

To: The High Elven Court.

From : Loyal Peacemaker Vistril Iverness, on assignment in the Lands of Younger Races.

I am pleased to report that our attempts to combat the Recent Drow-based Automatons have met with ingenuity on the part of the Short, yet stalwart Dwarves who make their homes in these mountains. They've managed to modify Crossbows and Spears to be mostly useless, save for in combat against these particular spiders. We are pleased to have a more expedient manner of dispatch for this abhorrence of nature.

I have chosen the crude spear as my new implement. It seems to be weighted oddly, with more lead and steel toward the head than most. It would be useless to throw this, but if used only in a "butter churning" stabbing motion, it could easily bash free the shells of these creatures.

In addition, a number of our party have adopted the "Siege Crossbows" of Dwarven construction. They are unwieldy in the hands, but much more stable if one is willing to lay in the filth of a tunnel, and pivot from the large knob on the front. This accommodates the much harder pull of the string. I'd dare say this machine is likely to pull itself apart before too long, and is more effort than it's worth... Then again, we can't look a gift falcon in the beak.

We've been fighting to clean out the dwarven tunnels as best we can for several days now, and believe that we've made a significant dent in their number. We can only hope that today, they'll fall into Slolanar's Disfavor once more, and that we can smash the mechanical beasts once and for all.

I promise to write more as we take our rests. You should find a few tracts regarding our battles in the pages following this letter.

Your Loyal Servant,

Vistril Iverness.

On the Topic of Clockwork Spiders:

We are heading out into the tunnels below. Our early scouting reports 13 spiders in the room, mostly made of more precious metals... Platinum, Gold, Iron... They seem to have greater abilities than the common rabble of copper mechanisms, but all can be felled with enough brute force.

I have no doubt that Paladin of the Order of the Lantern, Chase Roland (see my earlier letters concerning "Chassandra" for reference), will be apt as anyone to dismantle these clattering cretins.

Battle Notes:

I have taken the liberty (to the best of my memory) to recreate our battle herein, thus that the court may chronicle out fighting prowess, and glean what they can about the efficiency of our tactics

Pre Battle:

Our Wizyrd Rafiki (hailing from the Scholar's Library, somewhere days south of the Elven ForestHold) has cast a strength enhancing magic onto myself, and Kira (who you will be pleased to know is endearing herself to the young races, as is befitting of nobility). He purports to have summoned some number of allies, though it seems to be in the form of several small green centipedes. I have no idea how these will assist us in our plight, but he certainly scowled deeply at our lack of understanding in his plan.

The Battle is Joined:

We charged forth into the open cavern where the spiders lay in wait for us. At best it was a rough 40' diameter... and with a low ceiling.

We normally wouldn't crash into the lines so hastily, but we know that subtlety is useless against these restless guardians.

Chase bullied his way into the fray, and laid into one of the iron spiders (the spitters of Goop... able to immobilize even the most nimble of elven swordsmen).

Chi followed a centipede into battle against an electrum spider, seeming to hide in the tiny insect's shadow before lashing out with one of those Dwarven ballistae bolts to lay waste to his foe.

Kira wisely stayed out of range, pelting chi's target with confusing and distracting patterns of arrows.

I came forward with my Leaden Spear, but found it at first to be ungainly. My second attempt, however, paid off in electrum, with the crushing of the spider's flimsy joints. A good hard strike to the limbs of the creature seems to have immobilized it slightly.

We were not the only combatants to inflict wounds, however. I myself took several crossbow bolts from the cowardly Drow Arachnids. Leave it to the Dark Elves to battle with cheap, dishonorable tactics. Elven cunning has been perverted in this form. Should the drow ever return to the judgment of our court, I highly recommend we dispatch them swiftly before considering absolving them of such trickery.

Most effective, it seems, are multiple attacks. When I'm able to muster my concentration and strike doubly, the spiders seem less able to weather the blows. I see that Chase is following my example by attempting this style, and is meeting with limited success.

It appears that Chi's Dwarven FloorBow, while most impressive when it impacts, but leaves something to be desired in finishing power. He's launched a triad of bolts into one, and it still creeps forward toward our group.

Be very wary of any Adamantine shelled spider... as they crackle with some form of lightning wand. It seems that I'm doomed to be in the line of fire whenever some form of wand discharges. I believe that standing next to a human in noisy plate mail draws the attention of any enemy. It also has an inordinate knack for attracting well fired arrows away from their intended targets.

These spiders seem to have a rudimentary strategic intelligence imbued in them... They flank our position, and attempt to cut off our party from the point of entry.

Three strikes from one of these leaden spears seems to do the clattering horde in. Two strikes to the limbs, and one to the carapace was enough to finish my electrum adversary.

Rafiki is no doubt chronicling the effect of spells on these constructs, but it is worth noting here that his "Ice Storm" spell seems to be decently effective, but the magic behind his thematurgy is somehow shrugged off. No doubt due to some built in warding.

These drow mechanomages should be caught and interrogated. We may be able to find use in their wretched research.

Faegan and I attempted to team up against an iron spider, hoping that its sticky resinous discharge would fail to deploy. Immobility can be the death of a handsome elf very easily.

As we expand to hold our line in this cavern, we meet a stiff line of resistance. It seems that the spiders have opened a supply tunnel. We asked the dwarves to insure that the supply tunnels were collapsed, but no doubt some careless half-pint engineer was into the Grog before laying his charges. I'll be sure in the future to check the work of these needy races we keep saving.

Rafiki decides to try again with his "freeze them to death" efforts. A great cone of frost erupts from his palms, leaving our breath hanging in crystalline patterns as we weave through the battle. I do wish he'd give more warning before he conjures up such things. Once can hardly argue, however, when 2 of the spiders cease all motion

immediately following the discharge. The spiders do make some odd sounds as they clank their way out of automation. It seems that cold indeed does weaken them.

The spiders seem to attack with their 2 front-most talons at once. Knives, saws, and other implements of slashing are easy enough to dodge, but they move with such macabre precision, that they do land a blow now and again. The lightning ability does seem to be their most beneficial weapon. If some form of resistance could be arranged for in future battles, it would be highly advisable.

Chase has picked up my technique of multiple attacks, and seems to be doing well with it, dismantling his techno-manced foe. Every time he swings in error, he redoubles his efforts to make his sword connect. If only all humans would try in such earnest, they may one day learn the ways of a proper civilization.

Mink (who has been supporting the battle from the rear), steps forth, make that fifth, as her myriad of false images swoops in to confuse the enemy. It seems that these spiders are equally confused as any living fighter would be. This speaks to their inability to tell illusion from reality. They don't seem to eschew any anti-magical aura power against such schools.

As the spiders thin out, they don't show any battle weariness. They continue to advance into our line, as if they fully expect to be reinforced. This is quite disconcerting. Since our own more natural forms begin to tire. I began to feel as if this leaded spear is heavier than it needs to be. I will have to speak with these dwarves about its construction.

Again, I must enforce my warning concerning the electrical attacks made by these "things"... They seem to have a near limitless ability to generate these charges, and without any proper warning, I am nearly unable to escape the blast. I have begun to gain a second sense about this, being able to smell thick, stinging ozone. It begins to stink like a forge furnace, and my eyelashes start to tingle. If one can leap out of the path before the charge issues... they may have a chance.

These UNGAINLY Dwarven Crossbows are Damnably inaccurate! I have just danced past one of the bolts as it is misfired from its carriage. Were the dwarves more concerned with finesse in battle, they'd learn that these weapons need greater refinement. The ability to wound your own troops in combat can only be the brainchild of a group of bearded drunkards. I hope that the spiders aren't able to discern the design of these devices, as they're hard enough to face when they're NOT aimed at us.

Rafiki has abandoned his attempts to meteorologically disable our foes, and has conjured several magical projectiles. His aim is somehow magically accurate. I've yet to see him injure one of us, even when it seems an impossible shot. I'll have to query him sometime if this same accuracy can be imparted to young Kira. She seems to have been shedding arrows from her bow to little effect. It's shameful that her seemingly noble bearing doesn't apply to her aim.

As we neared the final blows of the battle, with but a single machine to fell... our attacks, while greatly concentrated, seemed to fall uselessly against the carapace of our victim. Only with repeated attempts from our weapons could we dent its armor. Whether this construct is magically resistant to attacks all on its own, or if some knowledge of its desperate situation is to blame, it made us work terribly hard for victory.

In addition, it makes it's own attacks count for as much as possible. It lashed out at Chase, as if it were drawn to his armor. He is caught somewhat by surprise it seems, clutching his new wound. He's equally shocked to see Faegin's Dwarven Bolt punching out through his thigh. I can not express enough how much I loathe these contraptions. The dwarves and the Drow deserve one another as enemies, if they insist on warring with such infernal technology.

Vissel was largely unable to act in a healing capacity during this combat. His skills as a warrior were highly in demand. Following our battle, the cleric was pressed into service to bind our wounds. While this was sufficient, had things come out differently, we'd have been in dire need of some form of healing potions. Readily available curing is advisable.

Thus concludes my notes from our battle. I hope they are useful to our scholars in determining better methods of combating such enemies. I would also be grateful if a copy made it to our own armories, thus that we might understand the construction and design of said clockworks.

The Exploration beyond:

While it may not be of any direct interest to our causes now, I feel a good detailed description of this cavernous dungeon is worth recording.

We scale a small vertical tunnel from the west wall of the tunnel, approximately 10 paces (30 human "feet") straight up, which opens to the north, into a 10 foot by 10 foot bedroom. This room is long dusty and abandoned. The tracks of mechanical beasties is prevalent across the length of the stone floor.

The door opens unto a perpendicular hallway (running east and west). A quick investigation to the west, the corridor ends 15 feet later, owing to a collapse of stony rubble. To the East, we can see 20 feet to a 4 way crossroads...

The details at this point, become fuzzy in my mind, owing largely to my distaste for such tunnels. Never let an Elven adventurer tell you that he prefers dirty, dusty, slumped over slouching through a dwarven ruin over the verdant forests above. Such pursuits may be necessary and even profitable at times, but are never a substitute for starlight and living plants.

Our travels bring us to a 20 by 30 room... excavated neatly by dwarven picks and shovels. Dust and stones from the decay of the tunnel are all that decorate the long disused floor. Eight pillars are arrayed through the room, framing 4 archways into other caverns. One Each to the North and South, Two to the east. The entryway we take is unadorned with such finery, only a squared off tunnel.

The pillars bear faint runes. They do not appear to be Dwarven, Drow, or Human. Perhaps they share some roots in Ancient Elvish, but not enough to make their meaning apparent.

We track one of the eastern exits in a Southwestern direction, leading us to an ovular room. A large stone block, measuring 4' by 4' set opposite the door. It holds a singular burning torch, held in the stone block itself. The dust remains the constant player in this charade. A search of the room reveals Spider tracks, but no others. Faegan discovers that the torch sheds only light... No heat. Mink decides that this is an invitation to frivolous activity, sticking her hand directly into the flame, disrupting the light.

Beneath the dust in this room, the floor is golden plated, or perhaps made fully of gold, and is inscribed with sigils and diagrams of celestial activity. A commonly occurring star patter makes the elves think that perhaps this room is a temple of some sort to a sun god, perhaps even to some creation mythos. Rafiki racks his brain for any correlation between these constellations and the activity outside (involving the comet). He discovers none, but vows to research it further... later... much later.

Faegan reaches out for the torch, lifting it from it's stone holder. Much to the relief of the remainder of the party, the torch does not cause any runes to shift, or any traps to trigger.

Returning to the room of Arches and Columns, we take the Northeast path from the second eastern Arch... we are greeted with a room containing a rectangular stone block (6' long by 3' wide by 4 high). This room also contains a large pit, 10 feet deep. Rough rubble fills this pit, and it's difficult to tell exactly what this material is.

Faegan opts to climb down to discern what the pit is filled with (besides the remains of foolish rogues). He discovers that decayed humanoid remains are the treasure held within this pit. While the aged walls give clues as to the escape attempts of the deceased, they prove that the pit was nigh inescapable. With that, he ascends back to the party to inform them that disrupting the graves of the clumsy dead are not something to be rummaged through.

Chase's inspection leads him to the detection of EEEEvil intent that occurred in this room. While he can't directly place why this room feels somewhat malevolent, he's wary of it's odious vibe.

Mink suggests that we leave this room hastily, while Faegan inspects the stone block for traps. He finds that no traps are apparent, but the block was likely used as a sacrificial altar. Mink's suggestion prevails, and we opt to explore the Northern archway.

The northern arch leads to a northwestern round room, with a central pit, flanked by a stone altar. The altar is home to a dagger of some sort. The ambiance of this room is shadowy. The party brings forth their light sources, and while they can see a fraction of the room, the pit at the center of the room is an abyssal source of blackness.

Faegan leans forward to stick the un-burning torch into the Shadowy pit. This produces a Bright flash, which seems to dispel the darkness... The darkness gathers itself into a Colossus size shadow, which proceeds to batter Chase as it plunges an amorphous limb toward him.

Mink, emboldened by the glow of her amulet, lashes out with her anti-reptilian sword. She gauges a swath of the gauze like form away, but what would normally be a good sized wound is filled with shadow almost instantaneously.

Faegan attempts to wedge his sword and dagger into the darkened form, but fails to gain purchase in its wispy form.

Chi fires a crossbow bolt into the Shadow, which passes through the air, light and dark, to no effect.

Chase lets loose a roar of righteous fury, but fails to direct it through Light-Bringer. The Shadow seems to sneer as it reaches out for a counter attack. Chase crumples to the cold floor in a pile of punished steel and flesh

Vissel directs his holy vengeance into the swing of his mace. The Shadow howls with a sickening sibilance as it recoils from the impact.

With the party fully surrounding the towering darkness, it begins to whip about erratically. Raining down a crushing impact onto Chi. The silent warrior finds his balance shaken, but concentrates deeply on his training, and finds the inner strength to turn its attack on itself. The Shadow disassociates into the air.

Mink wastes no time fetching the dagger, which in turn wastes no time turning Mink against Kira. Mink's glazed look tells the surprised young elf that the attack isn't intentional, but is most maddened and malicious . The dagger finds its mark in Kira's chest. As Kira's hands reach to free the blade from her torso, she feels the greasy sweat of poison creeping into her bloodstream. In a moment of mortal clarity, she realizes that her life is very much in peril.

As Kira's body wrenches in unbearable agony, Mink's wild swings drag the dagger once more through the young elf's skin, ensuring its foul work will be completed.

Vissel realizes that poison is keeping Kira from drawing breath, which is causing her discoloration. Acting on his clerical instincts, he chants a cleansing melody, which purges the vile venom from Kira's blood.

Rafiki, in a cunning feat of spellcasting, levitates Mink into the ceiling, as Vissel flaps his cloak in an attempt to entangle the hysterical Lamia. Faegan finds himself the target of a thrown knife attack. He shrugs off the poison, allowing him to free the knife with his cloth as a barrier, and heave it into the pit.

The paladin's condition improves greatly with a few magical healing spells

Returning to the central room, the Southern arch remains the only unexplored path... The party discovers an earthy scented room. On the floor, a heap of unidentifiable lumpy material holds up 4 spears. A large wooden block is home to a curved staff.

The lumpy material appears to be earthy and mulchy. The spears reveal themselves to be deadened trees. The wooden block reveals carvings of pictures of Animals, Trees, and flowers, interspersed with runes. The Curved staff atop the bench appears to be a wooden, curved sword.

Kira inspects the trees more closely. They probably died of natural causes, and snapped loose.

After a brief watering of the soil, a sprout of greenery springs from the once dormant soil. Vistril plants garlic and onions in the earth. They sprout as soon as water is added. Rafiki informs us that the wooden sword that Vistril has wrapped in his cloak is undoubtedly magical.

The runes on the wooden block reminds vistril of his patron God... Solanor...

He speaks the name aloud... and a soft ~TwAngggg~ sounds from a far distance.

A Silver arrow with green fletching sails through the air, pegging Vistril squarely... Attached is a note. Vistril pulls loose the arrow, and reads the message, sharing it only with Kira (who reads elvish). Vistril puts the arrow into his quiver after pausing to admire it briefly. With a smug smirk, he settles in to rest.

The party rests in this room, in the fresh and pleasant grasses. The scent of new growth provides a welcome respite from the mildewed stink of the underground passages.