack. Turvy = 19, dealing 8 damage to Drow 5. Eromani = 5 off Asha, finishing her, and 9 off Jorlan.

⁴⁷ Rini rolled Nat 20 to cast Revivify. Jorlan rolled 12 to heal Asha. Graiyla = 23, dealing 20 with Crimson Rite and Menacing attack. Quaggoth 1 resisted with 20 Wisdom save. Eldeth = 18, dealing 9 damage, killing Quaggoth 1. Eldeth = 23, dealing 4 to Drow 6.

⁴⁸That's when Derivell cried, "Attack my target!" and within a few seconds, he hung his shield onto his saddle, sheathed his blade, grabbed his crossbow, aimed and fired at one of the soldiers that was attacking Eromani. His bolt stuck in the warrior's armored shoulder, forcing him to lurch to the side. This exposed his chest, making him a bigger target. Havvah's bolt zinged past him, but Arla's punched through his breastplate. He died instantly.

⁴⁹"Dowse that \$#@ \$ \$#@ \$ light!" cried one of the elite drow in elvish, but fortunately most of his companions had already fired at others. Aelun danced to the side, narrowly avoiding the man's bolt.

Suddenly, Fiovey cast a spell and bounded up a good five to ten feet onto the side of a fifteen-foot tall stalagmite. As her feet connected, she used it as a springboard and leapt another five-ish feet onto a narrow ledge on the side of the ridge. As soon as she landed, she sprinted a short distance and sprang ten feet up, planted her feet against the side of a rocky outcropping, and bounded yet another four to five feet onto another ledge. From there, she leapt five more feet along the wall and up the remaining distance onto the ridge near the fallen priestess and her protector.

Aelun was truly amazed by the kitsune, but Dawnbringer snapped him back to reality. "Your drow companion is unconscious. I think it's poison. I can cure her. Quick! Touch the hilt to her." Then Aelun did as he was told. He dropped down next to Vlynrifane and held the sword to her shoulder. There was a flash of light, and Vlynrifane's eyes opened. She blinked a few times in an effort to get her bearings. Shreiken hopped up and down happily, grateful that his master was okay. Then Aelun helped her to her feet.

⁵⁰A bolt zinged past him. He jumped in fright and dove to the side, taking Vlynrifane with him. The soldiers were doing just as the elite had instructed. They were aiming at Aelun to try to snuff out Dawnbringer's light. All at once, bolt after bolt was whizzing past him. Each time, he barely dove and rolled out of the way, and Vlyn and Shreiken did the same. One managed to graze the sorcerer's right leg, just below the knee, but fortunately it wasn't enough to take him down.

Fargas noticed this shift in the enemy's tactics, and he quickly aimed for the closest soldier. This was one that Turvy had injured just a few seconds earlier. The gnome was reloading and just about to shoot again. The dark elf fired at Aelun and was about to duck back behind cover when the halfling put a bolt in his stomach. The man doubled over and collapsed. Turvy saw him fall, and he tried to switch targets too quickly. As a result, his shot went wide.

⁴⁸ Sarith = 10. Topsy = 6. Derivell = 18, dealing 7 to Drow 7. Dalazaril = 7. Havvah = 10. Arla = 16, dealing 6 and killing Drow 7.

⁴⁹ Elite 1 = 13. Elite 2 = 10. Elite 3 = 18. Elite 4 = 13, switching to attacking Aelun. Fiovey cast Jump using an Action and then Dash as a Bonus Action. Her High Jump is normally 3, and her Long Jump 10. Thus, her distances were tripled to 9 and 30. She ran 5 feet, jumped up 9 feet onto a stalagmite that was actually 15 feet in the air. She rolled 15 for Athletics, DC 15. Success. From there, she jumped 5 feet to the rock wall, landing on a ledge 4 more feet up. She rolled a 13 for Athletics, DC 10. Running along the ledge another 5 feet, she jumped up 9 feet, sprang off a rocky outcropping, and bounded up another 4 feet onto yet another ledge. Athletics roll, DC 15. She rolled 1 and used Inspiration to roll a 20. From that ledge, she bounded 5 feet along the wall and 4 feet up, landing on the path the drow were on. Athletics 14, DC 10. Hemeth = Crit Miss.

⁵⁰ Drow 1 = 11. Drow 2 = 6. Drow 3 = 10. Drow 4 = 7. Drow 5 = 10. Drow 6 = 16, dealing 3 damage. Aelun rolled 20 to resist poison. Drow 8 = 6. Fargas = 21, dealing 6 damage and killing Drow 5. Turvy = 13. Rini healed Aelun 8 HP to full.

Eromani decided to try to join Fiovay on the ridge. She ran and jumped, snagged the rock wall and cast Levitate on herself even as she climbed. In a flash, she was at the top, pulling herself over the edge. Aelun barely had the presence of mind to realize that she had done this, for all at once Rini was grabbing his leg and healing his injury. The cleric then pulled out her shield and shouted, "Derivell! Help! Protect Aelun!"

⁵¹Anarillia saw that bolts were raining down far too close to her, and so she scrambled away, crawling towards the rock wall near Topsy and Turvy to cower in fear. As she did, Jorlan lunged out at Fiovay, hoping to protect Asha who was still on the ground. He took two quick thrusts at her with his shortsword, but Dawnbringer's light blinded him, throwing off his accuracy.

Then Asha clipped off the words of a spell, and all at once devilish ghosts swirled about her, attacking Fiovay. The kitsune lashed out at them with her daggers, but it was no use. They continued to touch her with their ghoulish hands, sending painful, icy chills through her body.

As this was happening, Graiyla also decided to scale the cliff in hopes of joining Eromani and Fiovay. Like the sorceress, she ran and jumped up. However, unlike the mage, she had to manually work her way to the top. Still, there were many hand and footholds, allowing her to make her way relatively easily.

While this was happening, Eldeth shot and killed one of the drow. Then she spun and aimed for a second. This one she also put an arrow in, almost dealing a kill shot. The arrow stuck out of the man's chest, and he gripped it with one hand as he leaned heavily against a stalagmite. Sarith saw this as a prime opportunity to hit the same target, but the accursed light of Dawnbringer played tricks on him just like the rest of his kind.

Derivell heard Rini's cry, and he quickly reevaluated the situation. There were two elite on either ridge. On the ridge with Asha and Jorlan, there was also one more common soldier. Four regulars were on the far side, so if he rode up to Aelun and provided cover from those in Asha and Jorlan's location, there would be a total of six able to hit Aelun from the other direction.

And so, he rode up to the young man and positioned himself between him and those on the far ridge. Then he fired his crossbow at one, slung it quickly over his shoulder, and he drew his shield. The horse wasn't providing total cover, but it was mostly shielding Aelun with its body.

As a result, though, Dawnbringer's light was blocked from that side of the battlefield. The drow were no longer bathed in it. Neither was Dalazaril or Sarith, for they quickly maneuvered into the shadows. Able to see once again, Dalazaril hit one of the soldiers, his bolt sticking out of his target's right side.

"Arla!" shouted Havvah. "Help me take out the wounded one." And she aimed her crossbow at the same enemy that Eldeth had recently injured. Unfortunately, the soldier managed to dive behind a boulder just in time. Both the angel's and the half-elf's bolts deflected off the stone.

⁵¹ Jorlan = 11 and 11. Asha casts Spirit Guardians. Wisdom save, DC 13. Fiovay = 12. Failure. 9 necrotic damage. Graiyla Athletics check, DC 10. She rolled 17. Success. Eldeth = 20, dealing 9 to Drow 6 and killing him. Eldeth = 21, dealing 10 damage to Drow 1. Sarith = 10. Topsy = 7. Dalazaril = 21, dealing 4 damage to Drow 2. He rolled 12 to resist, becoming Poisoned. Havvah = 11. Arla = 11.

⁵²Two more bolts bounced off of the valley floor near Aelun, launched from the two elites on Asha and Jorlan's side. The young sorcerer barely registered that Derivell deflected another that was aimed for his horse's head while a fourth skipped across the stone at their feet.

⁵³That was when Fiovay caught Aelun's attention once more. Up on the ridge, she gave a fierce battle cry, spun her daggers downward, and pounced on Asha like a barbarian in a full blown rage. Asha let loose a blood-curdling scream, and it was cut short as the kitsune slammed both blades into the priestess's chest. The spectral fiends swirling around them disappeared like vapors on a hot summer day.

Hearing Asha's cry, the drow turned their attention on Fiovay and Eromani, for they were, at that moment, the greatest threats to their leaders. Aelun saw the one closest to the sorceress turn to fire, and he quickly threw a small ball of fire, hitting him in the right shin. Unfortunately, the man's boot sustained most of the hit, and Aelun quickly realized that he had done little good. He only had one choice if he was going to help save his friends. Thus, he hurried away from Bastion so that Dawnbringer's light was once more blinding his foes.

⁵⁴This saved the kitsune's life, for once again the light of the sun severely hindered the attackers. Crossbow bolts came at Fi at lightning speeds, but she was able to roll off her victim and avoid most of them. One managed to hit her in the back, but her armor, and the angle at which it struck, kept it from going in too deep. Fi squeaked in pain, but she managed to keep her footing.

A bolt from Fargas hit the same drow Aelun had targeted. The bolt stuck him in the right side. A split second after that, Turvy shot him as well, and the enemy soldier lost consciousness as he fell off the ridge, slamming into the valley near Anarillia.

Meanwhile, Eromani saw that Asha was bleeding out and dying, and she knew that Jorlan was now the last of the enemy leaders. Not only that, but he was closest to Asha and Fiovay. If she didn't stop him, he might revive the priestess. She immediately sent four magic missiles at him. He took two to the shoulders and two in the chest, but much to her dismay, he growled in pain and shrugged them off.

⁵⁵Rini noticed that two of the elites were about to shoot at her mother, and she cast Guiding Bolt, hurling it at the closest. Even though he was partially hidden behind a stalagmite, her aim was true, striking him in the chest.

And that was when everything went wrong. That's when the world around Aelun became enshrouded in a massive poison gas cloud. Unexpectedly, instead of aiding Asha, Jorlan cast a spell. Without warning, a section of the side of the stalagmite that Fiovay had used to spring up onto the wall tore loose and rose twenty feet into the air. As it broke away, a jet of noxious

⁵² Elite 1 = 13. Elite 2 = 11. Elite 3 = 9. Elite 4 = 11. Derivell imposed disadvantage with his shield on Elite 4, forgetting to use it on Elite 3 which is good because Elite 4's first roll was 16. He would have hit Bastion if not for the disadvantage.

⁵³ Fiovay = 24 and 18, dealing 15 damage, rendering Asha unconscious and dying. Aelun = 21, dealing 3 damage to Drow 8.

⁵⁴ Hemeth = 17, dealing 4 damage to Drow 3. Drow 1 = 13. Drow 2 = 5. Drow 3 = 7. Drow 4 = 19, dealing 8 damage. Fiovay rolled 19, succeeding in resisting poison. Drow 8 = 10. Fargas = Crit Hit, dealing 7 damage to Drow 8. Turvy = 17, dealing 4 damage and killing Drow 8. Eromani = 5+2+5+2=14 damage off Jorlan.

⁵⁵ Rini = 14. She used Inspiration and rolled 17, dealing 15 damage.

fumes poured out of it, aimed right at the party. In moments they were engulfed in drow knock-out gas.

⁵⁶When it cleared, Aelun was choking and feeling light headed. Only half of his companions in the valley were still standing. Among them were Hemeth, Rini, Zen, Vlynrifane, Graiyla, Eldeth, Derivell, Dalazaril, Havvah and Arla. Up on the ridge with Jorlan and Asha, Fioyay and Eromani were also still standing, but they were at great risk. The elites were all about to shoot at them, and they had no cover whatsoever.

⁵⁷Vlynrifane quickly cast Entangle on all the drow on the far side, hoping to at least prevent the majority from attacking. The results were good. Only one regular and one elite escaped the constricting vines. The rest were held fast.

⁵⁸Graiyla reached the top of the ridge just then as Eldeth finished off the only unrestrained regular on the far side. The dwarf quickly reloaded and fired a second time, hitting the only free elite as well. The shot didn't stick, but there was some blood splatter indicating it had at least partially penetrated.

As for Derivell, he feared for Fioyay. She was already looking like she was slowing up, and he saw that many were aiming for her. So, he quickly cast Shield of Faith to provide her with a little extra protection. Then he once again grabbed his crossbow and fired at Jorlan. The dark elf moved to the side at the last moment, and the bolt flew into the darkness. Dalazaril continued to fire at the enemy he'd been trying to kill for some time, but to no avail. Towards the front, Havvah and Arla decided they liked Graiyla's plan, and they ran to the same wall, working to scale it as fast as they could.

⁵⁹Three of the elites fired. One hit. This one tore a nasty gash in the kitsune's neck. Thankfully, his aim was just a bit off, or she'd have died right then and there. As it was, she was staggering. As for the fourth elite, he wrestled with the vines of Vlynrifane's spell, unable to break free.

In spite of her near-fatal injury, Fioyay resisted the temptation to flee. Instead, she surprised everyone by lunging at Jorlan. Her first swing slashed through his armor on the left side of his chest. The second missed entirely. Aelun saw this, and he grew even more afraid for her. "Rini! Can you heal Fioyay?" he cried. Then he hurled a flaming bolt. He cursed. It missed.

⁵⁶ Constitution check, DC 13. Aelun = 11. Poisoned. Bastion = 2. Unconscious. Hemeth = 19. Success. Fargas = 2. Unconscious. Turvy = 6. Unconscious. Rini = 15. Success. Zen = 15. Success. Anarillia = 6. Unconscious. Vlynrifane = 6 and 14 with Inspiration. Success. Graiyla = 16. Success. Eldeth = 20. Success. Sarith = 7. Unconscious. Topsy = 7. Unconscious. Derivell = 10 and 19 with Inspiration. Success. Dalazaril = 14. Success. Shreiken = 4. Unconscious. Havvah = 21. Success. Arla = 9 and 13 with Inspiration. Success.

⁵⁷ Elite 3 = 9. Restrained. Elite 4 = 14. Success. Drow 1 = 20. Success. Drow 2 = 8. Restrained. Drow 3 = 10. Restrained. Drow 4 = 5. Restrained. Asha = 17 for Death save. 1 Success.

⁵⁸ Athletics check, DC 10. Graiyla rolled 24. Success. Eldeth = 16, dealing 10 to Drow 1, killing him. Eldeth = 20, dealing 5 damage to Elite 4. Derivell = 10. Dalazaril = 6. Havvah = 13 Athletics, DC 10. Success. Arla = 11.

⁵⁹ Elite 1 = 12. Elite 2 = 17, dealing 5 damage. Fioyay resisted with a 17. Elite 3 = 9, remaining Restrained. Elite 4 = 9. Fioyay = 25 and 10, dealing 8 damage. Aelun = Crit Miss. Hemeth = 22, dealing 4 damage to Drow 3. Drow 2 = 15, breaking free from Entangle. Drow 3 = 20, also breaking free. Drow 4 = 18, also breaking free. Eromani = 2+4+5+4 = 15 damage to Jorlan. Rini healed Fioyay 8 HP with 2nd level spell slot and Healing Word. Rini = 20, dealing 8 damage to Jorlan.

Three of the drow broke free of the vines, racing to find new cover. Meanwhile, Eromani summoned her font of magic and threw four more magic missiles at Jorlan, focusing everything she had on taking him down. Rini heard Aelun and did as she was told, healing Fiovay's injuries with Healing Word and restoring some of the rogue's strength. Then she dropped her shield and whipped out her bow, grazing the drow leader on the left forearm.

⁶⁰But Jorlan would not fall. No matter how hard they tried, he remained on his feet. And so, he returned to Asha's side in a flash, administered another healing potion, and stood over her to try to shield her with his body.

Vlynrifane saw that most of her victims had escaped, and so she tried again. This time, though, the vines disappeared only to reappear on Jorlan and Asha's side. Fiovay, Graiyla and Eromani were positioned in such a way that Vlynrifane could target her foes without potentially ensnaring her own companions. And so, she was more than happy when all but one of the elites was restrained. Even Asha and Jorlan were bound.

Graiyla seized the opportunity, targeting Asha to keep her from casting spells. Before the evil priestess could even get her bearings, the yuan-ti pureblood stabbed her in the side. Derivell continued to focus his shots on Jorlan, and now that the veteran soldier was ensnared, he made a much easier target. The knight's bolt stabbed him in his right shoulder, and he roared in pain.

Havvah and Arla reached the top of the ridge, ready to charge at the nearest enemies, when all of a sudden, the battle shifted yet again in an unexpected way. Miralin and Habrax appeared, as did a large, red, ape-like demon with a blue face, chest and fists. This was a bargura, a savage brute with low intelligence that was hard to kill. It had been invisible until it was right next to Eromani, on her right. Then it appeared and attacked even as its two masters did.

⁶¹Miralin immediately called, "Derivell, My Love," and her voice had an instant effect on him. Aelun could see that the knight's expression shifted to that of a puppy in love. "Come to me!" the vile temptress added, and she was most pleased to see him already making his way to her.

Habrax did the same to Eromani. He appeared near her, just to her left, and he called in a very deep and resonant tone, "Eromani. Come to me." Eromani, like Derivell, was instantly caught in his spell.

As for the bargura, its purpose was to ensure that no one was able to stop its masters from acquiring their primary objectives. It was also to capture Havvah, for Miralin wanted to reclaim her. Because of this, and the fact that she was the closest to it anyway, the massive ape-creature went for her. It roared when it appeared and charged. Then it proceeded to bite her on the shoulder and pummel her with its fists.

⁶²The sudden appearance of the fiends drew the attention of everyone, including the drow. Seeing the bargura as the new, biggest threat to their leaders, the elites turned and fired. Every

⁶⁰ Jorlan healed Asha 15 HP. Strength save, DC 13. Elite 1 = 7. Restrained. Elite 2 = 20. Success. Jorlan = 2. Restrained. Asha = 8. Restrained. Asha just returned to consciousness, and so she was unable to use an action to free herself. Graiyla = 18, dealing 13 damage. Eldeth = 15 and 14. Derivell = 18, dealing 8 to Jorlan. Dalazaril = 9. Havvah = 22, and Arla = 11, both succeeding in Athletics.

⁶¹ Wisdom save, DC 15. Derivell = 13. Failure. Eromani = 7. Bargura = 25, Crit Hit, and 23, dealing 21 damage to Havvah. (She got lucky. Damage rolls were quite low.)

⁶² Elite 1 = 13, breaking free. Elite 2 = 10. Elite 3 = 12. Elite 4 = Crit Miss. Habrax = 15, DC 12. Success.

bolt bounced right off or sailed by the massive thug. Fiovey slipped away from Jorlan, recognizing that Eromani was now enthralled by Habrax. She weaved around the barlgura and came upon the incubus as she completed Tasha's Hideous Laughter. The incubus resisted, grabbing his prize by the wrist and shoving her behind him.

⁶³Aelun's mind reeled, but he quickly determined the best target to attack. Casting Fire Bolt yet again, he tried to hit Eromani. Unfortunately, that was when Habrax shoved her to the side, and the missile sped through the space she had just occupied. "Hit Eromani and Derivell," he told everyone. "It might snap them out of their trances."

But Habrax wasn't about to let them take her away from him this time. Telepathically, he commanded her to summon Evronar. Eromani did as she was commanded, and her father appeared in all his terrible glory. He filled the space between the two ridges just on the other side of where Miralin stood, and his very presence caused all but a few to quake in fear.

In spite of this, or maybe because of this, Rini didn't think. She just did as Aelun suggested. She fired at Eromani, hitting her between the shoulder blades on her back. Fortunately, the missile bounced off and didn't hurt her too badly. In the same respect, it still didn't snap her out of the charm either.

Zen jumped in front of Rini, protectively, and growled fearlessly up at Evronar. Jorlan, in full blown panic, fought to free himself from the accursed Entangle spell, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't escape. Then Vlynrifane dropped her spell. The dragon was now their greatest threat. Aelun was right. They simply HAD to get Eromani to snap out of the trance. As long as Habrax held her in thrall, she would command the dragon to kill them. And so, the druid transformed into a giant spider and raced to the cliff wall, streaking up it as fast as she could.

Asha screamed in fear and fled. "Retreat! Retreat!" she commanded, and she waited for no one.

With the vines gone, Graiyla was free to angle around the barlgura right up to Eromani and Habrax. When she arrived, she balled up her fist and took a swing. Eromani slid sideways, just in time, but Graiyla followed up with a kick to the gut. It wasn't hard, but it was enough to double her over.

⁶⁴As for Eldeth, she didn't want to risk killing her friend, so she aimed her bow at Habrax, hoping to kill him and free Eromani that way. Fear of the dragon, however, took its toll on her, and it threw off her aim. She missed with both of her shots.

All this was just as Miralin had hoped. With everyone focused so much on freeing Eromani so Evronar wouldn't kill them, no one was paying attention to Derivell. She smiled victoriously as he ran up to her, throwing his arms around her. "I'm yours," he told her. "Whatever you want to do with me."

⁶³ Aelun = 14. Hemeth = 11. Drow 2 = 16, dealing 6 damage to the barlgura. It resisted poison with 22. Drow 3 = 8. Drow 4 = 14. Rini = 16, hitting Eromani and dealing 9 damage. Eromani rolled 11, failing the Widom DC. She was still charmed. Jorlan = 7, failing to break free from Entangle. Graiyla = 13 and 15, dealing 3 damage. Eromani rolled Nat 20, finally breaking free from Habrax.

⁶⁴ Eldeth = 12 and 11. Havvah healed 5 HP using Second Wind. Then she attacked the barlgura with an 18, dealing 17 damage.

"I know," she replied, taking him in her arms. Then she spread her wings and prepared to fly.

Meanwhile, Havvah hacked at the bargura with her greatsword, putting a sizable gash in its chest. Still, it seemed to do little more than cause the monster to groan. A split second later, she danced around it and acted as if she was coming right at Habrax. The incubus fell back a pace, and Havvah cried, "Eromani! Now! Run!"

Much to everyone's relief and surprise, the sorceress did just that. Graiyla's kick had snapped her out of her trance, and now that Havvah had forced Habrax back, she was clear to escape. She fled to the back wall of the ridge. Then she spun as if she was going to unsummon Evronar.

"No!" cried the incubus, and he roared in fury. ⁶⁵He was just about to pursue when Arla engaged, getting in his way. She took a swing with her warhammer and missed, but she managed to put Habrax on the defensive for at least a few more seconds.

Miralin saw that the situation was unraveling quickly. With Eromani free, it was only a matter of time - probably only a few seconds - before Evronar would attack her and Habrax. She had to take her prize and go before it was too late. Thus, she cast Haste and abandoned Habrax and the bargura. She fled with the hefty knight past Evronar and off into the darkness of the cavern south of battle.

Habrax didn't even see her go. He was too busy trying to reclaim Eromani. He knew he couldn't charm her a second time, but he could render her unconscious and take the sword. Then he would hopefully put the dragon back in the sword and flee with his prize.

And so, he risked exposing himself to Arla and Fiohay so that he could reach Eromani and attack her. The warrior glassblower from Urmlaspyr cracked him on the lower back with the hammer's head, and the kitsune rogue stabbed him hard in the right shoulder. Still, the vile fiend kept going as if uninjured. He reached Eromani, and with one clean swipe, he hacked her down.

Evronar roared with delight, for he was temporarily freed. Habrax, however, dropped his own weapon, and he scooped up Evronar's Essence. In a moment, he quickly commanded the dragon to return, and the mighty wyrm was gone. As this was happening, the bargura bit down on Havvah a second time. The pain was so intense that the angel lost consciousness. Then the hulk grabbed her and fled towards Habrax.

The drow obeyed the command of their mistress, and they began to flee as well, racing through the field of combatants in a desperate attempt to catch up to Asha. No one cared about them anymore, for their primary concern was that Eromani and Havvah could be kidnapped or worse. They could be dying.

Fiohay wove around and behind a fleeing drow to attack Habrax. At the last second, he threw up his arm (he had lost his other to Ky'jim), catching her just under the blade in her right hand; forearm to forearm. This left him unable to stop her left dagger which sliced his right shoulder painfully.

⁶⁵ Arla = 6. Arla = Crit Hit, dealing 7 damage due to resistance. Fiohay = Crit Hit, dealing 25 damage with Sneak Attack. Habrax = Crit Hit, dealing 21 damage. Bargura = 21, dealing 9 damage. Fiohay = 14 and 24, dealing 5 damage to Habrax.

Aelun couldn't see much from where he stood, for the combatants had moved away from the edge. And so, he looked around him as if waking up from a terrible dream. That was when he realized that Derivell was gone. In the back of his mind, he remembered seeing Miralin spread her wings and fly off after casting the Haste spell.

Fear seized him. He had to do something to save the knight, but he was too slow by himself. "Rini, that succubus is getting away with Derivell, I think. Up the path! Hurry!" Then he started off in that direction himself, unsure what else to do.

⁶⁶Rini feared for Eromani, but she realized that there was nothing she could do down there in the valley. However, if Miralin was escaping with Derivell, that WAS something she could prevent - maybe.

But first, she had an idea. "Wait!" she called to Aelun. "Bastion! You can ride him." Then she cured the horse of the poison with a spell, returning him to consciousness. Following this, she jumped onto Zen's back and spurred the wolf into a full run. "Catch up if you can!"

Just then, Vlynrifane came up over the lip of the ridge, and she saw Habrax and the bargura with her friends. Thus, she spit a web onto the fiend in the hopes of restraining him long enough to get the sword away from him and save Eromani.

⁶⁷Graiyla was already charging up to attack the demon when the web ensnared him, and she stabbed him in the left side as he tried to dodge but was held fast. Arla was right with her, and she cracked him hard in the right shoulder.

Habrax began to panic. "Free me!" he ordered the Bargura even as he tried in vain to do so himself.

The bargura did as commanded, biting down on the web with its teeth as it thrashed. But it was too late. Fiovey stabbed the incubus with her daggers, puncturing his lung and severing arteries. Vlynrifane sprang on him from the other side and bit him hard. Then Graiyla finished him off by plunging her lightning sword into his face.

⁶⁸Arla noticed that Habrax was quite dead just moments before she finished her swing. As such, she shifted and struck the bargura instead. Unfortunately, her aim was off, and the creature was able to simply bat her attack aside.

Meanwhile, down in the valley, Aelun raced back to Bastion's side as the stallion got to his feet. Then he quickly climbed on. "Sorry, Pal," he told him. "I know you're a bit shaky right now, but I REALLY need you to run fast. Your master is getting kidnapped." In spite of his words, it still took him several long seconds to get the horse on board with his plan. In the end, he was racing at top speed after Rini and Zen, but they were quite a ways ahead of him.

⁶⁶ Eromani = 3 for Death save. 1 Failure. Vlynrifane = 16, restraining Habrax with a web.

⁶⁷ Graiyla = 22, dealing 6 damage. Havvah = 1 on Death save. 2 Failures. Arla = 21, dealing 4 damage. Habrax = 6 Strength save, failing to break free. Bargura = 26, dealing 9 to the web and breaking him free. Fiovey = 23 and 18, dealing 16 damage. Eromani = 10 for Death save. 1 Success and 1 Failure. Vlynrifane rolled 1 for recharge on her web. Then she attacked with Bite = 16, dealing 4 damage. Habrax resisted poison with a roll of 11. Graiyla = Crit Hit, dealing 7 damage, killing Habrax.

⁶⁸ Havvah = Nat 20 Death save. She recovered with 1 HP. Arla = 6. Bargura = 12, 26 and 22, dealing 21 damage to Arla.

The bargura saw that one of its masters was dead. The other was nowhere in sight. It was surrounded by enemies. And so, it tossed Havvah to the floor and threw itself into a full blown rage. Its first target was Arla. Its jaws snapped down on her shield. It jerked its head violently, tearing it away from her. Then it proceeded to slam its fists into her twice. The first knocked her to the ground, and the second pounded into her chest, cracking ribs. In the end, she lost consciousness; bleeding and broken.

⁶⁹As Arla fell, Fioyab jabbed both daggers into the demon's back, spraying black ichor everywhere. Vlyn tried to bite it, but she couldn't penetrate its thick skin. Likewise, Graiyla's blade bounced off of it, failing to even cut it.

Then Havvah rolled to her feet and fled. She had returned to consciousness while the creature was still holding her, and now that it had tossed her down, she was free to return to the fight. But first, she had to retrieve her sword. After the bargura had rendered her unconscious, she'd dropped it. And so, she hastened back in the direction of where it lay, hoping to grab it and hurry back before it killed her companions.

Fioyab was now the bargura's primary target. She had hurt it quite a bit, and it was furious. With a swift snap, it bit down on her left side. Then it tossed her to the floor. After she was taken out, it focused on Vlynrifane. Two swift punches knocked the wind out of the spider-druid, but she wasn't down yet.

In retaliation, she bit down on the monster's leg, but she didn't get a firm grip. It broke free just as Graiyla tried to stab it. Once again her sword bounced off. Havvah retrieved her weapon and returned, but instead of attacking, she decided to heal Arla with her divine gift of healing hands. Arla simply got to her feet, staggering around behind the brute to retrieve her shield.

⁷⁰The bargura continued to focus on Vlynrifane, biting down on one of her front left legs. It thrashed, tearing the limb from her body. Vlyn screamed. Then it slammed her in the face with its right fist. She transformed back into herself, and it followed up with its left, punching her again and sending her flying like a rag doll onto her back.

⁷¹As for Graiyla, she saw blood forming a pool under Fioyab, and she knew the girl was dying. She darted around behind the bargura and quickly gave the rogue a potion. The kitsune's eyes opened, much to the yuan-ti woman's relief as Havvah stabbed the monster in the left side with her greatsword. As she did, she distracted it, leaving it exposed to Arla.

Arla caught a second wind, gave a battle cry, and cracked the monster on the top of the head. Black blood spewed everywhere. And yet, it didn't fall. It was definitely on its last leg, but it still had some fight left in it.

⁶⁹ Fioyab = 25 and 19, dealing 17 damage. Eromani = 17 Death save, 2 Successes and 1 Failure. Vlynrifane = 1 for web recharge. 14 to Bite. Miss. Graiyla = 14. Arla = 8 Death save. 1 Failure. Bargura = Crit Hit, dealing 23 damage. Fioyab = 7 Death save. 1 Failure. Eromani = 1. She used her Inspiration and rerolled to get 14. She was stabilized. Vlynrifane = 1 for recharge web. She rolled 24 to hit, dealing 8 damage. Bargura resisted poison with 25. Graiyla = 13. Havvah healed Arla 3 HP.

⁷⁰ Bargura = 22, dealing 12 damage. Fist = 23, dealing 14 damage, dealing 12 to Vlynrifane herself. Fist = 26, dealing 12 damage and taking Vlynrifane down.

⁷¹ Fioyab = 4 Death save. 2 Failures. Vlyn = 16. 1 Success. Graiyla healed Fioyab 12 HP with a Greater Healing Potion. Havvah = 18, dealing 10 damage. Arla took Second Wind, recovering 13 HP. Then she hit the bargura with a 22, dealing 4 damage.

⁷²Lost in its rage, the bargura continued to bear down on Graiyla, its new target. It bit her on the left arm, lifted her into the air, let her go, and proceeded to double-fist smash her to the ground. Graiyla landed hard, rolled to her feet, and fell into a defensive stance. She spat a curse at it, blood running down her back from a head injury.

⁷³That's when Fiovay surprised it. She jumped up on her feet, leaped up on its back, hugged it, and proceeded to slit its throat with both of her daggers. Then she dropped off of it, rolled away, came to her feet, and watched as the monster gurgled, grabbed its throat, choked up lots of blood, and finally fell on its face.

"Quick!" said Graiyla as she fought to remain conscious. She pulled out another healing potion, and she ran up to Vlynrifane. "Check Eromani. See if she's alive." And she gave the druid the potion.

Vlynrifane returned to consciousness. She quickly sat up and looked around. "Wha... Is... Is it over? Did we win?"

Havvah looked around them. There wasn't a drow or fiend in sight. "I think so," she replied as she checked Eromani. "She's alive. I think she's stable."

Arla ran to the edge of the ridge. She peered down, seeing Eldeth, Hemeth and Dalazaril milling about and checking the fallen. Seeing no enemies, she asked, "Everyone okay down there?"

Eldeth looked up, a grim expression on her face. "Derivell's been kidnapped by Miralin," she reported. "Rini and Aelun took off after them." She pointed in the direction where they went. "Many down here are still unconscious from the poison gas. No enemies left, though. Everything okay up there?"

"We're all alive," said Arla. "Gods! I can't believe Derivell's gone." It was truly hard to fathom.

Eromani was revived then, and that was the first thing she heard. She stood, instinctively taking Evronar's Essence as she did. "Derivell's gone? What? Where? Who? Is he dead?" It was clear that she was extremely worried about him. She even went so far as to shove the helping hands of Graiyla and Havvah aside as she made her way swiftly to the edge where Arla stood.

"Miralin took him," said Arla. "Rini and Aelun went after them, I guess."

Eromani's face turned even more pale than it already was. She looked down at Eldeth. "We need to go after them too," she said firmly.

"What do you want us to do?" asked Eldeth. "There's no way we can revive our companions until after the poison has worn off."

⁷² Bargura = 21, dealing 7 damage. Fist = 25, dealing 10 damage. Fist = 26, dealing 12 damage.

⁷³ Fiovay = 22, dealing 11 damage and killing it. Vlyn = 2 Death save. 1 Success and 1 Failure. Vlyn was healed 14 HP. In the end, only Miralin, Jorlan, Asha, 4 Elites and 3 Drow remained of the enemies that attacked. The party was awarded 700 XP each; Aelun 400. Havvah and Aelun level up. Eromani was given a Greater Healing Potion, restoring her 12 HP.

Eromani looked off in the direction of where Miralin had taken Derivell. “Eldeth. Stay and watch the others,” she said. “Whoever is able, come with me.” Then, before anyone could argue, she took off at a full run.

Fiovay shrugged as she looked at those still standing there with her. “Well, what the heck. I’m in.” And she took off after the sorceress.

Arla exchanged glances with Havvah, Graiyla, and Vlyn. Graiyla just shook her head. Then, without a word, they followed as well.

Barlgura

