

## The Dwarf-Drow War

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A new problem... By: Jhaelryna

The Yochol, a handmaiden of Lloth, stood over the Valsharess and continued to speak. "The plan is failing. The accursed dwarves are stubborn, and resistant to our magics. In the fullness of time, perhaps this method of attack will work. But you do not have that luxury of time. As it stands now, Axepeak will still be a threat to your plans." Valsharess Jhaelryna stood quietly and brooded on this latest development. Curse those stunted dwarves. Their digging and tunneling under the Mountain was not a direct threat. But it was a threat none the less. She had worked for some time on a way to undermine the dwarves, to slowly corrupt them. But the recent orders of the Spider Queen had moved up her timetable somewhat. She quickly came to a decision. "I shall continue as planned. Our original plans shall proceed. I cannot, however, guarantee the destruction of the dwarves by the time we need...but they can certainly be...distracted." Understanding the Valsharess' intent, the Yochol nodded and disappeared. Jhaelryna cackled evilly as she wrote her orders. The dwarves would be distracted, most certainly. And it would prove interesting indeed.

Durhelm Stonehew wiped the sweat from his brow and set down his pick. A rich vein! He made a quick note on a crumpled parchment, then stuffed the parchment back into his miner's coveralls. If this vein of silver was as rich as he thought, then the dwarves would profit much this season. He heard several buzzing and whizzing sounds, and felt a few sharp stings on his neck and back. "Blasted moss-keetos!!" he thought. His vision swam, and as he fell into unconsciousness he wondered just what mosquitoes were doing a thousand feet underground. The dwarven patrol found him early the next day. He was stripped naked and chained to an outcropping of rock. His skin had been flayed off, layer by painful layer. Blood lay in a pool at his feet. "By Moradin!!" cried the patrol leader as he ran to the tortured dwarf's side. Durhelm lifted his head, tears in his eyes, and tried to speak. Shaking off his revulsion at the bloodied and beaten face, the patrol leader whispered "Who wer th' devils wot dun this to ye, lad?" Durhelm moaned a few unintelligible sounds and then slumped into unconsciousness. The leader turned from the poor dwarf, and barked "Don' ye jes stand ther, lads! Free him, and we best be gettin' 'im to th'

clan healers. One o' ye gives him an 'ealing draught ta steady 'im." The soldiers scrambled to aid their wounded comrade. "Why did he nae speak?" asked a soldier as he gently lowered his friend to the ground. The patrol leader spun around angrily. "Beclus' they cut out 'is tongue!" he yelled, "I swear by Moradin tha' I repay those wot dun this seventyfold!!". His words echoed down the dark passageways of the mines. A short distance away, a dark form noted the goings on, and silently slipped back to report that the mission was proceeding as planned.

-----Dark times upon us.... By:  
Nystramo

Nystramo looked down at the unconscious Tigguhr, a feeling of dread filling him. "Beldarak," he had said before passing out. Treachery.

He motioned for the gaurds to take him someplace safe. "I wants two kuldar on 'im a' all times," he ordered. Events were taking a turn, and not for the better. He could smell it in the rock.

"Nys." A voice behind him interrupted his thoughts. He turned and saw Dwyvym, a bleak look on his face. More bad news, he thought. "Comes wi' me, Nys. It be Durhelm."

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The chief of Clan Axepeak watched in silence as the healers worked feverishly on the miner. Durhelm's agony was evident, but true to his heritage he didn't cry out. A cleric of Moradin prayed over him, both to aid in the healing and to alert the god to the possibility of a new arrival. Some of his skin had grown back, and the beginning of a new tongue was forming. Nystramo forced himself to watch it all.

One of the healers approached him. "We done our bes', Olor Kuld. We kinna be savin' 'im." Nystramo nodded and approached the dying dwarf.

Durnhelm looked up at his chief, knowing full well his fate. With difficulty, he spoke. "I be on my way, chief." Nystramo nodded. It was not the way of dwarves to insult honored comrades with comforting lies. "It be too slow," the dwarf continued. "Nae... nae tha way I wants it." Nystramo looked over to one of the healers, who nodded. Death was assured, but it would be long and painful. "Do me tha... tha honor.... Olor Kuld." Nystramo

nodded once more and drew Rorn Norogh, his fearsome axe. "I makes it quick, samman. Serves Moradin a' well a' ya ha' served tha clan." Durnhelm nodded, managed a gruesome smile, and the axe fell.

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"I gots a job fer ya," Nystramo told Dwyvyrn in his office. "I needs ta ken wha' 'appened down there." Dwyvyrn nodded, expecting the assignment. "Picks yer team and finds who done this."

"Who ya thinks, Nys?" Dwyvyrn asked, though he had his own ideas.

"Drow er duergar, I be thinkin'. Both be cruel enou' fer this."

"Wha' 'bouts tha ITB?" Dwyvyrn didn't really believe this possibility, but thought it should be mentioned.

"Nae." Nys shook his head. "Nae down this deep, an' I'm thinkin' they'd be leavin' a sign ta tells us it wa' them. This' be reekin' o' tha Underdark. Find outs, kin, an' whoever it be, I wants one alive."

Dwyvyrn nodded and left to choose his hunting party, knowing full well that they might never see the halls of Lonely Mountain again.

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"Bonie!" Nys barked after Dwyvyrn left. The lass, still shaken from seeing Durnhelm as he was carried up from the mines, entered the room.

"Aye, Olor Kuld?"

"Summons tha Council o' Elders. Tells 'em we be meetin' in tha war room a' noon. We gots plans to make."

She nodded and ran off to fulfill her duties, wondering if she would be allowed the luxury of finding happiness with Delfthand after all.

-----Deception By: Jhaelryna

The drow soldiers put aside their normal weapons, and instead armed themselves with warhammers and battleaxes. They

laughed and joked amongst themselves as they entered the slave pens. A group of duergar slaves huddled in the corner, warily watching the drow advance upon them. "It's time that you served Lloth, filthy creatures." said the Captain of the drow. "You will play a most fitting part in a little drama..."

Moving purposefully through the mines, the three man dwarven patrol kept a wary watch for anything unusual. Without warning, the dwarves were engulfed in inky blackness. "Drow!!" cried the veteran who was leading the patrol, "Stand firm, lads!" Within a split second, the drow were upon them. The dwarves lashed out blindly with their weapons as they attempted to retreat clear of the magical darkness. The drow, trained in blind fighting, knifed and slashed at the retreating dwarves. As the veteran at last exited the blackness, he found to his dismay that his comrades were not as lucky as he. He grimly set his weapon and launched himself at the first drow to emerge from the darkness spell. "That'll teach ye, ye blasted elfies!" he cried as his axe disembowled his dark opponent. "Who be next?"

When the battle was over the three unfortunate dwarves lay slain upon the tunnel floor. The drow had arranged the hacked bodies of a dozen duergar around them. Admiring his handiwork, the Captain of the drow finished placing the last corpse. A scene of great carnage. Even a detailed examination of the bodies would probably indicate that they had slain each other in mortal combat. He was sure that he would be commended for his actions. He had lost only one soldier, with 2 others being seriously wounded. The last dwarf had proved to be a challenging foe, he thought. An evil smile crept across his face as he thought of things to come. He intended to fulfil his orders to the letter. Within a few short weeks, the foolish dwarves would be chasing shadows under the Mountain. He barked a quick command to his men. The drow warband left the bloody remains behind them, pausing only to make sure that they left no discernable trail as they left.

-----The Ironpeak Warrior.... By:

KAGIS

Kagis Ironpeak was no stranger to battle. In fact, he craved it... not the little encounters that were so common in these parts... but the big, knock down, drag out fights that pitted dwarf against all manner of fearsome monster. Scratching his slightly peppered beard, Kagis thought about the recent attacks from the underdark, "Somethin' 'ere don' seem righ'. All reports seems ta implicate dem darn drow, but now we's find a

patrol dat looks li' it be taken ou' by duergar. Rust and Tarnish!" Letting out a puff, "dat does it, I guess dere be nuttin ta do essept go down dere an' find out what befallen me kin."

The battle-worn dwarf pounds across his small room in the Lonely Mouten, and approaches a large leather-bound chest. The chest is only slightly smaller than Kagis himself, made of mithrill steel and inlaid with silver. Kagis slides the chest into the center of the room, grunting under the weight. Reaching in his belt pouch, the dwarf draws out a golden key and inserts it in the locked chest. With a twist of the key, the chest unlocks.

Kagis slowly, almost reverently, opens the chest's lid to peer down inside. "Come ta pappa me precious Kuldarau (The Great Axe)." Kagis reaches in the chest and pulls out the large battle axe. Running his hands over the weapon, Kagis breaths a deep sigh, remembering when his father passed the clan's weapon down to him. Kuldarau is centuries old and was forged of Mithrill and Nature's Magic by the first clan lord of the Ironpeak clan.

Kagis hefts the Great Axe in one hand with a familiarity that speaks volumes of battles in bygone times. "Now we be seein' who dare attack me new clan sammans."

Reaching back in the huge chest, Kagis retrieves a few more items. Tefflairn a hand-held crossbow of dwarven make that would shame those used by the drow. Kagis straps Tefflairn to his heavy leather belt, and retrieves a quarrel of magic bolts (a gift from a human paladin). Next, Barakalagh his stout shield. Finally, Kagis pulls out a small golden ring engraved with runes. Placing the ring of regeneration on his finger and hefting Kuldarau, Kagis leaves his delve heading for the lower delves of Lonely Mountain.

His Iron-studded boots clomp resoundingly on the stone floors as Kagis steps into the grand meeting hall. Spotting Nystramo sitting in a corner speaking with Bonnielass, Kagis waves an armored hand at the Olor Kuld. "Greetin's kin!" Kagis calls out.

Both Nys and Bonnie waive back. Bonnie nods to Nys then leaves on some errand, leaving the two warriors alone. "Wha' be bringin' ye from yer battle field ta da Morndin Kagis?"

"I heard 'bout da attacks from da underdark. I cannae stand da thought dat some wily dark elfies or those slagg duergar migh' be killin' me kin. So's 'ere I be..." Kagis pauses and then grins at Nys... "I be knowin' ya Nys... yer nae 'bout ta let dese attacks ta go unavenged. Ye be goin' ta send a warrior group down dere an' I be valunterrin' ta go."

-----The Underdark... By:  
SUNDERFIST

Sunderfist knew the Underdark well...he knew its perils as well as its beauty. He knew how to blend in with the surroundings, to become virtually invisible, to speak to the rocks and earth. But most of all, in his homeland of the Underdark, he was able to utilize the little known Svirfneblin power to summon creatures from the Elemental Plane of Earth. Perhaps he could even enlist the aid of his people if they passed close enough to his city! He knew he could help the dwarves....after all they had shown much kindness in accepting him, a total stranger, into their halls. Now all he had to do was convince Dywyvrn to allow a gnome on his quest team...."Hmm," he thought, "No small feat there!"....

-----More bad news.... By:  
Nystramo

Nystramo examined the scene of the most recent carnage personally. With him were HiuFang Li and Patroclus. Dwyvyrn was off preparing his hunting party, and Nys had sent Starkadh to search some less reputable avenues of information. Moradinson, having only recently assumed the title of Rrin Kuld, was still searching for a dwarf to replace him as 1st of the Gaurd. Hence, he was needed to organize the mount's defenses in this time of trouble.

"Duergar," Patroclus spat. "I kened we ha nae seen tha las' o' tha greyskins."

"So it would appear," HiuFang mused, scratching his chin. He was examining the bodies closely, making small questioning noises now and then. "Wha' ya be thinkin', kin?" Nystramo asked.

HiuFang shrugged. "Well, my king, it certainly does appear that our kin and the duergar locked forces. The wounds indeed match the weapons here. Still, I must be truthful. I have some nagging questions."

"Aye?" Nystramo asked. "So asks 'em an' be ou' wi' it."

"The duergar here are a scrawny lot, even for their kind. I would suspect that this was the first battle they had seen in some time. Note that they do have some scars, but the scars one would receive in battle are all very old. The rest are either from this particular battle, or are not battle scars at all. I would say they were more in keeping with whips, and perhaps even a snake bite or two."

"Whips, eh? Ya sayin' they wa' slaves?" Nystramo thought for a moment. "Escaped slaves, mebbe? Fr'm some goblin er 'obgoblin camp?" It never occurred to him to think that they had escaped from the drow. Nobody escaped from the drow, except in death.

HiuFang nodded. "Yes, my king, that is certainly a possibility. Still, the snake bites make me wonder..." His voice trailed off, lost in thought.

Patroclus spoke up, his scowl even more severe than usual. "Pfagh! Wha' I wants ta ken is 'ow thi' scrawny lot bested our kin!" He pointed to one of the fallen dwarves, who still held a mighty axe in his grasp. "Goran be one o' our stoutest kuldar. E'en Dwyvyrn too' a sparrin' match wi' 'im seriously. I nae sees 'im bein' felled by a few scrawny greyskins."

"Magix?" Nystramo asked.

Both HiuFang and Patroclus shrugged. "I cannot say, my king. We do not have enough information. I believe we have surmised all that we are able, at the moment."

Nystramo nodded. "Aye, we be gainin' nothin' more 'ere. We doubles tha patrols fer now. I wants six kuldar on every outin', an' a cleric be accompanyin' 'em. If'n they be bringin' magix ta bear on us, lets be seein' wha' a bi' o' Moradin's power kin do fer us."

The three elders of the clan made their way back to the upper halls, each lost in thought. Dark times, indeed, and there was no sign that they would be improving any time soon.

-----Poor Kitty By: DIAMOND

DIAMOND stepped out of Nys' work room in time to see Tigguhr peel the bucket off of his head and fall to the floor in pain. Even though the lad could be an irritant and feeling more than a bit guilty as she watched him twitch on the floor, D1 ran in

concern to help the now unconscious Tigguhr. Nystramo was already leaning over Tig when D1 arrived at his side. "Is he alright?" she asked Nys shakily.

Distracted by the fallen lads last words and the smell of foul magic, Nys had not noticed D1's appearance until she had spoke to him. The tremor in her voice and the way she didn't look him in the eye when she spoke did not escape his notice. Taking hold of her chin and turning it towards him, Nys forced D1 to look him in the eye. After looking her in the eyes searchingly for a few seconds, Nys asked, "Ye ken somthin' 'bout this, don't ye lass?"

D1 nodded and preceeded to tell Nys how she, out of anger towards Tig, hit him over the head and locked him in her cellar. The bucket, she explained, was used to subdue him when he had tried to escape a few days later. She continued, "Tha lads bin in me cellar fer nigh on a week an' I fears tha' his condition be me doin'."

At any other time Nys would have found D1's behavior amusing, but he knew that more was happening here than a few days locked in a cellar. Wrapping his arm around her shoulder to comfort her, Nys said, "There be more at werk here, lass, than tha' lads being locked in a cellar fer a week wit nae a ale to drink. Any dwarf would be hard pressed indeed to be in such dier circumstances, but I thin' there be some dark magic involved here," then went on to explain what Tigguhr had said to him.

As Nystramo called for some guard's to take Tig away, D1 looked down in concern at the wounds Tig had caused himself while pulling the bucket from his head. Putting her hand on Nys' arm to stop him as he commanded Tig's removal, D1 asked, "At least let me look after his wounds, Nys. Mayhap I cin git him ta talks more sense when he wakes up."

Nys looks at the limp body being hauled away between two guards, and nods to D1AMOND. She reaches up, gives him a quick kiss on the cheek and says, "Thankyee," then runs off after the guards.

-----Another  
card is played... By: Jhaelryna

"Keep movin, ya lazy dogs!" yelled Gunklob as he waved his falchion menacingly. The goblin chieftan was anxious to get started on his war of conquest. He looked over to his side, where Gaglug the shaman was rummaging through a bag of



foul-smelling herbs. The chieftan had little respect for shaman, "Too crazy, if ya asks me" he said to himself. "Wot?" said the guard passing next to him. Gunklob bashed his weapon into the side of the guard's head, and snarled "Keep yer nose whar it belongs!". Making certain to keep his thoughts to himself this time, the goblin leader thought about the course of events that had brought him to this place. He and his tribe had been approached by a party of drow, seeking to parlay. Gunklob was no fool, and he knew that the sneaky spider-kissers never asked politely for anything, much less for anything from goblins. None the less, he listened to what they had to say. They offered him a chance for glory that he could not refuse. He was given a golden opportunity to strike at his hated enemies, the dwarves. The drow provided him with provisions, weapons, and most importantly, detailed maps of the lowest levels of the dwarven stronghold. They promised Gunklob that they would assist him in battle, and would allow him to rule the Mountain after the dwarves were driven from it. It was an opportunity they could not pass up. The very next day, his tribe was moving through the underground passages towards the dwarves. The chieftan cast another annoyed glance towards Gaglug. The drow had given Gunklob his magical falchion to aid in the battle, and had given something to the shaman as well. But Gaglug had hidden it away, tucked in some secret pocket of his. Every once in a while, Gunklob was able to catch a fleeting glimpse of the shiny object, but the shaman jealously guarded his treasure. The chieftan figured that he could search the shaman's possessions while he slept, but dismissed the idea. He had no desire to get any closer to the smelly shaman than he had to. The other goblins laughed at Gaglug, and claimed that the mere stench of the shaman would stun a dwarf at 10 paces. Holding his nose as a breeze passed over the goblin horde, the chieftan figured that their guess was fairly accurate. He shook his head, and turned his thoughts back to the conquest to come, and he thought of the glories he would win. He did not know that the drow had no intention of aiding his attack, and he had no way of knowing that the map he was given was false. The map showed the location of the dwarven stronghold well enough, but all of the interior details were invented by the imagination of the drow Captain. The drow cared not at all for the fate of the goblins. Once the goblins reached the dwarven holding, the drow plan would have succeeded. The Captain cared not whether the goblins had a chance against the dwarves. All that mattered was to get them there. The goblin band marched on. Fifteen score warriors, all intent upon war with their ancient enemy. Battle would soon be met under the mountain.

-----The plan in motion By:  
Jhaelryna

The drow Captain listened to the reports of his scouts, and was pleased. The dwarves had reacted as planned. The dwarven patrols had been increased in number and strength. Soon they expected the dwarves to come down into the Underdark, hunting those that slew their kin. The drow prepared to withdraw his small force of a dozen soldiers. The small contingent of drow could not confront the power of the dwarves, now that it was awakened. But they would continue to leave enticing clues as they went. They prepared counterfeit duergar campsites to be discovered, and left duergar food remains and marks of passing for the patrols to find. The bullheaded dwarves would predictably be drawn after them, away from the prepared defenses of the Mountain. Then, the outermost patrols would be surprised and overrun by the several hundred goblins now marching towards the unsuspecting dwarves. The Captain chuckled to himself. Even the strong patrols of the dwarves had little chance against such weight of numbers. The losses of more patrols would further enrage the dwarves, and they would march out in strength to destroy the goblins utterly. And that is what the drow were counting on.

-----Hidden Weapon By: DIAMOND

DIAMOND followed the guards to Tigguhr's room and watched as they placed him onto his bed. She nodded to the guards as they turned to set their watch by Tig's door. Remembering Nys' words about foul magic, D1 stopped one of the lads and asked him to fetch a healer. Tigguhr did a world of hurt to himself, nothing bad enough for a healer, but she wanted a cleric type about to see if they could maybe detect any magic on the unconscious lad.

With the guards set, D1 went about cleaning the hardened cobbler from what was left of Tig's hair and beard. Then she cleaned and dressed the bare patches where Tig had torn out his hair. As she was taking off his soiled shirt, she felt something hard hidden underneath, close to his chest. Under his clothing she found a small crossbow and bolt. Diamond had seen many weapons in her life, but this was like no crossbow she had ever seen.

Making sure that the lad was comfortable, D1 went to show the crossbow to Nystramo. As she was leaving, she felt it important to tell the guards, "Makes sure ye watches 'im closey, and nae be trustin' a werd he says. When 'e wakes, please send werd ta tha chief er me."

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D1 was leaning over Nystramo's seated shoulder when Starkadh entered the work room. She looked up with a smile, but then noticed the serious set to both Nys' and Stark's faces. D1 studied Stark as he stood before his chief and received his orders. She watched as his features grew harder and harder with each of Nys' words and his fists clinched tighter and tighter. The way he held himself, D1 almosts expected Stark to spit in Nys' face and tell him to take a flying leap, but he nodded and agreed to gather as much information he could. She continued to watch him carefully as he turned to leave. Stark glanced at her while leaving. D1, who was expecting Stark's usual wink, almost gasped when she saw instead a glare of hatred.

Dropping her hand from Nystramo's shoulder, D1 started to go after Stark, but then she heard Nys exclaim as he found symbols etched inside of the crossbow he was once again examining. "Drow!" He almost shouted, and startled DIAMOND from her thoughts. She'd have to talk to Stark later, she thought, and turned her attention back to Nystramo.

-----Into the Underdark By:

Dwyvyrn

Dwyvyrn chose his hunting party carefully. When news of Durhelm Stonehew's torture had filtered through the clan, every dwarf capable of hefting an axe was eager to head out and avenge his death. Their enthusiasm cooled considerably when word of Goran's patrol came back. All three of those dwarves had been seasoned fighters. All three were dead.

Still, many kin sought danger and asked to be a member of the expedition. Even the deep-gnome Sunderfist had approached him about joining up. While Dwyvyrn had originally scoffed at this notion, he warmed up to it after a bit of thought. As the party ventured deeper into the passages under Lonely Mountain, the surface dwarves would become less familiar with their surroundings. In contrast, the svirfneblin would be entering areas much better known to him, and his knowledge of the Underdark could prove critical to the party's survival.

In the end, Dwyvyrn selected four warriors to accompany him and the deep-gnome on their journey. In addition a priestess, Gilgina, would accompany the group. She was one of the clan's most potent healers and a competent fighter as well. If there

was one common trait found in the party members, it was that none of them had any family here in Lonely Mountain. Dwyvyrn fully expected that the party would return to the clan halls with fewer members than it departed with, if it returned at all.

Dwyvyrn hurriedly strode into the training hall where the party had gathered, after attending a last-minute meeting of the clan elders. Although the elders were in agreement that the duergar did not seem to be the only ones behind this assault, they were unsure what other races might be involved. While it was possible that one of the surface races had forced the duergar to aid them, this did not concern the council too greatly. All of the dwarven warriors were adept at combatting their perennial surface foes such as goblins, orcs, gnolls, and giants. Indeed, since the duergar infiltrations had ceased many months ago, the only combat the dwarven patrols had seen was on the surface (In fact, subterranean patrols had been held in such low regard of late that dwarven warriors actively sought places on the surface patrols, where the chance of finding action was much greater). If the expedition should happen to encounter one of these races, the dwarves would hold a decided advantage in underground combat techniques.

What concerned the council of elders was the much more likely chance that one of the races of the underdark was aiding the duergar. Only the drow and the illithids had the power necessary to gain the cooperation of the dark dwarves, either willingly or unwillingly. Few of Axepeak's warriors had any battle experience against either of these races. To compensate for this, a quick training session was conducted to refresh the fighters in tactics used when fighting these foes. First they practiced blindfighting to combat the darkness used by the drow. Although the dwarves did not expect to match the expertise of the dark elves in this tactic, they would at least be able to perform an organized retreat to a place where they could set up a proper defense. Next, they worked on summoning dwarven battle-rage, the best defense they had against the mental attacks of the mind-flayers.

As he watched a blindfolded Sunderfist struggle to fend off attacks, Dwyvyrn momentarily questioned his decision to allow the svirfneblin to join the group. He realized however, that the deep-gnome's ability to summon elemental beings represented perhaps their best chance of surviving an attack from either drow or illithids. In that way he served them better than the most powerful dwarven warrior.

When their practice was complete, the group packed up their weapons, rations, and supplies. Once all was in order, they slowly filed out and headed toward the gate that separated the clan halls from the lower caverns. As the recently-doubled guard moved methodically to unbar and open the gate, Nystramo came down to wish each member of the expedition luck. Approaching Dwyvyrn, he clapped him squarely on the shoulders and managed a weak smile. "Findar, samman" were his only words. Dwy returned the smile, determined to show nothing but confidence to his party. "Aye, Olor Kuld. We'll find out wots be goin' on down under da Mount."

With that, the seven stout warriors descended into the lower caves. As the sound of the gate shutting behind them echoed down the passage, Dwy couldn't help but wonder if he would ever again hoist an ale inside the granite halls of Clan Axepeak...

-----The Captain

broods By: Jhaelryna

"Farewell" was all the drow Captain said to his wounded men, and then he turned away. Severely wounded by the unexpected ferocity of the dwarven veteran, the two wounded drow had become a detriment to the rest of the group. Drow were a practical people, and those that could not contribute anything were disposed of. Of friendship and of mercy, the drow knew nothing. The Captain heard weapons being drawn, and soon the labored breathing of the two wounded men had stopped forever. The other soldiers methodically stripped the bodies of all valuables and weapons, then tossed the bodies over the side of a fissure. Some monster in the Underdark would feed well today, thought the Captain. The Captain sat upon a rock, and berated himself for the useless waste of his men. He felt no loyalty or grief for them, for they were simple pawns and easily replaced. What gnawed at him was the fact that he had lost three soldiers, and had killed only three dwarves. An even exchange was unacceptable, and he knew that he would have to answer serious questions about his command when he returned to the drow city. Why had he been so foolish? He should have sprung an ambush upon the dwarven patrol. He should have felled them with poisoned bolts and been done with it. But in his pride, he ordered his men to melee the dwarves. Nothing could be done about it now, however. He needed to focus on the tasks before him. To dwell further on his mistakes would only serve to distract him from his responsibilities. He scribbled a coded message onto a piece of parchment, and gave it to the

messenger. "Take this back immediately", he commanded briskly. The drow messenger promptly saluted, and began his trek back to the drow city. "I'll not underestimate you again, foul dwarves" muttered the Captain, "Not again."

-----From bad to worse.... By:  
Nystramo

Nystramo looked at the small hand crossbow with a furrowed brow. Drow. At the very least he could be certain they were behind Tigguhr's bizarre behavior. And the attacks? All signs pointed to the duergar. Further patrols had revealed campsites that had clearly been used by the greyskins. Still, the timing could hardly be a coincidence. He shuddered as he considered the possibilities. An alliance between the two races? Not out of the question, he knew. Both had a hatred for dwarves, and it was not unknown for the two to work together to eliminate a common foe. Of course, Nystramo knew full well that the drow always made certain to come out on top after such alliances, but that was small comfort now.

"Thin's dinna be lookin' goo', does they lad?" D1amond asked with concern. Never had she seen Nys so worried, and she had to admit, it frightened her a bit. The chief was not one to be easily spooked.

Nys shook his head. "Nae lass, it dinna," he answered, still staring at the crossbow. No, things were'nt looking good at all.

-----Dreams,  
Truths, Beliefs By: Tigguhr

Two stout dwarven guards stood vigilance over Tigguhr as he lay on a stone slab in a holding cell deep within the Mount. Dreaming, he sweated and rocked, chafing against the bindings that held him. Once Nystramo saw the Drow crossbow that D1 had recovered off the young dwarf's body, extra precautions were needed, thus the bindings. Tigguhr dreamed of the drow priestess and his mission to assassinate the Rorn Gor....

"...so he returns as chief does he? Fine! The half folk grow in number like never before, polluting the surface and underground both. Prosperous now under his guidance? Ha! Use this sleep poison and then call me, Speck! I will torture him for all eternity. Then, perhaps the pirate will become head of the stinking foul dwarves. Perhaps the pirate...yes.."

Tigguhr awoke with a shudder. Senses and feelings flooded into

him at once: Burning on his face and head, bindings bit at his legs and hands, guards watched him attentively. In a distance, a babe cried. He felt an emptiness across his chest...THE BOW WAS GONE! "I must have done the deed then," his mind screamed. "I'm prisoner...I ha' kilt the chief! Tha kin ha' bound me 'n taked me beard!"

The babe continued to cry, getting louder, cutting out all thought from Tigguhr's mind. He focused on the sound, little but so loud, and helpless. No doubt one of the many dwarven couples had a new child, but what hope was there with no chief?. Anguish and remorse filled him, he could barely take a breath (and at that moment he shook off the drow spells, but he did not know it). "Tha whelp...." moaned Tigguhr.

"I ha' kilt tha chief a' the beckonin' o' a drow priestess!" he exclaimed. The guards looked at each other and one ran out off the room. Moments later, the lady D1 came into the room with a cleric and the guard. "Dear lass!" shouted Tigguhr. "I ha' caused nae end o trouble fer ye an' now I ha' kilt tha chief! It be dark magic o' the drow. In yer cellar she comes ta me! I ha' pullt tha trigger! They wanted tha chief ou' tha way 'cause tha kin gittin too prospress! I foughs wi' all me soul, but I kinna..."

D1 looked on the young dwarf with pity, realizing that some of the exuberance of Tigguhr would be gone forever when he was healed and learned the truth. "Healer, puts tha lad ta sleeps. He be needin tha rest, an' now we knows tha truth. I guess it be time ta move tha shop eh?. Drow priestess be poppin in my cellar???" The cleric slept the young dwarf. He detected no magic on Tigguhr now, so he ordered the bindings removed. The lad posed no threat now and he would rest better without the straps around his limbs.

-----Gaglug's plan By: Gaglug

Humming an off-key tune, Gaglug the goblin shaman rooted deeply in his bag of foul-smelling herbs. "Aha!" he cried, as he drew a fistful of the rotting plants out of the sack. The goblin cooks near him winced as Gaglug tossed the handful of herbs into the stewing pot. Gaglug then began to shout and prance around the bubbling stew. The other goblins stepped back to avoid being inadvertantly struck by the wildly flailing shaman. "Mak-uk lob gitty ur splut!!" shouted the shaman in glee, "Bakk tor nuk kam-del rik-ta dak!" The appalled cooks looked on as Gaglug began to froth at the mouth. "KEKK BAL

ROK-TOK SHUM IKKY DIT!!!" Another handful of herbs splashed into the goblin's dinner. The crazed shaman's dancing reached a fever pitch. His flailing limbs blurred as he spun around the bubbling stew. "AAAIIIIIIIIII WOKKA!!!" he shouted triumphantly, and spat an immense glob of saliva into the simmering kettle. Too stunned to speak, the other goblins gaped at their insane shaman. Puzzled by their stares, Gaglug explained "Majik makes goblins strong! Kills many dwarfses!". Still not convinced, the cooks brought out a bowl, scooped the now-rancid stew into it, and held it out to Gaglug. The shaman grabbed the bowl without hesitation and downed it in a single gulp. Half of the stew spilled down his face and on to his well-stained robes and furs, but he swallowed a good deal of the sickening slop. The cooks peered at him for several long moments, and when he did not fall over dead from the foul stew, pronounced the food fit to eat. Gaglug watched his men...for he thought of them as HIS men...eat the stew. What did that stupid chieftan know of leading troops? The shaman knew that he would be able whip the goblin horde into a frenzy within the next several days. He knew that the cheiftan would still get the credit for the great victory, though. But perhaps...perhaps the chieftan would get killed by the dwarves. Yes, that could certainly happen...if it wasn't for the fact that the chieftan led from the rear. But a stray bolt or weapon might catch the chief unawares. Gaglug grinned as he began to formulate a plan. He was lost deep in thought as the goblin horde ate the stew...the stew that had begun to affect them mentally. Within days, the horde would be his to command!

-----A whirl of information....

By: Nystramo

Nystramo looked in frustration at the gnome in front of him.

"Many big feet! Yes yes! One... one... one... lots!!" he was saying. "I sees and smells! And I tells! Yes yes! Warn under-over of bad unders! Sparklies!!"

"Aye lad, ye done goo' by Axepeak," Nystramo replied, and tossed the gnome a bag of gems. Grinning, jumping, and bowing, the odd gnome took his leave.

It had taken some time, but the gnome had finally gotten the warning across to the chief. Goblins, and many of them, were marching on the Lonely Mountain. Nys had no idea how many, but best to be prepared for the worst.



He shouted out to Mergaroth, who was on herald's duty at the moment. The grunt entered quickly. "Aye, Nys? Wha' ya be needin', eh?"

"Finds Moradinson an' tells 'em I needs 'em an' I needs 'em an hour ago." Mergaroth nodded and set of to find the Rrin Kuld.

"Goblins, duergar, drow...." Nystramo muttered. "All o' tha Underdark be movin' agin' us it be seemin'."

He looked up as Mergaroth entered, Moradinson just behind. "Ach, tha' wa quick," Nys observed. "Now sees if'n ya kin finds HiuFang. Tell 'em I needs somethin' done, an' I kinna thin' o' a better Kuldar fer tha job." Mergaroth ran off once again, wondering if heralds were always kept this busy.

"Aye, Nys?" Moradinson asked. "Wha' be so urgent, eh?"

"Goblins," the Olor Kuld replied. "An' lots o' 'em. Marchin' on tha mount, by all reports."

Moradinson grimaced. "Dwy ha' a'ready lef' wi' 'is team. There only be four."

Nystramo nodded. "Aye, I ken. Sends a runner a'er 'em an' tells 'em go nae further. I needs ya ta organize a war party, an' does it double quick. We needs it big an' we needs it now. I nae ken 'ow many goblins there be, so we plays it safe. An' sends a few priests, a' well. Ya'll be leadin' 'em yerself, Morad. We kinna affords ta be takin' chances. I wants tha bes' Kuldar in thi' war party, startin' wi' ye."

Moradinson nodded. "Aye, Nys. We be leavin' yes'erday." With that he set off, already running through the names of the clan Kuldar in his head.

Nystramo took a quick ale break, thinking. So much happening so quickly, and none of it good. To add to his distraction, D1amond had set off on some mysterious personal business. He shook his head. No time to worry about that now.

Where the blazes was Mergaroth with HiuFang?  
-----Nystramo's Summons By:  
HiuFang Li

Mergaroth the dwarf, grumbling in slight impatience, knocked

with gentle vigor on the Dun Gor's stout iron-bound door. "Dun Gor.. HiuFan?" he grunted, hoping he did not catch the silken-clad dwarf at the wrong time. Placing his ear close to the edge of the door, Mergaroth strained to hear any sound of activity within the room. After a few silent moments, he heard a voice.. but not one coming from the other side of the door.

"What is it that you wish of me, good brother?" whispered a muffled voice from behind him. Whirling about in sudden surprise, he saw a figure swathed in black, two narrow eyes glittering in the dim shadows. "Clangedin!! I.. is tha' ye, Dun Gor?" ejaculated the dwarf. Pulling down a raven-black mask of cloth about his face, the figure uttered in a more familiar voice, "Have no fear, friend.. 'tis I, HiuFang." Peering at the dark garb and the lengthy hair bound behind the Dun Gor's head, Mergaroth sputtered, "Now wha' wou' all THA' be in aid of?! Ye plannin' ta be someone's shadow?! Well, ne'ermin' all tha'.. the Chief be lookin' for ye in 'is chambers."

With a frown and a nod, HiuFang turns down the carved hallway, moving swiftly. "ey, wait for me!" Mergaroth calls after him, running down the hall. But the Dun Gor seems to have melted into the dim-lit halls, naught but the a whiff of jasmine to betray his previous presence..

-----A stinky passage.... By:

Darugh

(Two days prior to Nystramos meeting with a gnome)

Deep in the myriad caverns and tunnels under the great crage of Lonely Mountain, a small creature peers intently at a large outcropping of glittering emerald. The roaring sound of the great underground river, drowns out the sharp ringing sounds of the gnomes hammer and drill. This is the fabled source of the majestic Neverwinter River, heated by still glowing hart of the quiescent volcano...Lonely Mountain.

A large nodule of emerald breaks from the main outcropping and falls to the ground, with a bark of delight, the Gnome, Darugh Dundergem grasps it up quickly and peers intently at the green glowing hart of the raw gem. The heart of the gems glows brightly to the small gnomes infravision.

"Yes, Yes, Yes!!!", Darugh, hopping around in a circle swinging his arms about vigorously chants to himself over the roar of moving water. His hobnailed boots strike sparks as they react

with the traces of flint in the floor and his whirling dervish dance of glee.

"Good! best! better! not bad!! Yes! No, yup!! yup! yup!! It is..It is.. I know, I do, I dooo!!", the dancing gnome chatters to himself, as he pauses his whirl to take up his hammer and drill again. Muttering to himself. "Many, many...one,one...LOTS!! Sparkleys!! Har!!", Before again begining his drilling of the rich outcropping, he lovingly hugs the large outcropping of emmrald stone.

His knobby features...a moment ago..screwed up with glee at his rich find...calmed suddenly as his ear rested against the stone outcropping of emmrald crystal. Lifting his ear from the stone.. he listens carefully to the roar of the river passing thru this small cavern. Placing his ear again against the emmrald crystal.. he screws his face into a frown..and mutters.. "Bad, bad, ungood, yup..yup..It is." as he listens to the rhythmic thump of many feet passing.

He quickly stuffs his many tools into a clever leather belt at his waste. Then carfully putting the large raw emmrald into his leather satchel. He listens once again to the crystal outcropping. Nodding to himself he pauses to make a mark on a piece of light leather, then he slips into a side passage, in search of the sound.

Darugh peers down at the still glowing traces of heat marking the floor of the passage from a smallish side tunnel. It is quite evident even to the not very intelligent gnome that many creatures hand just recently passed this way... And in the Deeps, even Darugh knows that its better to know what is around you than let it sneak up and eat you.

The small gnome peeks into the passage, left and right, and sniffs the air, he makes a foul face as a pungent aroma assaults his olfactory sense. Uglys! big foot under uglies! and lots too!! He thinks to himself, as a fit of gagging takes him. After a moment, his stomach tires of the dry heaving, and settles to its fate...a dull ache.

The heat traces are dimmer to his dark sight, to the left and brighter to the right...running back up the side passage thirty feet or so, the gnome takes a deep breath then runs back to the intersection and turns left. Holding his breath and following the fading traces of the passing horde.

-----One..one..one... WOW! Lots!!

By: Darugh

Darugh holding his breath did not have far to go up the passage, at the first leftward bend it opened up into a large cavern. Just outside the cavern he bowled into a pair of goblin sentrys, all three went down in a tumble of flailing limbs and weapons.

His breath woofed out of him as he slammed into the sentries, and fell into a tumble with the two, big flat footed green skinned goblins. Darugh, found himself sitting on top of one goblins chest, looking down into its uglie face.

"WOW!!!" he exclaimed down at the goblin whose compainion was squirming under them both, "See you, me.....Yuk!, PEE-U!!, Uglie under stinky!!" holding his nose and caughing he jumped to his feet quickly, standing on the goblins face, he peered into the chamber behind.... where the goblin horde milled about at camp. "WOW, WOW, looket!", pumping his legs up and down furiously as he trys to count the assembled goblins. "ONE, ONe, one...LOTS!!" about that time, the goblin, his face torn and mashed by the vigorous gnome, rolled out from under the prancing lilliputian.

Tumbling onto his back, Darugh hits hard, the air woofing out of him again "OOPH!"

Gasping for breath, Darugh crawls away from the goblins and climbs to his feet. The goblins now have taken this opertunity to gain thier big flat feet also, and scramble to gather thier weapons. They bend over at the same time and soundly rap thier heads together. Stumbling back and cursing each other.

By now the clatter of arms and curses have attracted the notice of some of the goblin horde. Several see the gnome standing looking wide eyed into the cavern and roar the alarm.

Desideing that its time to go, Darugh, runs off down the passage back the way he came with the goblins hot on his heels.

The goblins chase the gnome all the way back to the cavern with the river running thru it. Darugh skids to a halt near the edge his hobnails strikeing sparks. Then turns back to see, one,one.one....lots!! of goblins boiling into the small chamber. Squeezing his eyes closed and pinching his nose shut, Darugh jumps into the river..and is washed away with the fast moving

water.....

Spitting up water, and caughing, a soggy gnome climbs out of the Neverwinter River in the east central portion of the Neverwinter woods. Lieing on his back drawing in great gasps of air, the battered and brused gnome..mutters. "WOW"

-----Sparklys!! and a smelly pipe.. By: Darugh

(Later in the Dwarven Stronghold..Darugh meets with Nystramo)

Darugh, after standing still for two minutes, was ready to explode.. why couldnt dwarves understand the simplest things? Taking a deep breath, the gnome tried again to make it as simple as possible for the granite headed under-overs. Running circles around Nystramo to emphasize, his point, he launched once again into his tale about finding a large sparkly, the emmrald crystal telling him a secret, the smelly passage, how many pebbles where dislogged in the same passage, what he thought of smelly passages, holding his breath, how Darugh was known for being able to hold his breath longer than any other gnome back home, his home never smelled bad, did Nystramo know the neverwinter river was warmed by his own forges?, how loud the river was if you put your head in it?, has Nystramo ever sat on a big footed uglie under's chest?, it smells worst then it looks..... lots of uglie unders under the mount, swiming in a underground river is hard, you have to hold your breath a lonng time, did he know darugh could hold his breath longer than any other gnome back home?... he could!! Draugh holds his breath to prove it.....

Darugh shuffled back and forth around and around, throwing up his arms for emphis, and jumping up and down at the good parts. Till finally the underover got the idea.

Darugh peered into the pouch, "WOW!! one, one, one,.... LOTS a sparklys!".

.....Later as Nystramo sat at an ale break he reaches into his belt pouch for his pipe, only to find it missing. After ferously searching his person and desk, he remembers something the gnome said as he was leaveing.... "WOW whats this!?"

-----Scouting Party  
discovers goblins By: KAGIS

Kagis, stood quietly listening to the rythmic vibrations humming through the stone all around him. Dwyvern and the rest of the

scouting party waited less than 100 yards behind the grizzled veteran. He furrowed his brow in thought, allowing the stone to speak to him. "Well over 10 score of hum'noids... marchin'... righ' a' us... Damn!"

Kagis heaved himself up from leaning against the stone and raced back to the rest of the group.

Rounding the corner Kagis nearly bowled over a concerned Dwyvern tapping his foot impatiently. "Ach! I be sorry Dyvern, buh I wa' listenin' ta da stone, and by me own reconin' deres a' leas' 200 hum'noids marchin' right for us... down dis very corridor!"

"Wha?!" bellowed Dwyvern.

At this point one of the other scouts came into the room from a side passage and reported. "Dwyvern, over 300 goblin marchin' righ' fer us.. an' tha mount righ' affer us."

"Goblin?!" The assembled dwarves all asked as one.

I nod my agreement to the assesment, "Yep. Nae drow'd be makin' dis much noise, and the critters aren't makin' enough noise ta be duergar. Only a hand full o' odders coul' be so bold or stupid... an' goblins be da stupedes'."

Dwyvern rubbed his chin in thought, looking over the assembled dwarves in his scouting party. Except for Kagis, they were all young and eager for battle... especially if they could fight goblins. Kagis was eager too, but for different reasons... his were much more personal. There was an entire clan (Ironpeak) he needed to avenge for their wrongfull deaths 12 seasons gone by now. As Dwyvern thinks over his options, Kagis pipes up.

"I sees only one opshcion fer us. Dere's only a handfull o' us 'ere and we nae be goin' ta fight da smelly buggars an' win by ourselves. We still a full day o' hard marchin' from da mount. I thinks wes should send a message back ta da mount, and da res' o' us busy ourselves by playin' hide an' seek wit da goblins." I hold up a hand to stall any comments, "We ken dese 'ere tunnels better den anyone. If'n we werk together and coord'nate, an' hit dere front scouts, den gets away 'fore da whole bunch come affer us, we migh' slow 'em down an give more time for Nys ta prepare da defenses. What's ya say Dwyvern?"

I turn to allow Dwyvern ta decide, done saying my peace.

-----The Lost Patrol is  
Found... By: Dwyvyrn

Dwyvyrn chafed inwardly as his small band continued to move slowly through the seemingly endless twisting caves that extended down into the underdark below Lonely Mountain. For three days they had been searching every inch of these caves, looking for some hint of the duergar forces which had slain their clansmen. On the first day they had found the remnants of a few duergar campsites, and thought themselves on the trail of the foul dark dwarves. As they travelled further into the Underdark however, the signs of duergar presence had slowly disappeared, leaving them to wonder whether the group of greyskins that attacked the Axepeak patrol had acted alone.

But why would a group of only a dozen or so duergar assault a stronghold of over 100 dwarves? Perhaps they were the last remnants of Clan Crakskull, which had vowed to take Lonely Mountain from the Axepeak dwarves or to die trying? No, Dwyvyrn thought, they weren't Crakskull. This was fairly evident in that none of the equipment found on the dead duergar or in any of the abandoned campsites depicted the familiar skull-splitting pick which was the symbol of that clan. Strangely, what Dwyvyrn found more convincing was that none of the duergar bodies showed anything faintly resembling the fierce pride that a Crakskull displayed, even in death.

Dwyvyrn shook his head to clear his thoughts. There had been far too much time for thinking on this journey. His small hunting party had turned into little more than a mapping expedition. The group was running low on supplies and would have to turn back in the next day or so, with only a detailed map of the caves beneath Lonely Mountain to show for their efforts. A long sigh of frustration escaped his lips as Dwyvyrn reflected on his ill luck. He had been certain this trip would bring him many glorious battles, or at the very least a glorious death. The gods seemed intent on denying him even that small measure of satisfaction.

Just as he was beginning to resign himself to his fate, events took a sudden turn. Kagis came rushing back from his forward scouting position and told of several hundred humanoids in front of the party, heading in the direction of Lonely Mountain. Another scout soon returned from his post and confirmed the report. A buzz of excitement encircled the dwarves as they began readying weapons and laying plans. Dwyvyrn listened

intently as Kagis set forth his idea of random, quick strikes intended to attrite the enemy forces and slow their advance toward the Axepeak halls. Although intrigued by the plan, his one point of concern was ensuring that the messenger sent back to Lonely Mountain arrived safely.

His mind was eased as he set his eyes on Sunderfist. The deep gnome had shown throughout the expedition that he could travel faster and with more stealth than any of the dwarves. More than once in the past few days Dwyvyrn had jumped at the sound of a rock speaking to him, only to turn and see the svirfneblin no more than three feet away. Sunderfist would have no problem avoiding any enemy scouts, and if he happened to encounter a cave fisher or any of the other dangerous inhabitants of the Underdark, he could summon an elemental to battle the creature while he made his escape.

As he was giving final instructions to Sunderfist before sending him back to Lonely Mountain, a startled cry filled the small cavern. The dwarven party turned to see a single goblin at one of the entrance passages, a look of shock frozen on his face. The goblin quickly recovered from his surprise and turned to flee, but before he got even one step Gilgina's hammer struck him squarely in the back of the head and he fell into a motionless heap. The priestess quickly recovered her weapon and dragged the goblin's body into an alcove. An air of tension filled the room as the dwarves quietly searched the nearby passages for any sign of additional foes. Finding none, Dwyvyrn sent the deep gnome back to the Axepeak halls, and gathered the remaining dwarves around him.

-----A plan is put into action...

By: Dwyvyrn

Dwyvyrn carefully explained the plan. They would split into two squads of three dwarves each. Dwyvyrn, the priestess Gilgina, and Nalvor, the youngest of the warriors would form one squad. Kagis would lead the other two warriors as the second squad. The squads would operate independently of each other, sticking to the side passages and avoiding the main body of goblins. As the dwarven squads prepared to separate, Dwyvyrn pulled Kagis aside for a final word.

"I ken ye be lookin' fer revenge agin' da goblins lad," Dwyvyrn spoke, "bu' dinnae lets it clouds ye 'ead an' makes ye does somethin' brash. I'm sure'n ye'd be 'appy to takes da lot of 'em strait on, bu' I be 'oldin' ye responsuhble fer dem two



lads." Here Dwyvyrn pointed to the two warriors Kagis would be leading. "Dinnae gets dem killed jes' to extracks revenge. Keeps yeselves alive an' da clan wi' helps ye to get vengeance."

With that, the two dwarves joined their respective squads. Gilgina handed Kagis a pouch containing her healing herbs and balms. Dwyvyrn's squad would rely on her supernatural healing abilities. As the dwarven warriors whispered calls of "Findar Torst!" and "Raugh Ar Dun!" to their departing comrades, the two squads melted into the black recesses of the Underdark.

-----A dangerous mission... By: Nystramo

"You wished to see me, my king?"

Nystramo nearly leaped out of his chair at hearing HiuFang Li's voice. "Ach, Hiu, I dinna 'ear ya enters." To this HiuFang responded only with an enigmatic smile. Nystramo shifted in his seat, somewhat uncomfortable. While he liked and respected the unusual dwarf, Nystramo found his mannerisms disconcerting, and he never particularly cared for being called "king." Still, he understood the dwarves unusual code demanded such formalities, and he accepted them for his sake.

Nystramo frowned then, noting Hiu's unusual garb. The black cloth clung to the dwarf, who was not quite as stocky as his other kin. His hair was done up in a pony-tail, another unusual affectation for a dwarf. "Ya be plannin' somethin', Hiu?" Nystramo asked. Before Hiu could answer, Nystramo continued. "Well'n, I gots somethin' ya may wants to consider 'afore ya 'eads out, eh?"

HiuFang raised an eyebrow questioningly. "Indeed, my king? And what might that be?"

"We gots evidence tha drow be involved in tha attacks on tha mount. We be needin' ta ken wha' be goin' on, wha' they be plannin'. It be some trickery, I nae doubts." He grinned at Hiu, then. "An' who be better'n ye a' sneaksin' abouts an' findin' secrets, eh, kin?"

He leaned back, waiting for Hiu's reply.

-----The Preporations.... By: KAGIS

I tie the pouch containing Gilgina's herbs and balms to my belt.

"Less be 'opin' we wont be needin' any of dis stuff."

With that said, I turned to my two dwarven kinsmen. Kelvan and Dedrac are stout middle aged dwarven warriors much like myself, with a strong sense of what's right and what's wrong. Kelvan carries a strong broad sword and a sturdy crossbow. Dedrac prefers a massive war hammer and also carries a crossbow. These aren't your average crossbows, but Clan Axepeak crossbows specially fitted with a "rapid-fire" trigger. A small lever placed slightly under the trigger bar allowed the wielder to quickly re-cock the crossbow with the flick of the wrist. Also, a long thin box containing 10 spare bolts sits underneath the firing bar. Inside the box carefully calibrated springs provides just the right amount of pressure so that a new bolt is pushed up when the swing lever re-cocks the weapon. In close range combat; in tight quarters the weapon was devastating. I grinned. "Dis gonna be fun!"

Without anything further to add we set off. I talked quietly to my two kin while we traveled as fast as possible. "I gots me an idea. Now goblin nae be 'ticularly bright fellas, but dese nae stupid neider. De knows juss 'nough 'bout battle tactics to know nae ta let yer enemy behind ya." I grin broadly. "I know exactly where ta hits em firs'."

We take one of the smaller passages, knowing that the larger force of goblins wouldn't be using it. The passage takes us past the goblin hoard and re-merges with the main corridor less than 50 yards behind the rear guard. I scan the area. There are three other side passages that lead off from the main corridor, all of them small enough to force single file movement. I quickly have Kelvan and Dedrac examin two of the passages while I check out the third.

A few minutes later we gather back together in the main corridor. "What's down da firs' passage Kelvan?"

"It runs 'bout 30 yars den ends in a small room strewn wit rubble."

"And da second passage, Dedrac?"

"Pretty much da same ting." the kinsman responds.

"Goo'. Da third passage opens up back on dis tunnel 'bout 100 yard back. So we have ta come back to da original passage."

I remove my pack, fish through it until I find what I'm looking for. I pull out a beat-up old cloak, and some old crossbow bolts. I tear off some of the cloak and place a strip near the first passage that leads to a dead end. I then place the old bolts near the entrance, and scuff up the ground with my boots, so that it looks like some folk ran through it. After finishing my misdirection, I replace my pack, heft my axe in one hand and my crossbow in the other. I grin at my two kinsmen as we begin marching to catch up to the goblin rear guard. I can hear Kelvan whisper softly, "Dis gonna be fun..."

-----The Attack.... By: KAGIS

A short time later I bring my two kinsmen to a halt and sniff the air. My nose wrinkles in disgust. "De are close now. So da time fer silence begins." Kelvan and Dedrac nod in understanding.

"Ok, we hit da rear guard, kill some goblins den backtrack to da original side passage; da one dat don't end in a dead end. One more ting, be sure dat a few o' dem gets away to tell da odders dat da dwarves are behind 'em. I wants 'em ta know we are here."

Again they nod in agreement.

With that said, we move quietly up behind the goblin rear guard. As we round a corner I can see the outlines of goblins ahead in the dark. There looks to be at least a score of the smelly beasts. And, as usual, they aren't paying very much attention to watching the rear of the group. I lift my crossbow, aim and fire. "Thunk!" I catch on right in the base of the skull. It drops with almost perfect silence.

An instant later, my two kinsmen open fire, launching one bolt after another into the rear ranks of the goblins. One, Two, Three fall within seconds. The remaining turn and stare in surprise. One of the goblins squints back down the corridor at us and then yells... "Dwarfs!!!"

Another volley of crossbows slams into the goblins... two more down. The squinting goblin grabs one of his fellows and points down the corridor to the main body of goblins. "Go! Tell!" he screams at the scared youngling. The messenger takes off, while the last of the rear guard turns and charges.

One last volley... three more down.

I then let go of my crossbow knowing it will hang from the cord on my belt, and heft my axe. Kelvan and Deduc follow suit, and we hit the rushing goblins... now less than ten.

Axe swings... blade slams home, a hammer crushes a skull. Pitiful swings of clubs follow, then the Axe, Blade, Hammer combination goes again. In less time than it took for the ten goblins to charge us, they now lay dead or dying at our feet.

"Ok! Dat was fun kin! Now lets get goin' 'fore reinforcements arrive."

Me and my assault squad head back for the side passage, taking extra special care not to leave any tracks at the entrance when we go through it.

After moving at full speed all the way back to the original cavern where Dwyvyrn and I parted company, we stop and catch our breath. Then, in silence we select another passage and head down it. This time I can hear both Kelvan and Deduc whisper to each other, "Dis gonna be fun!"

-----Nystramo's Order By: HiuFang  
Li

"An infiltration of the Drow Temple?"

Gazing upon Nystramo's solemn brow, HiuFang realized the gravity of the present situation. In the next moment, the raven-haired dwarf had no doubt what his decision was.

"For the Clan, my king, I will go on to do as you request," uttered the Dun Gor with a strong conviction. Bowing rigidly, HiuFang pulled a dark mask over his face, allowing none but glittering eyes to show. Turning quickly about, he started out of Nystramo's chamber..

-----Re:Nystramo's Order By:  
Nystramo

As HiuFang was leaving, Nystramo called out to him.

"Hiu, be careful, eh? Dinna takes on more'n a dwarf be able. I dinna wants ya secretin' yerself in tha temple in tha middle o' a high holy," he said with a wink. "Jes' finds ou' wha' ya be able, an' dinna gits yerself killt. I kinna affords ta loses ya."

HiuFang nodded and took his leave. As he watched him go, Nystramo couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt. How many of his kin would he send to their deaths before this ended. "Too many," he thought, and began laying plans for the clan's next move.

-----A Lad Awakens

By: Tigguhr

Asleep on a stone slab in a holding cell deep within the Mount, Tigguhr slept off the Healer's spell. In his sleep, the drow priestess again came to him. Unable to come physically through the magical barriers of the Mount, she invaded Tigguhr's dreams. "So, Speck! You broke my spells did you?" she hissed Appearing as a bodiless head with spiders crawling all over, including in and out of her mouth, the drow priestess was indeed young Tigguhr's worst nightmare.

"I told you that if you failed me, your whole pathetic clan would suffer. Ha! Or should I say the will suffer more! Nystramo lives and your clan grows, but not for long. So many new young specks...how your little bunch grows. I wonder how all these new specks can fight and defend their homes." The image slowly faded from Tigguhr's mind and he began to wake up. But just before the image was gone, the vile woman chortled, "I wonder indeed if all these new specks are as they seem? HA HA HA HA....."

Tigguhr woke up in a puddle of sweat on the stone slab. He sat bolt upright and noticed immediately that he was not bound but the dwarven guards, his kin, remained vigilant. "Samman..lads, eh who be Rorn Gor now? I be needin ta speak wi' tha chief."

"Nystramo is a' corse! Ya indeed ar daft, lad!" bellowed one of the guards.

"Kinna bee, Kinna bee.....He survived tha attack, he nae be poisoned?"

"Ya nae kilt da chief lad! Ya past ou in that throne room 'n that vile rat plunker ya wus holdin be in tha hands o' the chief now. Drowie magic suren be nasty!"

Tigguhr's nearly bald face broke into a huge smile. "HAR DEE DOO!" But his exuberance was short lived as the words of the drow priestess echoed in his mind "...clan will suffer more...new specks, not as they seem..."

"Spys! Amongst tha kin!" Tigguhr yelled. The guards eyed each other incredulously. Another silly stunt probably, but they had their orders. They grabbed Tigguhr and began the trek up from the holding cell to the throne room. Let the chief decide if the lad made any sense, they thought.

-----Goblins, etc. By: Jhaelryna

Frowning at the reports, Gunklob the goblin chieftan spat on the ground. Within the last several hours, more than a dozen goblins had fallen to their adversaries. "Bah! Dem dwarfses be payin fer dis, I be finkin!" Gunklob sat down and pulled out the map that the drow had prepared for him. The chieftan peered carefully at the parchment and compared the map with the reports of the missing scouts. Gunklob was clever for a goblin, and soon he had a working plan of action. He hooted in glee, and summoned his henchmen. "Da dwarfses be down here in wee groups. Dey probly be lookin fer more miffril and jools. We gots ta sweep tha dwarfs afore they gets bak to da other dwarfses. We sweeps out heres and heres" He pointed to the map, and the other goblins crowded in to peer at the paper. Gunklob indicated several key locations on their map. "We takes dese intrasekshuns here and here and here. Den da dwarfses be in pocketses. Dey caint get back ta dere friends or get tagether ta defends emmselves! We den skweese da pocketses whar da dwarfs be at. Dey won' be gettin bak ta dere frends. " Several of the bosses understood the plan, and nodded their heads eagerly. Several others stared blankly at the map, attempting to comprehend their leader's plan. "Goh!! Ya stoopid gits!!" swore Gunklob, "We be surroundin da dwarfses! Then we be skwooshin dere 'eads!!" Even the most dim goblin could understand THAT plan, and soon all of the chiefs of the goblins were preparing their bands to move out and sieze the critical intersections. The deployment of the goblin horde was costing them time. Crucial time that the dwarven city needed to prepare. Every minute that the patrols delayed the goblins was another precious minute that Nystramo so desperately needed in order to mobilize the dwarves of Clan Axepeak.

Now that he knew the dwarves were near, Gunklob took the time to check his weapons and armor. His suit of armor was handed down from chieftan to cheiftan. In a long forgotten war, his ancestor Baktor the Wild lead a successful war against a dwarven city. Among the war booty that Baktor captured was the suit of mithril armor...taken from the body of the dead dwarven king. That armor saved Baktor and his descendants time and time again. "Me lukky armer" cooed Guklob as he ran his hands over

the mail. Gunklob was so entranced with his armor, that he failed to notice the subtle change that was coming over his falchion. The chieftan had no way of knowing what his weapon's potentials were. The drow that had given it to him simply told him that it was special, and very magical. The nearness of the dwarves had begun to awaken the falchion after centuries of sleep. Direblood the dwarf-slayer began to become aware again. It sensed it's enemies, and began to glow a dull red. Hungry for blood, the sentient weapon waited patiently for its wielder to draw it.

-----Rrindabal By: HiuFang Li

Filling his lungs with the whispering air of the Neverwinter Woods, HiuFang Li glanced at the silvery moon which hung like a lantern in the dusky sky overhead. Letting loose a soft sigh, he took his first step down the steep of the Lonely Mountain, looming, iron-grey doors standing massively behind him. Shooting a glance back at the doors, he signalled to the stiff dwarves standing sentinel in the shrubbery flanking the doors. A final nod, and he glided further down the path, to be engulfed by leafy giants.

Peering at the dancing lights flickering through the greasy window pane, the darkly-clad dwarf floated past the swinging doors of the tavern. Beady little eyes turned to stare at the figure, which stepped noiselessly through the mess of tables, stools, and stoutly-built limbs. The small crowd was inundated with pointed caps, spectacles, and longish beards.

"Lookie, lookie, a g-ghost, ghost!" gibbered one small voice. "Not a ghost, a Drow, Drow elfy!!" shrieked another, poking the figure's black clothing, and shrinking back. "No no no no, you idiots.. no ghost, no Drow, too short. Hahaha! It's a dwarf!" yelled the last voice, a little too close to the dwarf's ear.

Swatting away the prodding fingers, the dwarf bellowed, "Ha, you rascals! Of course.. 'tis I, HiuFang Li!!" Pulling away the tight cloth about his face, HiuFang scanned the tavern, looking from astonished faces, to laughing faces, to sullen faces. With eyes sparkling, he worded carefully, "I have an offer available for every one of you, my clever cousins.."

Fingering the strings of a leathern jewel-bag he withdrew from a small pocket, he continued to scan the chamber with a funny gleam in his eye.

"And which one of you knows of the Temple of Lloth?"

-----Defending the Mount

By: Baldar Hmr

The sounds of a door closing and footsteps walking up to the throne roused Nystramo out of his deep thought. He was taken aback by the sight before him. Baldar stood before the Rrin Gor, dressed as the Chief had never seen him before. Gone was the standard studded leather armor and breeches of a gateguard's attire. Baldar's plate armor shone brightly, clearly having been polished to an almost mirrorlike sheen. Not ordinary Plate, either. Nystramo looked the Grunt over from top to bottom. His head was encased in an open-faced helm, with a 4-inch metal spike topping. The entire suit bristled with spikes at the elbows and knees, and the forearm bracers had some sort of long stilleto-blade embedded in them, for rending and tearing. "Aye Rrin Gor, dis nae be designed fer stealth or fer sneaking up on an enemy unawares." "Dis be a suit for a Dwarven Battlerager ta fite for da life o' his Clan". "I ken I is still a grunt and nae a full Kuldmordin, but I asks ye for a postin' on the vanguard of our army. Chief, I has lived wot little o' me free life wit dis Clan, and I ken wot its like ta be a slave o' dem Spider-kissers. Ifn dey is involved with dis goblin horde marchin' on da mount, ye ken be suren they nae be far behind. I 'as me nae taerin, no hearth ta return ta, so I asks ye ta let me take tha place o' one dat does." "I has sworn an oath of vengeance agin' da darklins fer wot dey dun to me, and I wants a chance ta pays 'em back. I promise ye, If'n ye gives me tha order ta hold my position when tha hordes come chargin' on us, I'll nae retreat. I 'as no fonder wish den ta meet me rough surrounded by a score o' dead darklins." Baldar went down on one knee before the Rrin Gor, and awaited his response...

-----Re:Defending the

Mount By: Nystramo

Nystramo considered Baldar's request carefully. True, the lad was not yet Kuldmordin, but there was no doubting his courage or conviction. Who was he to refuse such a brave request?

"Baldar, I kinna says nae ta ye. Finds Moradinson an' tells 'em ta fin' a place fer ye in tha fron' gaurd."

As Baldar nodded and turned to go, Nystramo had one final thing to say.

"If'n we be seein' battle in the mount, lad, I ken I kin be



countin' on ye. Ma' yer kin proud."

-----Returning Home By: D1AMOND

After several days of searching, D1amond walked away from yet another dead end. She was starting to lose what little patience she had left. Her search for Starkadh had led her from dive to dive, from one suspicious barmaid to another. All of whom had not seen or heard from Stark for months, but were able to direct D1 to try yet another inn or tavern farther away.

Sitting down on the front stoop of the latest inn, D1 rested her chin in her hands and looked out over the town that was now Port LLast Harbor. It had grown much since the great change in the realms, but it had not developed nicely. Instead of well built homes and shops, there were shanties and small merchandise stands. There were obvious attempts to clean things up in other sections of the harbor, but this part of the docks was attracting the less than respectable types. Which didn't bother D1amond either way, a profit was a profit after all.

With a sigh of frustration, she started making her way home to the Mount. This was taking too long, and although she knew that something was wrong with Stark, she couldn't stay away from her responsibilities back home any longer. There were boxes and belongings to unpack in her new digs, not to mention the new shop in RRindabal. Then there was Tigguhr to check up on, and papers piling up unfiled in Nystramo's office. The thought of Nystramo brought a warm smile to her face, but her eyes were full of concern. D1 had time to think over all the happenings at the Mount lately, and she was beginning to worry for Nystramo. If someone was going to go to all the trouble to set up an assassination on Nys once, then they would probably try it again and that caused D1 great concern.

Nystramo was a smart man and a great leader, like it or not, surely he had thought of this too by now and posted a guard around himself or at least some type of added protection. This was the first thing she would see to once she returned to the Mount, if she had to guard Nys around the clock personally. D1's smile grew wider, that idea definitely had merit.

D1amond mentally chastised herself, this was no time to be thinking of romance when her kin were being killed and more could be even now facing the enemy head on. Angry at those that had killed her kin and the thought of a good battle made D1amond walk faster as she made her way back home.

-----Re:Clan Axepeak Crest  
By: Nystramo

Nystramo put down the hammer and admired the handiwork, both his own and Starkadh's. (Like it or not, the zander was more skilled with a hammer and chisel than he himself would ever be.) The new Axepeak Crest hanging behind his desk, chiseled into an enormous slab of granite, was the final touch to his new office. No denying it now, this was his office, his position, his responsibility.

And what a time to be thrust back into command. Duergar, goblins, and drow attacking the mount. Maybe. It had been quiet recently, but Nystramo knew better than to be complacent. Runners had informed him that Dwyvyrn's patrol was harrying the goblin patrol, slowing their progress considerably, and even now reinforcements were being made ready to meet the horde head on.

Even with this, things were quiet. The kuldar had been selected, provisions stored, and the mount prepared for siege, should it come to that. He had even drilled the kin for the one measure that all hoped to avoid, but would be enacted should the need arise: collapsing all of the tunnels leading into the mount, both from above and below. Only a select few knew this was even possible, and even fewer knew how it was to be accomplished, if ever. He had discussed it with Dwyvyrn, HiuFang Li, Moradinson, and Patroclus. All agreed that now was not the time to make such a decision, but everyone also agreed that they should be ready, just in case. Drow were not a race to be taken lightly.

He dreaded this decision, not the least because he knew that it was his responsibility alone. Gruff as his kin were toward humans and elves, many of the clan, including himself, had ties to the outside world, and restoring the collapsed tunnels would be a chore requiring years to complete. Still, he thought with a slight grin, more than a few darklings would be taken out by the falling rock.

His work done for the day (he had saved hanging the crest for last, as a reward for himself), he stepped out of his office, planning on spending an hour or so in the common room with his kin. He frowned slightly as his personal guards, recently doubled, fell in line behind him. He didn't like the precaution, but Moradinson had insisted, and he couldn't fault the wisdom of it. Now was not the time for Axepeak to lose its chief to an assassin's dart.

As he walked he caught a glimpse of Rrindabal through an open tunnel. The settlement's rapid growth amazed him still. Even now, at this late hour, it was teeming with the activity of dwarves, gnomes, and halflings. Another responsibility, he thought, but not one he grudged. He was not one of those dwarves who shunned the outside world. He knew the continued vitality of his clan depended on Neverwinter and its surrounding towns, for reasons of trade and socialization both. The infusion of new ideas and the constant competition kept his kin hard at work, and gave them someone to curse over their forges. Being an aggressive race, dwarves needed competition to thrive. Without competition there was stagnation or, worse, infighting.

Nystramo's grin widened, and he decided that perhaps the common room could wait for a bit. He had heard that a certain gnome had created a new variety of ale, one that was popular among the kin. Perhaps it was time for the chief to get a taste.

-----A small scirmish....

By: KAGIS

The goblin hoard continued its slow approach to the mount, slowed dramatically by "magik dwarves who pop up outta nowhere, den disappear after killin us," I'd overheard a goblin sentry complain a few minutes ago.

I was leaning behind a large boulder that hid me from the sentry's inspection but also allowed me to get close enough to overhear any conversation. It was a fairly small cavern, with many openings leading to twisting and confusing side passages. I had told Kelvan and Dedrac to stay back in the escape tunnel with their "axebows" ready. There's never telling when a goblin might have a stroke of genius and decide to look around a little (for a goblin sentry that would be a stroke of genius!).

There were three sentries in the room and just in the past few minutes they'd gotten down to their preferred method of "watching" ... playing games of bones and dice. "Finally," I thought to myself, "I was starting to think I couldn't even count on goblins to get bored anymore." I silently loaded my hand-held crossbow with a poisoned bolt and set aside two extra bolts for quick reloading. Three goblins aren't much to worry about, but I couldn't afford to get bogged down in hand-to-hand, so my little hummer would have to do the job for me. Just in case things got ugly, Kuldarau, my axe rested easily against my leg, hanging on a leather cord from a hook on my belt.

I let the goblins play some more bones before making my move; letting the goblins just get to the point where they were almost fighting over who was winning. "Good," I thought, "this should be easy."

Taking a deep breath to calm my nerves, I quickly (but smoothly) turned around the boulder, aimed and fired. Almost before the bolt left my crossbow, my other hand was reloading the second bolt. "Thunk!" The first bolt hit home. Aim.... fire.... "Thunk!" The second bolt hit home and two goblins fell dead. The third goblin looked at me with fear in his eyes and quickly tossed the dice at my face... "Twang!" The third bolt missed, shattering on the wall behind the goblin.

"Damn ya, ya stinker!" I bellowed... "Naw ya gots me mad." Letting the hand crossbow swing down to its place on my belt, I hefted Kuldarau and moved in on the goblin.

The goblin quickly grabbed his long sword and moved to meet me. "Where ye get yer pig sticker," I asked calmly as we exchanged parries and blocks. The goblin grinned, obviously proud of his weapon... "gets it from da dark ones we dids." I blocked a feeble thrust; forcing his sword out wide and low. "Tanks fer da info," I grinned as my axe cleaved the goblin in two on the backswing.

I reached down and retrieved the goblins shiny mithril longsword. "Hmmpff... maybe dis be some o' da proof da elders are lookin' fer. Nae goblin be making anything with mithril, and only da drow prefer dese elfy longswords." I quickly strapped the longsword and its sheath to my back and trotted back to where Kelvan and Dedrac were waiting for me.

"Common!" I said when I met up with the two dwarves, "our werk be done in dat room... time at move on." As we navigated the twisted caverns and tunnels, taking care not to leave any tracks, I wondered if I'd get the chance to give the sword to the counsel of elders as evidence or not. The goblins were getting tougher to goad into easy battles, and they were starting to actively hunt Dwyvyrn's and my groups. "I 'ope Nys and da odders 'urry it up... donnae tink we can keep dis up much longer." Kelvan and Dedrac just nodded in agreement.

-----Welcome Home Tackle

By: DIAMOND

hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhk, D1 said as she cleared her throat of road dust. She had been traveling most of the day and had just crested the hill that revealed the growing town of Rrindabal. Standing on the hill top, she surveyed the town of crafts people and traders with satisfaction. Having the shop here close to her kin was going to be a definite improvement over the dreary town of Berun, although she would miss some of her old neighbors.

Readjusting the strap on her pack, D1 set off through town to check on the construction of her and Emmy's new shop. They had enjoyed planning out the new shop's design. They pretty much agreed on everything except D1 had wanted bars in front of the shop windows (Tigguhr proofing) and Emmy was still pouting over the rose bush they had left in front of the old shop.

Stopping outside the shop, D1 critically looked things over. If everything has gone according to plans, the construction should almost be completed. "You'd think they'd have a bloody door on this thin' by now. Humph, contractors!" She stepped through the gaping hole where the door belonged and glanced around the inside of the shop. Emmy had special ordered granite counter tops and a tap from MoradinSon. Those were in place, along with the new work benches and tables and the glass cabinet to display the lasses finer works. "At least tha insides be 'bout finished," she said with a proud smile. "We'll have ta invite mam and pap up here ta see's it."

Leaving the shop behind, D1 set off for the Mount. As she was walking through the main entrance, she saw Nystramo with a passel of body guards surrounding him, making his way from the other end of the tunnel. They greeted each other with a hug and quick kiss and D1 asks teasingly, "Whut, ye post a sentry ta run an tells ya when I got back?" As she was talking, one of the guards behind Nystramo looked around quickly . D1 glanced in the same direction in time to see a dagger flying towards Nystramo's back. Moving instinctively, she tackles Nystramo to the ground. Actions which proved not to be necessary as the diligent guard quickly throws out his shield and blocks the flight of the sailing dagger.

Looking angrily down at Nystramo, who was pinned underneath her, D1 asks, "This been happening much to ye since I been away?"

-----Freedom to  
bondage By: Jaggged

Hand over hand. Concentrate. One foot in front of the other.

Another passage of darkness. More monsters to flee. Caverns, cliffs, ledges. Finds small nook in the rocks. Listens intently, all quiet. Rest, blessed rest.

Jumping awake. What's that noise?! Dwarves? A patrol. Wicked sneer crosses face. Without second thought, draws dagger. Slowly and silently peers out from rocks. Just two. Their backs are turned.

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The two battle ready dwarves stand patiently at their posts. With a loud "OOOPH", one falls forward. His comrade looks down to see a small figure trying to embed a mithral dagger into his fallen friends back. The comrade easily bashes the figure from his kin and it falls to the ground motionless.

"Wha' was that?"

The comrade bends to look at the figure. "Gordul! It be a lil duergar lass."

"It dead?"

"No' yet." The comrade lifts his axe and makes to kill the duergar.

"Wait" Whispers a small voice. "I hav' information about the attacks, if you don'na kill me." She opens her eyes and stares frankly into those of her enemy.

The comrade stays his weapon. "Tell us then lass"

"If I tell you wha' I know, you will then slay me. No. I will tell yur chief."

"Go 'head an' kill her kin, duergar only ken how ta lie. She jus' tryin' ta save her hide."

Sneering at the guard on the ground. "That may be truth slug, but then you'd never know if you were to kill me."

Comrade, the smarter of the two, bent down and picked up the odd dagger the lass had wielded. It was hand made and had a razor sharp edge. "Nice dagger." He used it to cut some of his rope. He put the dagger into his belt and tied up the duergar. "We'll

takes her ta tha chief when our watch be up."

-----A little visitor.... By:

Nystramo

Nystramo frowned from atop his throne. He frequently frowned on the throne, both because he felt he should and because he simply disliked having to sit on a throne in the first place. He much preferred his office, with its more comfortable chair and welcome removal from ceremony. He hated ceremony.

His frownd deepened as he saw two of the mount's gaurds approaching with a small prisoner between them. It became an absolute grimace when he saw the prisoner to be a duergar. Young, to be sure, and a female, but a duergar none the less.

"Why ya be bringin' a greyskin 'afore me tha' still be able ta kick?" he asked with a growl.

"Well'n, chief, tha slag be sayin' she ken somethin' o' tha attacks on tha mount. We thots it bes' ta brings 'er ta ya, jes' in case," the senior gaurd replied, not at all put off by his chief's gruff manner. One of the things Nystramo liked about leading dwarves was that they weren't thin skinned.

The chief nodded. "Aye, ya done well." He turned his fierce gaze on the small duergar lass. "Speaks, slag. Tell me why I shou' nae guts ya where ya stands." His tone made it clear that the threat was not made in jest. Every bit of hatred Nystramo felt for the duergar dripped from his words, and there was more hatred there than could be held by the Sea of Swords. Every instinct told him to behead her here and now, without waiting for an answer; a good answer might nescessitate sparing her life, a thought he did not relish. Still, he knew, he was chief, and he had his responsibilities. If it would help save his clan, he would listen.

So he waited.

-----Negociations By: Jaggged

Dragged about by the guards, tha duergar growled and thought to herself. I get free of the drow ta be taken captive by the gully dwarfs. Now I'm bein' taken before a chief to tell him things I have no real proof of. Maybe I get a chance to slit his throat? A little voice in the back of her head accused her. Yeah rite, you canna' even stab a surprised guard in back an' now yur thinkin' of killing their chief. You've been in a cell

too long.

Jaggged was dragged up before Nystramo without even realizing it because she was so busy arguing with herself. His gruff voice startled her and she stared up into his eyes. Ach! If looks coul' kill. She thought to herself. Knowing she had to do something drastic to convince this king, Jaggged turned to the guard beside her and calmly said.

"Rip off me shirt."

Disgusted by her suggestion, the guard just stared at her.

"I no' comin' on ta ya, ya slagged orcbreath! Turn me around an' rip off me shirt, so yur chief has proof of me werds! Me hands be tied, I canna' do it meself."

The guard hesitated and looked up at his leader, who nodded for him to proceed. The tattered and threadbare shirt was easily ripped off. Those present in the throne room were witness to one of the most grotesque examples of abuse and neglect they'd ever seen. Jaggged's back was deformed with whip scars. There were places where huge chunks of her back were crudely cut out, probably when untended wounds had started to fester with gangrene.

As people gaped, she explained. "These are my only proof that tha information I has to give ya be truth an' that I'm no' allied with those I bring information about. I has lived in tha drow slave pits fer ten yers now. Thanks to me dagger, I have recently escaped. I has spent most of me years attendin' to the captain of the guards, who found great pleasure whipping an' raping me." With cold eyes she continued, "The captain thought me so ignorant that I could no' understand his language, and I let him keep believing so. Even though I learnt their language fairly quick."

She stopped her speech and looked up at the king. "Do you understand were I'm leading?"

Nystramo nodded, "Tha captain said somethin I mite wants ta hear?"

Jaggged sneered and nodded. "Yur pretty smart for a gully dwarf, guess that's why they made you king."



"Yur life be in me hands lass, ye best start talkin'" He said, red with anger.

"First we negotiate. Me life an' me dagger for the information."

-----Freedom By: Jagged

"That was easy enuff" Jagged stood up from where the guards had throw her outside the gates of the mountain trading village and brushed herself off. "I got me a new shirt in the deal too" She sneered as she remembered the kings disgust with her nudity. He had motioned for someone to bring her a shirt and she guessed she got the nearest unworn shirt. "Nice silk, altho abit large."

Not caring at all for the darklins that had enslaved her and killed all of her family, she had told all she had learned about their plans against the dwarves. How they had hired the goblin horde that was marching against the mountain stronghold. How they had used her own kin to fight against a dwarven patrol to throw the dwarves off of the darklin's trail. Their desires and plans to destroy the dwarfs from NW and take the mountain's caves and caverns for their own.

The king had nodded and listened to all the Jagged had said, then much as he hated to, he had released her. She looked forward to meeting him again, outside of his ring of guards and the protection of his mountain. As she thought about that meeting she fingered the blade of her dagger, the guard had grudgingly given back to her.

"Now off to see if there be any duergar left alive in Neverwinter. Maybe I can find me some mushroom ale in the process." Jagged sneered happily as she walked freely away.

-----Re:Freedom

By: Nystramo

Nystramo watched the duergar lass leave with a mixture of relief and disgust. He was happy to see her leave; he was just sorry that she was still breathing on the way out.

Still, she had provided some valuable information. Unsurprisingly, the drow were behind all of the attacks his kin had recently suffered, and it seemed Lonely Mountain itself was their goal; or, at least, one of their goals. One could never be certain with the darklings.

Valuable as the information was, he didn't feel the need to change anything at present. Moradinson was doing a thorough job of fortifying the mount's defenses, and he had sent a runner some time ago warning Dwyvyrn's patrol of the suspected drow activity; hopefully HiuFang Li would turn up something in his reconnaissance of the drow near the Neverwinter region.

This was the worst part of being chief; waiting. He wanted nothing more than to take an active hand in the war, but he knew it was out of the question. Besides, he was certain his guards would sooner tie him to his bed than let him take the fight to the darklings personally.

It was a lot easier before Moradin got involved, he thought.

-----The battle  
renewed... By: KAGIS

Silence echoed off the stone walls. Somewhere in the distance, an underground pool splashed as one of the underdark creatures slithered into it. Kagis leaned over two torn forms, tears streaming down his cheeks and disappearing into his salt and pepper beard.

Kagis reached down and closed the still staring eyes of Kelvan and Dedrac, his two scout companions. Steeling himself to the pain, Kagis reached into his pack and withdrew a mallet and chisel. Searching the wall for smooth section and finding one, Kagis quickly sets chisel to stone and lets his mallet fall.

Working quickly Kagis carves a gravestone for his two fallen comrades. But also it serves as warning, letting any who come into these delves that clan Axepeak lives here and will tolerate no intrusions. The gravestone reads, "Here fell two Axepeak warriors, who fought and killed over two score goblins before they layed down their lives in defense of their homes. Beware any who enter these halls."

Kagis finished carving the Axepeak symbol in the stone, took a deep breath and shuddered in silent rage. After several minutes Kagis regains his composure and begins gathering his gear. The mallet and chisel go back in his pack, which is quickly tossed over this shoulders to rest comfortably on his back.

"How," he asks no one in particular, "how in the abyss didda group o' goblin' numberin' over 40 get behind me scouts? It jus donnae make sense. We was doin' our normal ting, I went after a

few sentries while me two scouts guarded me escape. Comes ta tink o' it dose goblin sentries died awfully easy... even fer goblin.... hmmm." The puzzled dwarf thinks about the events over again.

I Left Kelvan and Dedrac back a ways where it's supposed to be safer. I sneak forward, kill a few goblin sentries... and sneak back. Only when I get back I find this... this... carnage. ::sigh:: At least Kelvan and Dedrac killed 40 of the buggers... they died well.

Kagis ends his musings, cursing the goblin hoard that marched toward his home. Hefting his massive axe on one hand, the dwarf bellows out, "Naw ye gots me mad!"

With that said, Kagis takes off racing down the corridors, heading for the front of the goblin hoard... "nuff sneakin' 'round, time ta rumble..." the angry dwarf mutters to himself... a grim smile on his bearded face. Not for the first time or the last Kagis missed hearing his comrads everpresent words... "dis gonna be fun."

-----War under the Mountain By:  
Dwyvym

Dwyvym winced as a loose pebble skidded along the floor of the passage he and his two companions were following. They were trying to remain as quiet as possible, but speed was essential at this point. For the past week they had been sticking to small side tunnels, darting in with furtive attacks against any goblins who fell behind or wandered too far from the main group. They had felled just over a score of goblins in these raids, never more than three in any one attack.

Dwyvym had concentrated his group's attacks on the rear of the goblin army, correctly guessing that it would be the most disorganized section. Although the success of their raids was evident in the form of beefed-up patrols and increased alertness shown by the goblins, they were not sufficiently slowing the progress of the goblin horde. Dwyvym decided to shift his attacks to the front of the goblin legion to create more caution in the advancing army, and to take out some of the better-trained and equipped goblins in the lead group.

This was the reason for their present haste. The quarry of inter-connected side passages they were using died out a short way ahead. They would need to enter the main tunnel and advance

several hundred yards to reach a side passage that led to another burrow of tunnels. Dwyvyrn wanted to get through the main tunnel and into the side tunnels before the goblin horde passed by. If they waited for the goblin army to pass by before moving into this new set of tunnels, they would have little chance to move up and attack the vanguard of the goblin force before the advancing army reached Lonely Mountain.

At last the trio of dwarves came to the concourse with the main tunnel. Dwyvyrn carefully inched forward and looked back down the cavernous passage. He saw nothing, but his ears pricked up as he caught the unmistakable sounds of a large group of creatures advancing toward them. Dwyvyrn turned and gave a hand signal that brought his companions Nalvor and Gilgina from out of the shadows.

"The foul goblins be right near," he whispered to them, "We makes all haste fer da next set o' tunnels." With that, the three dwarves filed silently into the main tunnel, just as the lead members of the goblin army rounded a bend and came into view fifty yards behind them!

The dwarves broke into a run as an alarm was raised throughout the goblin masses. Soon the sound behind them rose to a dull roar as hundreds of goblins picked up the pursuit. The shrill yip of goblin war-cries echoed off the cavern halls as the battle-hungry vanguard of the goblin forces eagerly chased after them.

Dwyvyrn turned to his two companions and yelled his plan as loudly as he could. "We runs down to da entrans to da nex' burrow o' side tunnels!" he screamed, hoping his kin could hear him above the din created by the goblins. "We'll loses mos' of 'em in da maze o' passages, an' kills wotsever of 'em finds us. Dey'll calls off da pursuit once dey gets split up an' starts findin' a bunch o' dead goblins about!"

Dwyvyrn looked to see if his kin understood his plan. They nodded their agreement as they ran onwards, but then their eyes widened and they came to a halt as they stared down the corridor ahead of them. Dwyvyrn stopped as well and faced back down the passage to see what his kin were staring at. His heart sank as he saw a goblin advance party, a dozen strong, hurrying down the passage to meet them.

Dwyvyrn hesitated as he considered their course of action. He

was sure that he and his companions could defeat the goblin party, but not before the goblin horde descended upon them from the rear.

The goblin advance party did not hesitate. These were the best-trained and most bloodthirsty of Gunklob's army. Upon hearing the alarm raised behind them, they had immediately turned and headed back toward the main body of the force, hoping to get in on any combat that might ensue. As soon as they saw the trio of dwarves barreling down the passage toward them, they unleashed a volley of crossbow bolts at the group. Although the dwarves managed to block most of the bolts that flew toward them, one slipped past their defenses and imbedded itself deep into Nalvor's left thigh.

Nalvor's cry of pain shook Dwyvyrn from his stupor. Shoving Gilgina toward a side passage, he grabbed the stumbling Nalvor and dragged the dwarf along behind him. "We runs!" he shouted to the priestess as he followed her into the tunnel. The goblins were right on their heels, but slowed a bit as they filed into the narrow passage.

Dwyvyrn's mind spun as he helped the badly limping Nalvor down the corridor. At least he had all the goblins behind him, he thought. If they were lucky they might be able to outpace the horde in the tight confines of the side passage. Luck did not seem to be with the dwarves however, for even with Dwyvyrn's help the wounded Nalvor often slammed into the walls as he lurched down the corridor. Soon the sounds of the goblin pursuit grew nearer.

As the dwarves neared the end of one fairly long and straight section of the passage, Dwyvyrn felt as well as heard the impact as another crossbow bolt found a seam in the back of Nalvor's armor. As they rounded a bend in the passage Dwyvyrn stole a glance at his dwarven companion. The young warrior's face was contorted in a grimace of pain. Blood trickled from his nose and mouth, and a bright red gout of phlegm and blood spewed forth as he let forth a rasping cough.

Seeing his kin's grave condition, Dwyvyrn changed his plan. "Holds, lass!" he shouted up to Gilgina ahead of him. As she stopped and turned he pushed Nalvor toward her. "Tends to da lad. I'll holds off da goblins." Gilgina caught the pale warrior and immediately began to work on his injuries. Dwyvyrn turned and readied his axe for the coming fray.

The goblins descended on him rapidly. The first was cut down as it rounded the bend, the head falling one way and body the other as its momentum carried it on past the dwarven warrior. The second managed to stop in front of Dwyvyrn, but that only made the fatal strike that much easier for the dwarf. The remainder of the goblins drew their weapons and advanced on the Axepeak fighter. The narrow passage allowed only two at a time to confront Dwyvyrn, who maintained a defensive stance, parrying the blows of his opponents until he found an opening, then striking quickly with his axe. One solid hit was usually enough to dispatch a goblin, but it mattered little here, for as soon as one fell another closed and took its place.

Dwyvyrn began to sing, belting forth a battlesong to Clangeddin in order to raise his own spirits and counter the war cries of the goblins. He worked methodically, conserving his energy as he waded slowly through the goblin advance party. As he worked on his tenth kill, his spirits sank as he saw more goblins filling the passage. The main army had followed them in as well.

Dwyvyrn continued to fight bravely, finishing off the last of the advance party and squaring off with the first of the goblin regulars. Although he had only suffered a few minor scrapes so far, and despite the fact that these goblins were not as skilled as his first dozen opponents, Dwyvyrn was tiring rapidly. He knew that it would only be a matter of time before the vast numbers of the goblin army eventually got the better of him. This only steeled his resolve, and he raised his voice in song again, determined take as many goblins with him to the afterlife as he possibly could.

With a mighty swing Dwyvyrn swept aside the two goblins in front of him, smashing them both against the wall. As they crumpled to the ground, Dwyvyrn looked up and noticed the remaining goblins had backed off a few paces. Although puzzled by their action, he appreciated the chance to catch his breath, and stopped his song momentarily as he leaned on his axe. It was then that he noticed the goblins had stopped their usual disorganized howls and war-cries, and now spoke one word in unison. "Gunklob! Gunklob! Gunklob!" The chant filled the tiny confines of the tunnel, and although at first Dwyvyrn didn't know what the word meant, he soon found out as a mithril-plated warrior broke through the front rank of goblins.

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Gunklob the goblin chieftan moved slowly forward, all the while cursing Gaglug the shaman. It was Gaglug who had started the troops chanting his name, crying that the gods had foretold their chief would strike down the dwarves. Once the chant had been taken up by his army, he had no choice but to move forward to where the fighting was taking place. He didn't hurry, hoping that by the time he arrived at the fray the dwarves would be dead or--even better--severely injured, allowing him to strike the final blow and fulfill Gaglug's "prophecy". Instead he now faced a fearsome and nearly unscathed dwarven warrior, but with his army chanting his name behind him, there could be no turning around. As he closed to melee the dwarf, he thought again of the derisive leer he had seen on Gaglug's face, and vowed to deal with the shaman later--if he survived.

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Dwyvyrn surveyed the warrior that came forward to meet him. He was large for a goblin, and the suit of mithril he wore--made to fit a dwarf--was by no means too big for him. Dwyvyrn seethed inwardly at the thought of a goblin wearing dwarven mail, but that anger was tempered by caution as he realized he would have to place his attacks carefully to penetrate the dwarven armor. In his right hand, the goblin bore a curved blade of fine manufacture, but certainly not a dwarven weapon. It glowed dull red in his grasp, and the intensity of the glow increased as the goblin advanced. A magic blade, Dwyvyrn knew, but little did he realize just how powerful a weapon it was.

Dwyvyrn smiled inwardly as he hefted his axe to face the warrior he knew must be the goblin chieftan. He reasoned that if he could defeat this one, the goblins might fall to fighting among themselves in a struggle for power. Surely none of them would be too eager to face him once they saw their leader dead at his feet. Refreshed by the renewed possibility that he and his kin might live through this, Dwyvyrn again took up his battle-song and prepared for the fight.

Gunklob swung first, not with the wild arcing motion that many of the goblins had shown, but with a calculated thrust that showed he was a seasoned fighter. Dwyvyrn noted this, and deftly blocked the blow with his shield. For several minutes the fight continued, each fighter testing the other's defenses with none scoring a good hit. Then Gunklob attacked with a move he had used previously, one that left him open briefly for a

counterattack. Dwyvyrn recognized this and quickly brought his axe around, grinning as he anticipated the feel of his axe penetrating a seam in the goblin's armor and biting into its flesh.

His grin changed to a look of surprise as he felt the shock of the goblin's blade stopping the swing of his axe. The goblin had reversed the blade's motion and brought it back up to meet Dwyvyrn's blow in a blur, faster than any swordsman he had ever seen. Then Dwyvyrn glanced quickly at the face of his opponent and saw the goblin was gaping in surprise as well!

For nearly a second they stood frozen, Dwyvyrn's axe poised mere inches from the goblin's neck as it pressed against the flat of the goblin's blade. Then the goblin seemed to recover and swept Dwyvyrn's axe away, raking his falchion across the dwarf's knuckles in the process. Dwyvyrn bellowed in pain as a burning sensation spread over his hand. Although the blade had done little more than take some skin off his knuckles, his entire hand burned as if he had stuck it in a forge, and was slowly beginning to go numb.

Dwyvyrn looked down at the goblin's blade to see if it was coated with poison or some other substance he hadn't noticed earlier. His eyes widened when he saw that the falchion was now pulsing with a bright red glow. The goblin chieftan seemed taken aback by this as well, and paused as he examined the glowing weapon in his hand. Dwyvyrn jumped at this unexpected opening, unleashing an attack that would surely separate the goblin's head from his shoulders. He watched with growing horror as once again the blade moved blindingly fast to deflect Dwyvyrn's blow--without any perceivable inclination on the goblin's part!

Now the falchion seemed to be acting completely on its own, attacking and parrying while the goblin stared in amazement. Gunklob did all he could just to hold on to the weapon, then gained confidence as he saw the falchion would not let Dwyvyrn's axe near him. He grinned as he pressed forward, beginning to put his own strength behind the weapon's blows.

Dwyvyrn had switched to a completely defensive posture, parrying wildly as the falchion came at him with ever increasing speed. His right arm was almost completely numb below the elbow, and Dwyvyrn felt the best he could manage would be a wild swing with his axe. But a wild swing wouldn't penetrate mithril armor.



Dwyvyrn felt the adrenalin drain from his body as he began to fully comprehend that he could not win this fight. His movements began to slow as the lengthy battle wore down his endurance. His shield arm began to drop and the glowing falchion swooped in from above, biting deeply into his left shoulder. Dwyvyrn howled as a blinding flash of pain enveloped him. A burning sensation filled his chest and ran down his left arm. His breathing came in short gasps as fire seemed to fill his lungs.

Dwyvyrn struggled to steady his vision and regain a defensive stance. His left arm was now going numb as well, and it took all his concentration to keep his shield in front of him and focus on his opponent. The whirling blade continued to come at him, and it was not long before Dwyvyrn stumbled and the falchion sank into his right flank.

Dwyvyrn let forth a piercing scream of rage mixed with terror as yet again fire seemed to course through his body. His eyes welled with tears as he doubled over in pain. Dwyvyrn realized--almost subconsciously--that the next blow would kill him. A desperate yearning for life filled him, and gave him a final burst of energy. In a wild fit of panic, he sprung up and backed away from the goblin as he swung his axe with all the might his numb right hand would allow. He swung not at his opponent, but at the low ceiling of rock that hung over them. Again and again he bashed the butt of his axe up against the overhanging stone, backing away all the time.

A low rumble grew in the passage as first small chunks of rock fell into the passageway, then larger boulders crashed down into the tunnel. Dwyvyrn continued to pound away at the rock overhead, until finally a great thunder resounded through the passage as the roof of the tunnel before him collapsed. Dwyvyrn dove backwards, coughing uncontrollably as fine dust filled the tunnel and choked his already labored breathing. He looked up momentarily and saw two legs before him, then something heavy struck him on the head and everything turned to blackness.

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Gunklob sneered as the tunnel collapsed in front of him. The dwarf's hasty retreat had taken him by surprise, and by the time he had recovered the dwarf was well away. The falchion had urged him forward--nearly pulling him along behind it, but

Gunklob saw the roof of the tunnel weakening and wisely decided pursuit would only bring him death.

Gunklob turned away as the collapsing tunnel sent forth a cloud of dust into the passage. Although he was angry that he had not been able to finish off the dwarf, the fight had still gone much better than he had hoped. He had gotten the best of a dwarven fighter who had felled almost a score of his toughest warriors, in plain view of his own army. There would be no goblin that would challenge his authority now! In addition, he had discovered that the falchion the drow had given him held powers he hadn't even guessed at. Perhaps best of all was the scowl that came across Gaglug's face when the shaman saw that the chief was still alive. A sly grin spread over Gunklob's face as he led his army back onto the path toward Lonely Mountain, now only about a day's march away.

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Dwyvyrn's head throbbed as he gradually drifted back into consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes and saw Gilgina kneeling over him, a look of concern on her face.

"Well'n, it seems Moradin ha'e decided to lets ye live anodder day," the priestess teased, "tho methinks he mites takes me in da process." Gilgina sat down heavily next to him as Dwyvyrn painfully raised himself to a sitting position. Her skin was pale and her brow covered in cold sweat. Obviously the work of healing him had taxed her power greatly.

"Thankee, lass." Dwyvyrn croaked, able to manage little else with his ragged breathing. Then he thought of his other companion. "Nalvor's a'rite?" he spit out before a fit of coughing overtook him.

"Aye" she replied, nodding in the direction of the young warrior. "He'll lives, tho' he'll needs rest jus' like ye." Gilgina paused a moment, then added, "an' me as well'n!" She shut her eyes and rested her head back against the wall of the tunnel.

Dwyvyrn frowned and started to rise, bracing against the wall as a wave of dizziness washed over him. "We has nae time to rest, lass." he scolded as he waited for the dizziness to pass, "The goblins'll be diggin' thru to here in nae time!"

Gilgina opened her eyes and shot him a stern look. "The goblins is nae diggin' thru to 'ere, ye jargh fool! It'd takes 'em almos' a week to clear dat cave-in! Ye hears enne sounds o' diggin', lad? Odder'n da poundin' in ye 'ead, me means!" Gilgina smiled as she closed her eyes again.

Dwyvyrn paused a moment as his head cleared and realized there in fact were no sounds coming from beyond the collapsed section of tunnel. "Er..mebbe ye is rite lass," he said, then turned and began walking futher into the tunnel. Although the burning sensation had left him, a numbness still pervaded his whole being, and he had to concentrate on each motion to make his muscles obey.

He stepped gingerly over the sleeping Nalvor, and continued slowly down the tunnel. "Hrmf!" he muttered, more to himself than anyone, "An' wots if'n da goblins comes at us from behind? We shou' has someone guardin' dis passage!"

"We nae has to werry o' dat!" came Gilgina's smug reply. Scowling and grumbling--albeit more quietly now-- Dwyvyrn continued down the corridor at his measured pace. As he rounded a turn in the twisting passage, he saw the reason for Gilgina's confidence. Ten feet ahead, the tunnel came to an abrupt end.

-----A sacrifice

is made By: KAGIS

Kagis trudged along the main shaft leading away from the guild's home. He moved quietly except for the constant "thud...thud...thud..." rythm of his steel toed boots pounding the stony corridor. He carried his massive axe in his left hand, and his axepeak special crossbow in his right hand. A silver and gold ring gleamed dully on his right hand. Tears continued to poor down his cheeks as he advanced toward the forward ranks of the goblin hoard. His two scout companions were dead, and for almost 30 days they had harrassed and hammered the goblin hoard without any word from the Mount.

Now the goblin hoard was less than a day's march from the lower levels of Axepeak delves, Kagis had heard nothing from Dwyvyrn and his patrol in days, and Kagis was mad. Not just mad... but practically seething with anger. "How dare dese mis'erable stinkers come to our home! Damn ta da abyss da 'cursed spider kissers who sent dem! By da will of Moradin himself, I be sendin' evry last one ta hell ta spend deir days wit' da spider kissers!" The string of curses continued without pause.

Kagis knew he was making a lot of noise, but he didn't care anymore. Glancing down at the ring on his finger Kagis grinned a bemused smile. "Ye ain' gonna let me lie down an' die are ya?" It was his fathers ring, a special ring forged by the hand of Moradin himself some said. All Kagis knew was that the ring healed any wound he ever got in battle, so Kagis never entered battle without wearing it. Whether Kagis' words were ment for the ring or the long dead ghost of his father was uncertain.

Kagis rounded a corner and spotted the goblin's forward scouts. The corridor was wide were they gathered no more than 50 paces away, but quickly tapered to less than 6 feet wide were Kagis now stood, with a wicked grin on his face. Not wasting any time, Kagis yelled out, "Com' an' get me ye werthless, lazy, lizard lovin', spider kissin', my momma wa' a Kobold, gruntin', smellin' slags!!!" Seeing a lone dwarf standing before them, Kagis didn't need to tell them twice. The goblins charged, gleefully calling out taunts and battle cries of their own.

Kagis calmly propped his battle axe against his hip, raised the crossbow and began firing. "Twang!" The first goblin reach up to grab the bolt stiking out of his throat, gurgled in pain and then fell face down. His goblin comrads didn't even slow down.

Kagis flipped the crossbow forward with his right hand, holding onto the swing lever and let the swinging crossbow recock itself. Another bolt was ready... aim... "Twang!" Another goblin fell, a bolt lodged in one eye. Three more times Kagis cocked and fired the crossbow, felling three more goblins. Finally, Kagis tossed the crossbow at the lead goblin and swung his massive battle axe up into his strong hand. With a twist of his left shoulder, Kagis brought his shield around from his back gripping it tightly in his off hand.

The first pair of goblins finally reached the enraged dwarf. Two goblins were quickly brought down by the deadly axe. The other goblins were heedless of their brethren, trampling over the bodies of dead goblins trying to reach the mad dwarf. Kagis was swinging his axe from side to side, ignoring the small but stinging cuts he received from the goblin's own jabs. His shoulders heaved as he plowed the axe clean through a goblin's body, stopping its swing only when the blade bit into the stone wall. Kagis bunched his shoulders again, reversing the axe and bringing it back accross in another might swing, rending another goblin as it completed it's swing to dig into the other wall.

The mad dwarfs fierce axe became a blender, slicing through goblin bodies with ease. Reveling in the battle before him, Kagis began to sign... chanting a battle song to Moradin at the top of his lungs.

Goblin bodies quickly piled up at the mad dwarf's feet. Only when the other goblins could no longer climb over the pile did they stop attacking the dwarf. Kagis laughed loudly, almost hysterically. He could see more and more goblins pile into the corridor, indicating that the entire goblin hoard had finally arrived. The rows of goblins parted and a massive goblin gilded in mithril armor stepped forward. He called out in haughty common, "come ou' an' play little dwarfy."

Kagis responded, "bah! Ye come over me pile and see what's I gots fer ya, ya weakling!" Kagis was banking on goblin's fear of weakness, to force the chief over the pile in an attack. But it never happened. Instead, the chief made a swishing motion with one of his armored hands, and dozens of "twangs" rang out. Most of the bolts hit the goblin pile, turning it into a gory mess. But a few flew over the pile and slammed hard into Kagis shield. The shield held. "Comman! Ye can do better dan dat!" Kagis called out.

The goblins archers stopped firing as a particularly dirty and smelly goblin came forward chanting. The shaman touched each of the archer's crossbows. After completing the spell, the archers fired again. More of the bolts hit Kagis mithril shield, clanging loudly. The bolts hit with such force, Kagis could hardly keep on his feet. "By Moradin!" he gasped, "dese be tough bolt slingers." Suddenly a bolt slipped past Kagis shield and tore through his armored left shoulder. Pain erupted in his brain, and Kagis groaned. Looking down at his shoulder Kagis could see the gaping hole where the bolt has passed clean through him. Stubbornly, Kagis held the shield in front of him, grimacing in pain.

Again another volley of enchanted bolts slammed into his shield. One burst through the shield, lodging itself in Kagis left forearm pinning the limb to the shield. "Arg!" Kagis bellowed in pain. The dwarf almost fell over backwards, but again sheer stubbornness kept him standing. Kagis stared at the goblin chieftan through pain clouded eyes. "It gonna take more dan yer silly bolts to stop me," Kagis spit out through clenched teeth.

"Fine," was the only response from the chieftan. With another

wave of his hand an elite troop of goblins came forward through the goblin ranks. Each goblin was a huge brute, armored from head to toe in mithril plate. Only their beedy little eyes shown through slits in their armored suits. Each one carried a shield and an massive hammer. The elite force formed into tight ranks, three abreast and marched toward Kagis with precision.

"uh oh," Kagis finally allowed to himself that perhaps this wasn't such a good idea. The tightly packed armored goblins increased their pace, marching faster but still holding formation. Kagis could see that the formation would be a very tight fit to get through the 6 foot wide section he was standing in, so he hefted his axe in his good hand allowing his ruined arm to hand useless at his side and bellowed at the top of his lungs... "FOR AXEPEAK!!!!" An instant later a tremendous "CRACK" thundered as the armored goblins hit the blocked section of corridor.

Kagis swung wildly, his axe cleaving large chunks of goblin, even through the mithril armor. But the end was inevitable. The goblin's powerful hammers slammed down on Kagis with such force, that he quickly fell to his knees. Kagis continued to swing, and proudly noted that he'd actually killed one of the armored goblins. But another quickly took it's place, and the hammering continued. Kagis last thoughts went out to his clan before darkness closed in on him.

The armored goblin column marched through the breached section of corridor and trampled the dead dwarf beneath their steel boots. The goblin army continued right after the armored wedge, trampling the sceen beneath their feet. After the last goblin passed by, not much remained. Goblin bodies lay torn and dismembered, piled high around the dead form of Kagis Ironpeak, his axe still clutched tightly in his right hand, his father's ring wrapped around his left hand pinned underneath a torn and battered shield and a smile on his lips. Kagis has died well. A small ripple tugged at Kagis left eye, but it was most likely one last muscle spasm.

-----The ante is upped By:  
Jhaelryna

Valsharess Jhaelryna quietly went through the reports on her desk. News from the patrol captain indicated that the goblin horde was making better progress than was anticipated. The dwarves were caught unprepared for the ferocity of the attacks, and their outer patrols had been neutralised. The

drow queen quietly reflected on the goings on. Her primary objective had been fulfilled. The drow Running had been a great success. The only ones that could have interfered with those plans were the dwarves. Advance warning from the Mountain could have spoiled the entire raid. The dwarves were focussed entirely upon the perceived threat, and the drow were able to emerge undetected from the Underdark to slay and to destroy in the name of the Spider Queen. She had meant for the goblins to be a mere distraction, and they served their purpose well...but what now? Originally, she intended for them to die...taking as many Axepeak warriors down with them as they could. But now...now it seemed that the goblin horde actually posed a significant threat to the Mountain. Chuckling, she studied the reports further. The dwarves had spent too long in peace. After the Crakskul threat faded, the foolish dwarves let their defenses weaken. They pursued money and trade with the surface dwellers. They grew rich and fat. Now they would pay dearly for their lack of vigilance. The question now was what to do. Did she allow the wheels she had set in motion to keep turning, or was it time to up the ante? She rubbed her chin thoughtfully for several moments, then made her decision. She wrote quickly upon a parchment, then sealed it. Snapping her fingers, she summoned her messenger. "Deliver this to the faern immediately" she commanded. "Yes, Valsharess." "Tell him that I do not appreciate delays. He is to leave in one hour."

Within an hour, a score of seasoned drow warriors marched from the city of Rilauven to reinforce the scouts under the mountain. In the midst of the soldiers went a dark, cloaked figure.

-----Preparin' fer battle By:  
DIAMOND 2

Diamond went to the local stable and rented a cart with 4 stout ponies. She drove the cart to Mataga's and had Baldar Hmr help her family into the cart. Emmrald, her papy and Morad sang loudly as she hauled them all back to the Mount.

She got Emmy and Sardkuld to their beds and made a strong pot of coffee for Morad as he doused himself in a ice cold bath to get is senses about him. Her and Emmy had planned out what to do with the shop in case the Mount came under seige, so Diamond quickly cleaned out the display cases and packed up the shop. She loaded the shop contents into the cart and drove it to the Mount where she stowed them in a storage room near her and Emmy's digs. Then she took the cart back out to Rrindabal and

paid to have it returned to NW.

Making her way to her room, she donned her newly polished armor, recleaned her weapons and made her way to the main hall. Other kin were gathering as well, dressed for battle and awaiting to be assigned their duties. Diamond said a quick prayer to the gods that Morad was able to snap outta it and perform his duties. He had looked pretty peekid when she had left him in his rooms.

One of the kin started to quietly sing a dwarven battle song and others joined in adding harmonies. Diamond sang as well preparing her heart to protect her home. . . .

-----Gaglug and Gunklob By:  
Gaglug

"Shum ballallah ikka mokka tai! Zim bam okka tam rogadub kai!" hooted Gaglug as he capered around the bonfire, flinging handfuls of putrid herbs into the giant pot. Gunklob did his best to ignore the gibbering shaman, but to no avail. Gunklob watched the shaman for a while. In fact, thought the chieftan, it just might be unwise to ignore the shaman's actions. Just several days ago, the other goblins would have attempted to keep as far away from the insane Gaglug as was possible. Now Gaglug had several dozen soldiers participating in his nightly festivities, all prancing and dancing around the giant cooking pot(causing great stress and strain on the goblin chefs, who were as often as not, trampled underfoot by the cavorting mob). When the goblins entered combat with the dwarven defenders, Gaglug was able to whip the band into a screeching frenzy. The goblin chieftan grabbed the closest guard and throttled him, yelling and spitting in his face. "How ken dat skinny smelly git gets da crew all upsided? Bah! Musta be da darkelfun sparkly dat dey gives 'im! I knowd it alls along! Dem skanky elfy gits maked da deals wif Gaglug ta gives 'im me warband." Gunklob tossed the frightened guard into the wall and sat down. The frightened guard scurried away as Gunklob continued to talk to himself. "We be deelin' wif ya, ya stinky scrag. Firstem offs, me 'leet gards won' be eatin' any more o' dat rancid stew dat ye cooks up. Den, we figgers out da way ta gets ye outta da way, we does."

While the main goblin army slept, Gaglug sat awake and brooded on his plans. "Der stub'rn slag cain't die wif dat majiky sword dat da drowses gived him", he mumbled. "Why did da elfys gives Gunklob da nifty swords and only gives Gaglug da



pretty sparkly?" "But boss, ya sed dat de sparkly wud win yas da battle 'gainst da dwarfses." "Quiet, ya git" grumbled the shaman as he backhanded his lieutenant across the face, "Caint ye sees dat I be finkin?" The drow had told Gaglug where, when, and how he was to use his sparkly. They also told him that it was very dangerous, and very powerful, and that he could use it only once. That simply wasnt fair, thought the shaman. Gunklob got a shiny sword that made him invincible against the dwarves. He got to use it again and again. But Gaglug only could use his present once. Not fair!! "Bah!! I gots it!! Dem skinny elfs wants to gets Gaglug outta da way fer Gunklob! He always had its in fer me, but I be too smarts fer em! Dat snively chieftan gonna find out dat da sneaky tricksies kin go bof ways!" "But boss, whatcha gonna do 'bout his glowysword? It be..." "Quiet, ya git" commanded Gaglug, as he struck his lieutenant again. "Dincha see dat da glowysword only be glowy round dwarfses? Round goblinfolk, it be a normal sword. Sos I bets we cud jest gos up ta da chief and lop his 'ead off, quiet like, and takes 'is glowysword. Den I'd be gettin bof da sparkly and da glowysword. Da mob wud follows me ta glory! Now alls we gots ta do is figger out how ta gets da chief outta da way, we does..."

-----Preparing  
for the coming storm.. By: Nystramo

Nystramo raised his head and listened. Singing. Deep, sonorous voices raised in song. Dwarven voices. A song of battle. He smiled and took up his axe, making his way for the main hall.

He entered to see scores of his kin preparing their weapons and armor for battle, singing one of the ancient war songs.

"We march off bearing shield and axe To defend our halls of stone. We'll sacrifice all to keep it safe Our lives, our blood, our bone."

Without a word Nystramo joined in the preperations. He sat next to Dlamond with a smile and polished the head of Rorn Norogh, adding his own booming voice to the chorus. She smiled back as she worked on her own weapon. Many of the kin, heartened to see their chief among them, strengthened their own signing. This in turn attracted more kin who joined in as well, with equal vigor. Soon it seemed that every dwarf was not on assigned duty was in the hall, all singing with the strength only dwarves preparing for war can muster. Lonely Mountain itself seemed to vibrate

with the power of the song. Nystramo chanced to look to the eastern wall of the hall, where the Axepeak Crest was carved into the rock from floor to ceiling. There he saw Mysalla, his grandmother and avatar of Moradin, singing along with the rest of his kin. Just behind her, he thought he saw the giant image of an ancient, but still vigorous, bare chested dwarf holding an immense hammer. It too seemed to be singing.

-----Introspection By: Tigguhr

At Mataga's Tigguhr, among others, noted the chief leaving with a disgusted look on his face. 'Its the war' he thought to himself. 'An whut has ye done about it yerself lad?' Tigguhr fingered the amulet he was given to signify his Kuldmordin status. 'Ya's done nuthin but fer thins yerself. Ya nae be opnin a shop if thar be no Mount left tha's fer sure. It be time ta do fer tha Kin! Now git a move on Tigg afore ya end up as tha gully dwarf whut Morad always calls ya.'

Tigguhr paid for his last ale and exited Mataga's. Arriving at the mount some time later, he spent some time in the main hall, preparing his equipment and singing with the kin. Afterwards, he trailed Nys out of the hall. He found a few other dwarves waiting to see the Chief. Maybe had been at Mataga's and no doubt went through the same introspection.

When his turn finally came he stepped into Nytramo's presence with a tentative bounce. Nys looked up from his desk with a minor scowl, which Tigguhr knew he deserved. "Chief I ken wha yer thinkin' an ya be rite. I be kuldmordin an I shou' be helpin out whi preparations fer war. Whi tha rank come tha responsi, eh responsi, oh, er tha duties."

Nys's features softened slightly, "'Bout time ya started contributin lad. Glad ya figgured it out." Tigguhr brightened. "Tha trouble be cheif, wha cin I do. I dinna wants ta gits in tha way o the elders whut doin tha big jobs. Whut I cin do, is nae opens me shop, an start ta stockpile me homegrowed in tha mount, incase we be besieged. An' I cin digs a tunnel from Me garden ta tha mount, so's we can git to it. It be so secluded nae darklin'll find it.

"An, I ken a few tricks 'n traps frum tha jungle which cin work in tha tunnels. I be happy ta shows em ta tha kin in charge of defense. I dinna need nae special duties tho. Coral Joe be hankerin' fer some action. I be tha happies' o lads if I simply fite next ta me kin."

Nystramo stared the peculiar young dwarf. Tigguhr was a bit slow on the uptake, and had a penchant for getting into trouble, but he was eager. Good in a fight, maybe he did possess a few skills that could be put to use. Unsure, the chief scratched his head trying to come up with an answer.

-----Children of The Earthen Sky

By: MoradinSon

"Arrogant fool!"

Storm MoradinSon fumed to himself.

"Ye had nae business a goin off on such foolishness wit th' war so well nigh!"

Ignoring the comforts of his bed and bath he doused himself once again in the icy runoff water that filled his forges quenching trough. Warily he looked up to the everburning forge of his workshop. For as long as he could recall that forge had been more to him than a simple workplace. It had been his worship, his private heaven where his finest and greatest accomplishments were achieved. He knew that his father and his father's father had worked that forge before him and that for four human lifetimes he himself had labored at it nearly every day of his life. Yet the surface of the anvil was not marred at all, rather it was mirrored with a well used gleam and like a silvered stream of molten mithral it shone back at Storm his own image. The anvil image was backlit by the redwhite glow of the forgefire and it seemed to Storm to be changing before his eyes. He blinked away the water which ran down from his unbraided hair and into his face and he ran one massive hand back from his forehead to clear the runnels of wet cold which streamed into his eyes. The image in the mirrored anvil looked back at him with clean, grey, unblinking eyes yet those eyes were not his own. The dwarf in the anvil beckoned to him. " Poppy?" Morad croaked in a small tired voice The dwarf in the anvil gestured toward the forge and the bellows began to pump methodically. The redwhite coals became pink then blue then pure white as the fire's heat became blindingly hot. Storm MoradinSon nodded and stepped toward the glowing forge. He felt himself warmed, he felt himself forged and remade he felt his lifesong within him and recalled his purpose and lifequest. As strong and alive as he had ever been in his long life he stepped from his place of worship to his maker, Moradin the Soul Forger reminded him that his very reason for creation was to be dwarven and to defend all

things dwarven. In a Rhythmic harmony to the mighty war hymn ringing in the halls of the Lonely Mount, Storm MoradinSon sang a mighty song that spoke of the heritage and responsibility of being a Child of Moradin.

The Forger's hand is ever nigh To the children born neath earthen sky Mount as deep As sky is high Belongs to those He forged to keep

The anvil, hammer, mithral vein The blows of Forger hark to rain Down upon the virgin steel Children formed as evil's bane Knee's which ere to the Forger kneel

Strength and honor laid to geas Within these souls he forged the key To how the mountains live and die The Forgers pledge is given thee You children born neath earthen sky

Honor keep the kingdom given Halls of mount must naer be riven Live and fight and forge and die As Children of the Earthen sky

Clad in the finest mithral armor and bearing forth his weapons the revitalized Storm Moradinson went forth to battle.

-----What to do with a Bouncer? By: Nystramo

Nys blinked one more time at the odd orange clad dwarf, bouncing slightly before his desk. In truth, he he was never quite sure what to make of Tigguhr, ever since their first awkward encounter. On the one hand he seemed a bit, well... daft; on the other he was a stout kuldar, and had surprisingly shown enough initiative and organization to earn his Kuldmorndin. The chief had had more than a few doubts that the bouncer (as most of the clan had taken to calling him) would make it.

And here he was offering up his service to aid in the war. Not that Nys was surprised at the request; he knew Tigguhr was an enthusiastic dwarf, and he knew he cared deeply for the clan. He wasn't surprised; he just didn't know what to do with him. The bouncer's main skill seemed to be... gardening.

Fortunately, Tigguhr gave him an answer. "Traps?" the chief asked, raising an eyebrow.

Tigguhr's bouncing increased and he smiled excitedly. "Aye, chiefy! I ken a few traps I be bettin' e'en Moradinson nae 'as seen yet! We strings up a few gobs! Whizz! Bang! Har De Doo! It

be almos' a' much fun a' trippin' drow!!"

Nys chuckled despite himself. Odd or not, Tigguhr could always bring a smile to his face. "Alri' den, bouncer. Off wi' ya ta sees tha Rin Kuld. Shows 'em what ya gots." His smile widened as he watched Tigguhr bounce off with one more "Har De Doo!" of victory.

-----Fun Ways ta Kill Tha Enemy

By: Tigguhr

Tigguhr beamed as he bounced out of the chief's office, then he halted abruptly as he realized he would have to present his tricks and traps to Moradinson.

Recently Tig and Morad had swung weapons together in the woods (draggin a couple a ganglies along) and the bouncer had great respect for Morad. But he was still very intimidated. Morad had a lot of responsibilities and would probably want no further distractions from the war. Tigguhr knew his ideas had better be good.....

Off he went to his little corner of the mount to scratch out a few diagrams.

-----A Dream Begins.... By: KAGIS

I feel a tight pressure in my chest, and think the pain is going crush me. I trying to take a deep breath, but no air comes. Silence prevails. Somewhere nearby someone is pounding... it sounds like a drum beat... "thump-thump..."

Finally, I open my eyes and for a brief moment panic siezes my heart... I can't see! After an agonizingly long moment my vision clears... "whew." Glancing around I notice I am laying on a pile of hay in the corner of stone-heued room.

"thump-thump..."

In the center of the room stands a large stone forge, hand pump bellows lean against the base. Around the rim of the thick stone forge, a variety of tools are hung with care. Several different sized hammers, tongs, clamps... all neaty arranged. A shiny new mithril anvil stands near the forge, and next to the anvil a bucket of cool water sits. In another corner of the room, a wooden table is piled high with other implements and tools I recognized. It dawns on me, although I don't know how I know it, that this is a blacksmith's workroom.

"thump-thump..."

"Wall naw... dis be 'bout righ'." I say, as I struggle to my feet. Everything seems awkward, different somehow; but I can't put my finger on it. I look down at my hands as if they belong to someone else. Both hands end in short, almost stubby fingers... the hands are covered in scars. "Funny... I nae remember me 'ands lookin' like dis." One my left hand, on the third finger from the thumb, rests a gold and silver ring. It's a thick band, with intricate carvings along it's length. For some reason I feel like I should recognize it, but I don't.

"thump-thump..."

I take a deep breath, but even breathing seems out of place here in this room. I walk around the room, scratch my beard... "Wha' tha?" I look down... "Well naw, I donnae 'member 'avin' nae beard." It's long, a rich shade of brown but peppered here and there with shoots of white. "Guess I be older dan I 'member too."

I walk over to the bucket and peer in it's depth... my reflection stares back at me, but I might as well be looking at a stranger. From somewhere in the back of my mind, I realize I'm a dwarf... but again that seems out of place to me somehow. With a growing sense of dread, I realize.... "Who am I... I nae 'member me own name."

"thump-thump..."

I sigh deeply with frustration, "Well, I be a dwarf... dats fer certin. I guess I should start making tings with dis nice forge." I move over to the work table, select a nice long bar of iron and walk back over to the glowing forge. Placing the iron rod in the center of the coals, I take the billows and begin pumping air through the coals making them hotter. Heat radiates from the forge, filling me with warmth as I realized I must have been freezing until just now. Finally, something feels right.

"thump-thump..."

"thump-thump..."

I've been working for countless hours making all maner of items.

One I recognize as a long thin sword. The table is now piled high with finished goods, but I don't really remember making them all. Daggers, a lance tip, the head of a war hammer, a small axe made for throwing, steel bolts for a crossbow... the list goes on. I look down at the large axe blade I'm currently hammering to a fine edge. I hesitate... "Who am I? An' why am I makin' all dese weapons?"

"thump-thump..."

"You be a dwarf," a deep voice sounds from behind me. I whirl around and find myself staring eye to eye with another dwarf. I can tell that he's no ordinary dwarf. His eyes are coal black, shinning with a deep twinkle. His hair and beard are the deepest shade of red, reminding me of the forge I labor over. He stands a full head taller than me, his body covered with powerfully corded muscles. I feel a sense of reverence... of awe... but I don't know why.

"thump-thump..."

"Who be ye?" I ask suspiciously, "an' how ye gets in me forge-room?"

"That's nae 'portant," he answers. "What be 'portant is dat ye donnae belong 'ere... nae yet anyway." A smile wrinkles his face, and I realize the dwarf before me must be ancient, but he still seems so young!

"Who am I? What be me name? I donnae 'member." I ask desperate for answers.

His smile seems to lessen slightly at my questions. "I cannae answer yer quesctions. but what I can tells ya is dis. Ye donnae belong 'ere in me realm... ye are needed by yer clan for dey be facin' a dire fate. You must go back an' finish yer life with them." He holds up a calloused hand to prevent a stream of more questions I desperately need to ask. "Before ye can go back, ye must 'member who you are. Nae jus' yer name, but the very essence o' yer being. Finish makin' yer axe... make it strong... make it solid... but finish makin' it. It be written dat da makin' of your axe, will remake yer soul. An' yer new axe shall be known as 'Fulcrum.' And nae at thing will stop it's swing."

I looked down at the axe I still held in the forge. "Fulcrum,"

I whispered to it... "yes... Fulcrum." I looked up to thank the stranger, but he was gone. I scratched my head in confusion. Wondering again what my name is.

"thump-thump..."

"thump-thump..."

Has it been days, hours, weeks? I don't know... All my concentration... all my heart... and desire has been in hammering, heating, hammering, and finishing Fulcrum. My hammer raises and falls in a tireless rhythm of my own.. matching the odd drum beat.

"thump-thump...clang-clang..."

I realize that my throat is soar from whispering..."Wha? Wha' 'ave I been sayin' all dis time?" I can't remember. I know they are words I've never heard before, but I'm no longer worried about them, because I know Fulcrum is finished. I plunge the massive axe into the bucket of cold water. Steam rises for several minutes, hising.

"thump...." The drum beat stops suddenly. "I... I am... Kagis." The memories... everything hits me like a thunderclap. My ears ring, my eyes begin watering... and world goes dark on me.

I awake and realize I'm back in the corridor where I had died. My head swims with confusion. Looking down I see the holes in my armor and shield, but my wounds are healed fully. My father's axe lay neatly on top of a wooden case. In my hand rests Fulcrum... my axe... my soul. I see the ring on my left hand, and remember. "Me papies ring o' r'gen'ration." I stand and walk over to the wooden case. Opening it, my eyes go wide with wonder at all the weapons piled within it. "Dese mus' be da odder weapons I made." I carefully strap my father's axe to my back, close and lock the case, and heft it onto my left shoulders.

With Fulcrum in my right hand I begin the trek to reach my clansmen. I hope I'm not too late to help in the coming battle against the goblin hoard. Somewhere in the back of my mind I realize that something very wierd happened while I was dead... but I stubbornly refused to think about it. "Dere be more 'portant tings ta worry 'bout righ' naw. Nae time ta tink



"bout silly dreams."

I head off at a trot, taking a side passage to skirt the goblin hoard, and reach the Axepeak halls before them.

-----A New Dark is Dawning By:  
ZYXOS

::: The Valsharess had offered the blessings of Lloth to the Drow Warriors and Mages being sent off to reinforce the captain.... she watched as they marched past her with blood in their eyes and death in their hearts :::: she could not help but feel pride in the growth of Rilauven and the glory brought to Lloth under her guidance.... then as she was turning to reenter her throne room her gaze fell upon and stopped at a darkened figure still remaining at the back of the royal "Parade Ground":::

::: the "stance" of the male identified him as one of only 2 males that could be so insolent.. even in just their posture.... and the livery and armor of the Faern identified him immediately :::: she muttered to herself.... "Curse that insolent Zorak... if any more other than ZYXOS calls him Jabbuk we will ALL welcome the Abyss as relief"....

::: only raising an eyebrow at him was enough to summon ZYXOS into her presence ::::

"So... Jabbuk Faern... after all this time you finally seek out your past Ilharess for some reason I hesitate to ask"... the cold voice of Jhaelryna cut through the still darkness....

::: As the Dark One went to a knee before her, Jhaelryna could not help but smile at her memories of their firey meeting and the "stories" of the two of them that circulated within the temple. ZYXOS was known for his curt nods... <damn that Zorak>.. to the females of the temple... but without hesitation he knelt to his former Ilharess... now Valsharess ::::

::: his deep voice resonated through the darkness ::::

"You send children to do the work of warriors, my Queen.... and never have you called upon me since your ascension to thy rightful place of power. I come to thee now... to again state my desire to serve our Goddess with my life and my blood. These diminutive children of Moradin have met the goblins.... they have met the captain of your guard... and they are about to meet

some of thy vaunted shock troops....."

::: ZYXOS stood and the Valsharess noted the deepening blood red in his eyes... and the strength of his stance... and she was almost afraid of the outcome these precursors normally foretold  
::::

"BUT.... they have yet to meet the Dark One of the Drow..... I come now to seek thy approval to move against these gully dwellers in the manner of my Jabbuk... unaided and without hesitation or quarter..... :::ZYXOS' stance widened... and he held his right hand on-high towards the dias of the Queen :::  
"all for the glory of Lloth and the Valsharess Jhaelryna I !!!!"  
:::during these last words the Obsidion Dagger of Lloth sprang from ZYXOS' boot to his right hand and glowed with a darkening red fire... a dagger Jhaelryna had often heard of... but few who saw it lived to recount of it's presence ::::

::: with a sly smirk Jhaelryna continued to stare at the Jabbuk Faenr before her... wondering what she might be about to once again unleash upon the realms::::

-----Whot tha..... By: Niord

After meeting with his kin one last time, Niord had a feeling of emptiness. Memories....memories of his past....pleasure....pain...family....death....

The visions were to strong.....

Niord woke to find himself in the woods. But it was wrong somehow..... The sky was red, there was no sun, and he felt a presence..... He quickly whirled around, readying his axe as he did so. Standing before him....an image of his wife....long dead...and still loved more than life. He reached for her, only to pass through the image. Sadness overcomes Niord, and he falls to his knees wailing.....

In his mind....a voice emerges. It is the soft caressing voice of his long dead wife. She soothes his thoughts. He stops his grief and slumps on the ground.

"Niord....it be time ye were fergitin o' me.....I be long dead, an I kinnae come back....."

"But I kinnae ferget...me love....me life..."

"Ye mus' lad...ye has ah new 'ome now. Ye has kin...an they be needin ya. Now...if'n ye loves me amuch as ye were always sayin...ye will ferget me an git to ye kin."

"I kinnae ferget...."

Niords mind blurrs.....he awakes in the middle of the woods... "Whot be goin oh 'ere?" He reaches up and feels warm tears on his cheeks....but can't figure why they are there. No one is around..... He sits back trying to remember.....but there is no memories to be had. His mind wanders to his (new?) kin. Remembering meeting them....their flashy ways, battle prowess, kinship..... Niord knows something is missing from him.....but what he cannot place.

A sudden wave of anger passes him. Images of giants and dragons....and a burning hate for them. "Enuf o' wastin time, I gots ta git ta tha mount"

About a days walk from the mount he stops in horror. Obvious signs of a massive goblin army are here.....going straight for the mount. Without hesitation he picks up his pace....running....and having an overwhelming fear of loosing his kin.....ans somewhere....knows it has happened before.

-----More trouble on the horizon  
By: Jhaelryna

"Very well, Zyxos. You have my leave to operate against the dwarves. Your tasks are to be as follows: You are to collect as much information as possible about the defenses of the Mountain. This includes the physical defenses, and those that are planning and coordinating the security of the Underhalls. This information will be returned to the Academy for review. You are not to directly engage the dwarves in combat. You can, however, dispose of targets of opportunity. Lone patrols, and such." Valsharess Jhaelryna continued speaking quickly and quietly. "You are to watch the goblin attack and look for weaknesses amongst the dwarves. If possible, you are to use the chaos and disruption of the attack to infiltrate the Mount. If you are able to gain entry, you are to locate and eliminate these targets." The queen wrote a number of names on a small parchment, and handed it to Zyxos. As she turned to leave, she smirked. "By the way, Dark One, my soldiers have their own orders. They do not necessarily coincide with yours. Consider yourself to be alone on your mission". Robe flowing out behind her, the Valsharess left

Zyxos kneeling alone in the courtyard.

-----Jungle Tricks 1 By: Tigguhr

Moradinson strolled with Emmrald through the ornamentals in Tigguhr's garden. Eyes locked on each other, they nearly both tripped over a low table blocking the path. Tigguhr, sitting at a small stool, was as surprised as the couple. The jungle dwarf let out a loud "WHAAA" and fell backwards into a pile of compost. Papers flew everywhere.

Standing up, his black and orange skin now quite soiled, he greeted his kin. "Me apologies kin, I whar workin' on me traps! Helps yerself ta a nibble er a posie if ya likes. Oh 'n Morad, tha chief sayed I shou' shows ya me traps wha' I learnt in tha jungle. It cin waits a bit tho, seeins how ya gots some strollin' time with tha lass."

Moradinson gave a sideways look to Emmy. "As if I dinna has 'nuf ta deals with..." thought Morad. "Well'n lad, if Nystramo sayed, then ya meets me in tha main hall first thing in tha morn. An' ya gits a wash first-ye smells like a gully dwarf!" Tigguhr jumped to attention and snapped a salute and the couple strolled off.

-----Jungle Tricks 2 By: Tigguhr

In the morning, Tigguhr, freshly washed, showed up in the main hall with several baskets of meats, bread, roasted vegetables and a small keg of Special. He emptied the contents onto a table where Moradinson sat waiting, but he set one basket to the side. "Warnin' ya kin-dinna eats frum tha basket. Ya sees why in a bit." Morad let out a satisfied grunt, tucked in to the breakfast, and motioned the bouncer to begin talking. So Tigguhr, nervous and hoping to impress, began his little presentation.

"Ya gots ta ken tha enemy. Which I ken ya do. But wha do we ken?" Tigguhr asked rhetorically. "Drowie floats. Drowie detects traps whi magix. Drowie ha' lots of protectie spells. Soes, ya gats ta have traps whut cin be set off by tha kin, traps whut nae look like traps, an' double traps. Gits em riled up, kills a bunch, makes em waste thur foul magix rite?" He then layed out a series of eight diagrams detailing his ideas.

-----Jungle

Tricks 3 By: Tigguhr

Moradinson ate his breakfast and looked carefully at what

Tigguhr presented. Each diagram was titled across the top.  
Tigguhr took Moradinson through each in turn .....

DOUBLE TROUBLE. Slightly obvious pit trap right in front of a second shallow pit, sand filled that matches and appears to be floor, contains fine mesh connected via string to poisonous gas canisters in cieling. Step on mesh, pulls string, opens poison container.

GITS THA FLOATERS-INVERSE PIT. Fine wire trip wires on floor walls and ceiling releases floor stone slab which crashes up via springs.

PORKEYPINES. Dozens of holes bored in wall. Greased Manticore spines inserted. Grease makes it air tight. Moss conceals holes. Spine filled wall is backed by passage. Stone slab cut from passage wall, hollowed out to create air space. Slab is greased on edges then replaced to form air tight seal. Kin fires all spines from safety of adjacent passage by slamming into slab, using forced air to fill hallway with spines.

FAKE TREASURE. Fake treasure out of normal metals, gold plate and cheap gems-many magic looking items.. Contact poison covers treasure. Poison plants from garden.

-----Jungle Tricks 4 By: Tigguhr

Tigguhr continued showing his designs as Morad munched. The final diagrams showed:

HOLY ROLLER, DROW VARIATION. Build steam roller vehicle, big stone wheels, long chains attached to wheels. Good for clearin a path. Drow might Dim Door behind roller, so build an archer platform on back.

FUNNY FUNNEL TUNNEL. Narrow the tunnels in crucial places to size of one kin. Ffalse walls farther back in hallway allow kin to attack jammed up intruders from behind.

TEARS OF A DROW. Noxious pepper pots from garden are thrown or fired with sling, explodes, causing nausea and watery eyes in small radius (Tigguhr opened the extra basket to reveal numerous little red round peppers).

MAGIC ROCK SHOCKER. Magnetized rocks that on contact they sets off a dispel magic spell. Line tha approach corridors with them. The diagram showed rocks jumping up from the ground to

attach themselves to the metal of drow weapons or armor.

Tigguhr finished by saying, "Now I dinna ken 'ow tha clan feeled abou' usin' magic an' poison fer trappin bu' whi' tha Mount itself at stake, I dinna want to....." Morad finished looking at the diagrams and looked at the bouncer. Tigguhr's voice trailed off. He became silent, nervously bouncing in front of the elder, hoping that his ideas could help.

-----The Approach By: ZYXOS

::: As Jhaelryna turned to leave she used her powers as a Yathtallar of Lloth and read the mind of ZYXOS :::: "As if I would prefer it any other way, my Queen... LLOTH TLU MALLA" :::::

:::Jhaelryna shook her head and grinned... she had forgotten how exhilarating this Dark One could be ::::

:::ZYXOS trailed the Drow Shock Troops as they made their way towards the delves of the Dwarves. Several times the scouts and patrols seemed to sense that someone was about... but they could never find nor see him :::

He would begin his work as he reached the area of the fighting between the goblins and the dwarves... and... as his Valsharess had suggested... infiltrate the underrealms of the Dwarves to see what he could see..... and do.....

-----Kagis Returns... By: KAGIS

The dwarven guards stood vigilant as they monitored the handfull of tunnels leading from the underdark into Clan Axepeak's delves. Moradinson has ordered regular shift changes to keep the warriors fresh in case the goblin hoard attacked at any moment. The guards watched the tunnels with wary eyes. One guard assigned to a rather small side tunnel called out a spot. The guard captain trotted over to the side tunnel to see what the commotion was about. He got to the tunnel just as Kagis stumbled out of it. The exhausted dwarf stumbled into view, carrying a large wooden case on his back and an incredible axe in his fighting hand. His armor was cut and torn in ways that suggested wounds no one should have survived; but somehow Kagis had. "Kagis! Wha' dis be 'bout?" the captain asked.

Kagis's eyes shifted in a crazy manner and his jerky motions worried the captain. When Kagis didn't respond immediately, the captain grabbed the struggling dwarf by the shoulders, steadied him, and staired him in the eye. "Kagis! Come 'round now. I

says, wha' be goin' on? Where da rest o' ye scoutin' group and Dwyvyrn? Wha...."

Kagis seemed to suddenly snap back from wherever his crazed mind had been wandering. "Nae time fer dat now goo' cappy. Is gots ta sees da Chief!"

Without another word Kagis hefted the case onto his back, adjusted his hold on the axe and continued on; heading for the where the war headquarters was located in the main hall.

After he left, the guard captain looked around at this troup and called out, "Loo' alive now! Da goblin coul' show dere ugly faces any time now!"

-----Report of Scouting mission...

By: KAGIS

Nystramo sat at a stout table set up in the war room. Piles of paper covered every spot, reporting on the advancing goblin hoard and the dwarven defensive preparations. He was currently studying the last scout report to come in... it was two days old and the scout had spotted the goblin goard less than a day away from the Mount when he'd sent the report. Scratching his chin Nystramo pondered the odd manner of attack, "I wonders wha' dem goblin be up to... wha' are dey waitin' fer?"

Just then a commotion outside the room caught his attention. "Guard! Wha' be all dat noise fer? Are da goblin attackin'?" Nystramo asked almost hopefully. He didn't like this waiting, and the more he waiting the more nervous he was getting.

"Nae da goblins Chief..." the guard called back... "Kagis ha' return'd an' 'nsists on speakin' whit ye." Nystramo could believe it... "Wha' are ye waitin' fer guard? Send 'em in now!" The guard stepped aside and Kagis stepped into view, clutching a massive axe in his right hand, and carrying what looked like a chest on his back.

Kagis nodded his head at Nystramo, and then launched into a quick but thorough explanation of how Dwyvyrn and his scouting parties had attacked the goblin hoard. Nystramo was disturbed to hear that Kagis hadn't heard from Dwyvyrn for several days and had lost his two scoutmates, but what disturbed Nystramo more was Kagis' explanation of the goblin elite hammer warriors. Finally Kagis finished his tale explaining that he must of 'blacked out and the goblins just didn't check to see if he was

still alive after the last battle.' Judging from the cuts and dents in Kagis' armor Nystramo didn't believe for a minute that Kagis had "blacked out," but now wasn't the time for such debates.

Nystramo looked Kagis over, noticing that the stubborn warrior looked more dead than alive, but only asked, "Whas in da box?"

Kagis grinned, "special weapons ta use 'gainst dem goblin hammers." Kagis placed the case on the ground, and opened the lid. Stacked inside were dozens of mithril swords, axes, and hammers. In addition, five special Axepeak crossbows and what looked to be over 100 mithril bolts lay inside the case. The crossbows were not made from carved oak (as most of the Axebows were), these were made entirely of mithril steel. "As I figure it, dese Axebows and bolts shou' pu' a bolt clean through stone thicker dan I be tall." Kagis added noticing Nystramo carefully examining one. If anything Kagis was underestimating the punch these weapons would have in close quarters. Nystramo nodded his approval.

Kagis turned to leave, his report finished but Nystramo reached out and grabbed Kagis by the shoulder. "Hold on dere lad. Dem cuts in yer armor... dey loo' perty bad. Wha' happen' ou' dere?" Kagis looked down and Nystramo could see his eyes water slightly. Kagis finally answered, "I dinnae tink I cans answer yer ques'chion Nys. I dinnae think I really ken wha' happen to me..." Kagis sighed, "I nae even sure I wants ta ken."

Without another word Kagis left Nystramo to go change into his spare suit of armor, get a few mugs of Axepeak Special to restore his energy and head where Kagis expected the toughest fighting to be. In front.

-----Re:Report of Scouting  
mission... By: Nystramo

Nystramo watched Kagis leave, still uncertain of what to make of the Kuldar's tale. He wondered, but not for long. There was work to do.

He gestured to the case of weapons and addressed one of the gaurd. "See tha' these weapons gits distributed. I wants ever' unit ta has some o' dem in their ranks. An' gives each o' The Ten first pick o' weapons, 'cept fer tha Axebows. Finds our five bes' shooters an' gives 'em each one an' a score o' tha bolts." The gaurd nodded and he and another kuldar carried the cache of



weapons to the forces.

Nystramo fingered Rorn Norogh's blade and grinned. It would be a grand battle.

-----Into the Mount By: Niord

I gathers me senses an starts inta tha mount. Discarded stuff an dead bodies be 'ere an thar. I keeps goin, fallerin tha main trail tha gobblies left. Me mind be almos' gone....a million thoughts at ah time. I ne'er took meself fer ah psycho.....

I starts findin signs o' fierce battle. I clutches tha amulet on me neck...funny....I naer noticed tha befor..... I finds ah pile o' bodies, an ah dwarven shield w' lotsa 'oles in it. I nae recognizes it, but I nae sees a body o' un me kin 'ere. I goes ah li'le further, an I finds crosses an names scribed in tha wall. I reads tha names, an me heart pains, fer I ken these two brave lads.....

I comes ta ah spot whar tha main army turned, an then comed back. I goes doon....it be goin ta anudder set o' side tunnles. I 'ears noises..... I flattens against tha wall, an sees 4 gobblies commin oot o' tha tunnel. I sees ah shield in un o' thar 'ands....I ken whos it be....it be Dwy's shield.....

I acts withoot thinkin.....screamin like ah berzerker....chargin swingin me axe. I takes 'em by surprize, an cleaves tha shield 'older in halves, frum tha top doon. Tha udders readies thar weapons, but I nae cares. I charges agin, I nae cares if'n I gits kilt. I rams un inta tha wall, an spits anudder w' me axe. Tha udder un 'its me frum behind an pierces me armor. I feels tha pain but nae cares. I finishes tha gobbie under me shield, an tha udder 'its me agin in tha sames spot. It goes thru me armor, an I screams in rage an pain. I clutches me side an whirls on tha gobbie, but it gots away. I rips off ah piece o' gobbie armor an puts it in tha hole in mine ta stops tha blood, picks up Dwys shield, an goes.....

I comes ta ah pile o' gobblies, an ah cavein aftur it. I nae sees any dwarvie bodies, soes I figures they be buried under tha piles. I ken tha Dwy be below tha pile....un o' tha first kin tha findid me an tooks me in. I gots ta gives 'im ah propper burien. Soes I starts ta dig. I nae gits far, an me rage goes oot. I clutches tha amulet w' me bloody 'and, an I feels sumfin wierd 'appinen. Me strength....it be commin

back....an greater.... I picks up me axe an starts swingin, cuttin thru boulder after boulder, an I nae tires. Me axe swings faster an faster.....I be clearin tha pile gud now. I nae ken 'ow long I be swingin....I nae gits tired.....I jes keeps swingin, nae seein any bodies. Me hopes git beddur, an I goes.

'boot 24 hours aftur I starts, I comes across ah gobbie body crushed in tha cavein. I lets oot ah sarcastic laugh....knowin tha Dwy got ah least un mores befur he gots it. I keeps diggin.....nae noticen me sanity slippin away. Finally, tha pile starts givin way. I puts doon me axe, an drops ta tha floor in exhaustion, nae noticen it befur I puts it doon. I forces meself ta gits up. I pulls more stones away, an thar it be! I gots an opinen ta tha udder side! I sticks me 'ead thru, an barely pulls back befur an axe 'its whar me neck were. Frum inside I 'ears ah voice...weak....."Comes on in ye gobblies, ye nae gonna takes me wioot ah fit!" Me eyes widen, I calls "Dwy? Tha be you Dwy?" I 'ears ah voice agin....."Niord? Is tha you lad!"

I finds me last bit o' energy an widens tha 'ole. I be stickin 'alf way in an Dwy runs up an hugs tha air oota me. Aftur 'e lets go an asks lotsa questions I nae has tha answers for, 'e 'elps me in. I stands up, an offers 'im 'is shield. He looks ah it, an ah me, then takes it. Thank ye lad.....I naer fergits this. I looks ah tha udders an greets em. Las' I remember was sayin 'allo, then e'erthin goes black as I feel meself 'itten tha ground.....

-----The Darkness Descends By:  
ZYGOS

::: The approach to the Mount had gone well, with no encounters forcing ZYGOS to give away his presence. He had started following one dwarf that seemed to have lost his mind in some fight. Finally, after killing 3 Goblins just for a shield, the dwarf seemed intent upon burying himself in a pile of rubble. Then... for the first time... ZYGOS saw the dwarf possessed a magical amulet hanging around his neck. ZYGOS knew of the Dwarven dislike for magic... and the amulet seem to be a surprise to the Dwarf himself. ZYGOS noted the discovery for his record... "Dwarves appear to be using limited magic or magical impliments.... must increase vigilance when patrolling or doing battle".

Giving the magical impliment a wide berth, ZYGOS continued on into the tunnels. He happened upon a fight between some of the

Goblin Hammer Corps and a small patrol of dwarves ::: watching carefully, it was obvious that the Dwarven Patrol was more than a match for the Goblins... but they were taking horrible wounds and losing many of their number. However, it was obvious that the preferred Dwarven fighting style was to put everything into the "obvious" battle, even if it meant losing most of their force.

Finally one of the Dwarves had been able to subdue that last of the goblins... and with a large chest on his back was making his way shakily towards the Underhalls of the Mount::: pulling the cloak of darkness tighter about him, ZYXOS followed closely on the heels of the struggling Dwarf :::

::: As the pair approached the perimeter of the UnderHalls of AxePeak, the dwarf was challenged by a sentry ::: it was interesting to note that they did not fire if they even "thought" the approaching figure might be a fellow dwarf ::: and then with a cursory pass through, the Dwarf was allowed to make his way on through the defensive perimeter just because he said it was important ::: even Dwarven Clerics were not present to assure there was nothing amiss.... such as a cloaked Drow Warrior ::::

::: splitting off from the struggling Dwarf, ZYXOS made his way into the outer tunnels of the Dwarven UnderHalls watching for traps and patrols :::: finally he spotted the beginnings of a trap that he recognized in both form and function :::: as he was studying the trap and noting its location on his map the 2 dwarves working on the trap approached :::: "Sur'n it be impor'ant ta get dis done so Tigghur kin show it ta Moradinson... bu' ye wou' t'ink dey wou' give us time fer a few ales w'out us havin' ta sneak off ta get 'um ourselves" .. ::: the two had obviously been taking a break and were now quite relaxed ::::

::: ZYXOS moved quickly and silently taking advantage of the laxness of the two workers.... his boot knife drank deeply of the blood from the larger of the workers as it silently slit the dwarf's throat ::: the other dwarf looked on in horrid amazement as his companion's throat seemed to open of it's own accord and the blood spilt down the front of his armor ::: and the look turned to one of shock as the fully armed and armored Drow Faern seemed to materialize from thin air in front of him ::: the deep blood red eyes were the last site the Dwarf saw before the Fireball slammed him to the floor and ended his life in a living

hell of flame and pain :::

<chuckling to himself ZYXOS moved off again>... "let's see them figure out how goblins came up with magic like that".....

:::ZYXOS' movements were precise and it was apparent he was searching for someone or something specific as he made his way gradually inward within the defensive ring of the Dwarven UnderHalls :::

" So, little one... where are you now? There is one more card to be played that even you are not aware of....."

-----The Darkness Descends

By: Nystramo

It was the most disturbing news yet. Two more kin dead... killed WITHIN the outer perimeter of Lonely Mountain. Nystramo looked over the scene of the killings. There was a lot of blood, all of it dwarven.

"Blast," he muttered. One of the kuldar had his throat slit, apparently without a struggle. The other had been burned to death. The charred area suggested a fireball. "Magix."

The assembled dwarves looked at each other with concern. It was obvious no goblin was responsible for this. It was inconcievable that one could slip past the pickets, sneak up on two dwarven warriors, slit one's throat and kill the other with a fireball without losing a drop of it's own blood. Besides, Nystramo had never even heard of a gobin skilled enough in magic to even cast a simple sleep spell.

There was only one other possibility worth considering. There was a drow, or a few drow, inside the perimeter.

"Gits Moradinson! Now!" he barked to the nearest dwarf. Startled by his chief's unusually brusque command, the kuldar ran off to find the Rrin Kuld as quickly as he could.

He considered for a moment before giving his next order. Clearly their couldn't be more than a handful of drow within the perimeter right now, if even that many. This particular killing indicated no more than two or three of them. Even one drow, though a very skilled one, could have managed it.

"Puts out a call to all tha kin," he told another kuldar. "I

wants all kin wha' kin be found in tha nex' three hours inside tha mount. In three hours, we be closin' tha gates. An' puts tha call out to tha priests. I wan' them scourin' tha mount fer any signs o' foul magix."

The dwarf nodded and ran off, knowing that Nystramo didn't mean the standard gates that allowed entrance and egress from the mount. He meant the REAL gates - huge stone slabs that needed a dozen kuldar just to open and close. It was a serious move. It meant the chief thought the mount was in immediate danger. It was second only to the final sealing of the mountain, a decision reserved for a truly desperate situation.

Nystramo remained at the site, worrying. Why were the drow striking now, before the goblins had played their hand? Why announce their presence with an attack that accomplished nothing else but draw attention to them? He was missing something.

He shook his head and hoped Moradinson would be able to shed some light on the situation.

-----Har dee Uh ooh.... By:

Tigguhr

Tigguhr heard of the slayings and began working even faster. Morad had approved a couple of designs for test, but now the bouncer (who knew they would work) now decided to go ahead and complete the one he was working on as if it would be deployed for real and immediately.

Alone in a side corridor, he worked in the darkness. As he bend over some bamboo rods and netting, he suddenly got a sensation that he hadn't felt in some weeks. Staying in a crouch and turning quickly, he spied a blackness moving toward him, that got significantly lighter as it approached. A dark form materialized in front of him and grinned wickedly.

"Oh oh! Nae agin!" cried the bouncer, as he went for his axe Coral Joe...

-----Re:The darkness decends.. By:

Baldar Hmr

::Baldar had just arrived at the stonewerks, as requested by the StoneMaster, Moradinson, and was waiting for Morad to arrive when one of the chief's guards ran into the quarry. 'Quick like, where tha 'ell is Storm, Baldy?', asked the guard in a gruff fashion. 'Hmph!..I dinnae ken where he be, I be waiting fer 'im

meself!..Why is you so werked up?',answered Baldar. 'Gordul!', exclaimed the guard,' It done started! The chief dun ordered the gates sealed in three hours! All the kin is ta git inside tha Mount by then!! Two kin dun be found dead in tha Outer perimeter, and it 'pears ta be magix, maybe Drow!!' 'Sandstone!',muttered Baldar, 'Well kin, best tha we goes off and checks with Emmy and D1 ta see ifn' they ken where Storm be at.' ::A scowl crossed the young Kuldmordin's face as the two ran off in search of the sisters'::

-----The Eastern Underhalls 1 By:  
MoradinSon

"Yer sure?"

"Aye Rrin Kuld" Breathed the ghostly herald.

Storm MoradinSon stood in his planning chamber before a stone table covered with runes and pieces of engraved stone that would be indecipherable to any but a dwarf. He was conversing with an ancestral guardian, a dwarf who, in life, had been so dedicated to the protection of the mount that he continued his vigil even beyond the boundaries of death.

"Ragin" Storm addressed the shade respectfully. "I be honored that ye has shown yerself ta me an I be shaken at th' same time tha' we be in a danger fierce enow ta bring ye inta view in this livin world. I will strike a weapon upon Moradin's forge in yer honor fer givin yer aid to us now"

The translucent dwarven warrior nodded his head in recognition of Storm's words and began vanishing from sight.

"I will always be an guardian of the Mount. Always."

The Ancestor's final word lingered behind in certain promise as the ghostly image vanished from view.

MoradinSon moved a few cryptic stones about the surface of his table. He turned to one wall of the room upon which was engraved a layout of one of the underhall levels. Beneath the mural was a bank of stone rods which extended in various lengths from the face of the wall. Each rod had a series of runes upon it. Moradinson faced the wall and studied it carefully before murmuring a quiet word in the ancient tongue of the house of Durin. He intoned it precisely as Nystramo's venerated mother had taught him. He then withdrew two of the rods from the wall.

The rods slid smoothly from their sockets.

Far below in the deepest levels of the underhalls, although not yet within the citadel's gates, Zyxos moved in the dancing shadows of the flames which burned in the sconces of the hall. The drow had not yet penetrated deep within the mount and the hall he traversed well not well used. Many of the walls appeared to be natural in origin and the flagged floor had enough shallow pools of standing water to make it clear that the dwarven work crews didn't pass this way often. still, it was the path by which the goblin army would approach and it would serve better than most mused the drow faern. Suddenly the faern heard a click. A click so soft and distant that few other beings would have had any chance of hearing it. At the same instant every torch in the down sloping hall went out.

"Foolish little men." Thought Zyxos. "Such darkness will slow the goblin hordes little and me not at all".

Zyxos continued more confidently now that there was no need to flit from shadow to shadow. Downward toward the inner halls of the mountains underbelly he continued until he came to an abrupt dead-end. A glyph covered wall arose blocking the chamber. Although the wall was so well fit that no seam could be discerned Zyxos was certain that this wall was newly placed. He was tempted to cast a spell upon the wall to rend it from its place but something about the runes held him from doing so. He was unsure what effect they would evoke but he was certain that they were magical in nature. The dwarves were poor in most magic and they held what magic they could wield close to home but they walked closer to their gods than most folk and even a drow had to think twice before risking tripping dwarven runes and traps.

A mile back upslope the goblin front ranks had entered the same tunnel down which Zyxos now found himself. The tunnels torchlit mouth beckoned the horde in. Thirty or more goblins had entered the tunnel when the mighty slab of stone dropped into place sealing it completely and pulping the three hapless goblins unfortunate enough to be caught beneath it.

The tunnel

---

zyxos \_\_\_\_\_ 1mile \_\_\_\_\_ goblins

-----Eastern underhalls 2 By:

MoradinSon

Zyxos heard the goblins screams echo from behind him and his well honed instincts screamed to him. Trap! He took a deep breath and realized that he felt weak. It was then he heard the faint hiss. He looked about intently and listened. Several tense moments later he traced the sound to one of the doused torches. Upon close examination it became clear that many of the torches were not wood but metal. The hollow metal torches were making the faint hissing noise. Realization dawned upon the oxygen starved drow. Swiftly as he could travel he began running back up the tunnel. Back the way he had come.

The squad of goblins who had been trapped on the inside of the stone slab pummeled its polished surface to no avail. Two torches continued to burn here at the top of the sloping tunnel. Beyond the radius of those two burning beacons the tunnel extended downward into a stygian darkness. The spooked goblins aimed their bows and crossbows down the cheerless tunnel and began to inch forward. The gasping drow faern charged up the tunnel. His lungs and brain screamed for air. He turned a bend and saw the goblins advance scouts just as they saw him. The goblins startled at the sight of the drow and a few of them even let their bolts fly in startled reflex. Zyxos charged past them heedless. Onward, upward toward the door into this accursed tunnel. He knew that the tunnel behind him was filling up with natural gas.

"Those accursed little men will pay for this" he panted. He was as angry as he could remember ever being. The dwarven trap had surprised him in its elegance and he cursed his own foolishness for failing to regard the dwarven defenses as highly as he should have. He rounded the final corner as the goblins pressed themselves against the walls and struggled for breath around him. They were too concerned for their own pitiful life to attempt to stop or accost him. One lone goblin sergeant, leading from the rear as is the goblin way, tried to grab the Dark One's arm as he ran past but Zyxos pulled his sword, beheaded the fool and re sheathed his sword all without breaking stride. The drow knew his only hope was the door he had come in by. The long run and the lack of air was telling on his consciousness. He could swear he saw lights before his eyes as the door swam into view. Two baleful dancing lights like the eyes of some huge subterranean beast standing guard over the door. The closed, huge, glyphed door. "No!" screamed the drow.

He found time to attempt on swift spell before the natural gas



rising from the tunnel below finally filled the tunnel and reached the torches at its mouth.

All over Neverwinter the rumbling was felt. On the terrace of Striders tavern in Neverwinter Aziza, Stilicho, Rome, Krostasha and a host of others saw the towering gout of flame vent itself from the vicinity of Lonely Mountain. Beneath and within the mount there were several small cave-ins as the mount shook from the blast. Within the well designed halls of the mount the injuries were few as some dwarfs stumbled or fell at the unexpected shaking. Outside of the mounts structured halls cave-ins were common and many goblins died as whole sections of unsupported cavern collapsed upon them.

-----Eastern Underhalls Collapsed  
By: MoradinSon

Nystramo charged into the Rrin Kulds Defense Chamber.

"Whut has ye dun lad? We ha jus heard tha' Dwyv an his patrol still be alive an out thar. I only hopes ye knew whut ye were doin. Tis one thing fer kin ta die neath swords an another ta die from a kinsdwarfs trap!"

Storm MoradinSon nodded grimly.

"Aye Chief, twere desperate measures ta be sure an no dwarf will ever wish harder fer me kin's survival nor regrets it more if they be killed. Thar were drow within the mount's underhalls an that were the surest trap i had in that section o' th' halls. It had ta be done an may th' forger have mercy on me soul if me kin has died in me sealin off the eastern approach. I recomends we makes D1amond 2nd axe effective immediatly. We will needs someone who takes no nonsense ta fill in till we knows abouts Dwyv.

Nystramo saw clearly the anguish on Storm's face.

"Well'n ye said ye had laid traps but good gods lad! Dont ye ever do anythin on a smaller scale?"

Nystramo grasped Storm's shoulder in a reassuring gesture.

"I am sure ye did whut ye thought best lad. I will sends out patrols ta survey the damage an search fer any drow or goblins whut might ha' escaped. Meanwhile we keeps the eastern approach completely sealed an lay more traps an gaurds. Whut has ye

planned if they comes at us from the other directions?"

-----The Darkness

Deepens By: ZYXOS

::: as Zyxos ran back up the tunnel fighting for his life against the gas he continued his mission as required... continuing to note the trap type... the ease of spotting it by looking for metal torches... but most of all... using his senses to note the small spot of magical essence... dwarfish runes it appeared.... deep within the mountain :::

"Blocked... the accursed door is blocked!!".... ::: ZYXOS ran headlong into the blocking stone at the mouth of the tunnel :::

::: realizing his chance to escape was only due to the mechanical slow nature of the Dwarven traps.... ZYXOS stretched out his senses for the one he sought ::: finally sensing him hard a work deeper into the underhalls of the dwarven mount :::: with a shimmering glimmer... the form of ZYXOS faded from sight :::

::: the Dim Door spell carried ZYXOS within a short range of the dwarf working so industriously on his trap.... but far enough away to not yet be sensed :::

::: ZYXOS quickly entered into his notes the way in which the doors of the Mount were sealed... noting to find out if there was a further means of sealing the stones themselves::: also noting the method, type, and ways to spot the most recent deadly trap ::: and finally noting that the Dwarves were indeed further into the use of magic than believed and then locating that "spot" on his map... most likely a control room for traps and the war plans of the Dwarves :::

::: ZYXOS began walking towards the young dwarf working on his trap.... allowing the Cloak of Darkness to open as he approached ::::

::: Tigguhr looked up :::: HAR DEE UH OH..... was all he got out before the blood red eyes of ZYXOS again energized the control spell buried deep within Tigguhr for just such an occasion ::::

Tigguhr stopped as he reached for his axe and was kneeling absolutely still... with a blank look on his face... as it stared into the eyes of the Drow Jabbuk Faern.

"Tigguhr.....", ZYXOS spoke the control phrase.... "the Queen has further need of your services, young one."

In a whispered voice Tigguhr responded... "..... the.... queen....."

"You will continue your work on the traps, Tigguhr.... but each evening at this time, you will meet me back here on this spot and report to me of your progress. You will also bring me the plans and details of the traps you have devised, as well as all information you may gain on the "control room" I have now become aware of through the attempt on my life. And, Dwarf, I would know of any further means of sealing this mount other than the great stones rolled into place."

"as... the... queen... commands", Tigguhr responded.

"You will remember none of our meetings, Dwarf.... and will have no visible signs of the spell now upon thee. Each evening at the appointed time the spell will reactivate and you will come to me here....."..... :::: ZYXOS faded from sight as the cloak of darkness was pulled about him ::::

:::Tigguhr shook his head briefly while snatching up his war axe  
:::: "n wha' in the name of the seven hells do ye su'pose dat cou' ha' been?".... ::: as he remembered the shadow he thought he had seen.

"Well... nae time ta worry 'bout dat... gots ta complete dis trap 'n show it ta Morad...."

"..... 'n mebbe I kin get a look in dat war room o' 'is....",  
::::: Tigguhr seemed to mumble for a second with a dullness buried deep within his eyes.....

-----As the Mount  
Rumbles.....cont. By: DIAMOND 2

DIamond had felt the rumbling and braced herself as the the Mount shook and she saw various loose rock fall around her. She took it upon herself to check on the women that were watching the children of the Mount that had been rounded up and kept in the inner part of the underground city for safe keeping. "Safe keeping, bah! Keeps them outta the way I say." She grumbled after she had checked on the whining crying mass of children and the frazzled women watching over them. "Thankyee gods, that I

be a fite'n' lass and nae a nanny."

D1 went searching for Nystramo, helping people clear small cave-ins as she went. She finally found him in the war room looking over maps and charts scattered all over the table. "So's ye be alrite then lad?" She said, glaring at Nystramo with her hands on her hips. "I be fine too." She stated matter-of-factly, then continued, "Whu' happened?"

"Ach! Morad broke tha Mount!" Nystramo said with a wide grin. "But I thin' he got the goblins. He just sent some scouts out to check."

"And the drow?"

Nys frowns, "Nae sure if we got it."

"And your body guards?" D1amond looked around for the guards that had been assigned to protect the chief.

Nystramo tried not to look guilty, "Ach! I must o' lost um in all tha excitement."

Taking up vigil at the entrance to the war room, D1 said, "Then, since there be drow about, I guess ye be stuck wit me as yer guard till they returns."

-----Pawn 1 By: Tigguhr

Tigguhr bounced into the great hall chamber and quickly checked his step. Didn't want the kin to think he wasn't taking the war seriously, so he only bounced a little. Explosions, intruders, traps to be set and sprung-- it was all very exciting. The possibility of drow invading was terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. He spied D1 waiting near the main doorway to the hall (probably keeping watch-she's setting a good example thought Tigg) and went over to say hello.

"Aye 'allo lad. 'Tis scary an 'xcitin a' tha same time tis true. Dinna wan' it ta 'appen, bu' if tha darklins gonna come, we cin bash sum skulls an learn em a lesson." D1 radiated confidence, which always inspired the younger dwarf. Even though her betrothed had the weight of the world on his shoulders, D1 was not so self absorbed that she couldn't give an encouraging word.

"I fer one cin nae wait lass. Long ha' I thought abou ways ta

kill tha darklins since they tried ta pazess me whi' thar magix!  
I be rite proud tha Morad thought 'nuf o' me idears ta include a  
couple. Gots ta go werks on em lass. Sees ya soon.! Har dee  
Doo!"

D1 watched Tigguhr depart with only a slight bounce. The  
minimally exuberant Tigguhr reminded her that she saw the lad  
when he was possessed previously. She wondered just exactly how  
the bouncer would react the next time he saw a drow. A quiet  
reminder to both Moradinson and Nystramo about Tigguhr would be  
prudent, she thought.

-----Pawn 2 By: Tigguhr

Tigguhr was back out in the access tunnel working on his trap  
not long after. He was a bit frustrated, since Morad hadn't  
really let him in on much. Same story this morning. Meet in the  
main hall, get your assignment, don't see Morad the rest of the  
day. Tigguhr had no idea where he went all day. Nor did he have  
any idea which of his traps were going to be used or where,  
except the one he was currently working on. "Needs ta ken basis  
lad, first rule o' war. Ya gits over ta tha fifth lower access  
tunnel an sets up one o' yer spiney blasters. Sees ya in tha  
morn." -----

Hours later, Using his bare hands Tigguhr spread pig grease onto  
the stone slab and slid it into place, forming an air tight  
seal. The trap was complete. Just then, and the dark form of a  
drow began to materialize. Tigguhr stood up and lost his  
balance, slipping on a blob of pig grease he'd accidentally  
dropped on the floor. He fell forward, bumping into Zyxos as he  
solidified, smearing pig grease on the drow's finery. "Clumsy  
Speck!" he barked. Tigguhr, hearing the trigger word, fell under  
the drow spell immediately. "Vendrambuie...thar...darklin..."  
Tigguhr, saw that his dark master was filthy. He attempted to  
scrape grease off Zyxos but only made it worse.

Greasy and growling, Zyxos began questioning the enchanted  
dwarf. The bouncer dutifully responded to the drow, but all he  
could explain this day was the one spine trap that he had just  
completed. Zyxos, frustrated by the minimal information he got,  
reinforced the magic in Tigguhr with special emphasis behind  
getting closer to the dwarven leaders to learn more about the  
defenses. "Hopefully this will prove more fruitful tomorrow,"  
he grimaced. He spun around and faded out almost slipping on the  
pig grease.

-----Rest and Blessings... By:

## KAGIS

Kagis sat before a raised alter in his private quarters in a corner of the mount. Like the dwarf, his room was spartan. Except for an old carved stone slab behind the alter that depicted his father's clan symbol, no one would have been able to know this was Kagis room. He preferred things simple.

Kagis sat before the alter dedicated to Moradin. Fulcrum, The Axe, lay on top of the stone alter. It was the only fitting place for the weapon. Kagis had never been a particularly religious dwarf, but he knew that the coming battles would mean many would die.

So, not sure exactly where to begin, Kagis tried performing some simple blessings to Moradin he remembered from his childhood. It didn't seem like it was enough so Kagis began improvising. Eventually his prayers became a rambling diatribe about the virtues of the earth and stone, going on at great length about the reverence due when molding iron into steel. Kagis went on and on, reciting all his knowledge on The Beginning, when dwarves were first made by the hand of the Soulforger. Finally, mercifully, Kagis slumped over in exhaustion, laying his head against the cool stone alter.

Had Kagis been awake, he would have seen Fulcrum begin glowing a soft bluish color. Next to Fulcrum the candles suddenly hissed out as if they'd been emerged in some ice water. The blue glow slowly changed to such faintness that only the most careful inspection would give its magical glow away.

For the first time in over twenty years, since his father's clan had been whiped out by the Zhentarim and their goblin hoards, Kagis Ironpeak son of Lord Bendric Ironpeak, slept in peace.

-----Re:As the  
Mount Rumbles.....co By: Nystramo

Nystramo couldn't help but smile when D1amond took up her gaurd with a grunt and a huff. He knew she wouldn't be happy when he dismissed his gaurds, but they're strength was needed elsewhere. Besides, trying to get around the mount quickly surrounded by ten heavily armed kuldar had proved to be almost impossible.

Watching D1's scowl, however, he knew this was not the time to explain this to her, nor that if he wasn't safe in the heart of Lonely Mountain, a few kuldar would not likely save him. He made

with do with a shrug, a conciliatory smile, and a "Sorry, lass. Ya ken 'ow confusin' it be ri' now."

"Hrmph," she replied. "It gits a blasted si' more confusin' if'n ye gits yerself kilt, lad." After a moments thought she added, "An', jes' in case ya ha' nae thots o' it a'ready, keeps yer eye on Tigg. We ken there be a darklin' abouts, an' ya ken he been magixed by 'em once a'ready."

This thought gave Nystramo pause. In truth, he hadn't considered that. On the one hand, he didn't want to do anything to make the bouncer think he didn't have any faith in him. On the other, some precautions were definitely in order.

"A'rite, lass, I posts four gaurds on me door. Two in, two out. They keeps a close eye on any tha' enters ta sees me. Tha' be enou fer ya?"

D1 considered a moment, then nodded. The chief barked out the command to the nearest messenger, who ran off to find the Ten.

D1 opened her mouth to say something further, but stopped when the noise started.

It started low, as a distant rumbling, then gathered in strength. It reached its peak, ending with a resounding crash. The silence that followed could only be described as oppressive as every dwarf in the mountain stopped what they were doing to listen. No words were exchanged. None were needed. Everyone knew what had happened.

Lonely Mountain was sealed.

-----A Conversation By: D1AMOND 2

D1amond waited for Nystramo's replacement guards to arrive. From his maps and diagrams, Nystramo pointed out to her the tunnels that had been collapsed and some of the traps that Moradinson had laid. The guards arrived, D1 kissed Nystramo on the cheek and left him to his work. As she was leaving, she glared sternly at the attending guards, "Anythin happens ta him an' ye answers ta me, ya here?" The guards straightened and nodded curtly.

As D1amond left the war room, she looked around and spotted Baldar Hmr hurrying across the main hall. "BALDAR!" D1amond yelled at the top of her lungs with the angriest voice she could

muster. The lad stopped dead in his tracks and D1 could see him flinch.

"Aye lass?" Baldar turned and asked, rubbing his head in remembrance of the last time she had gotten angry at him.

She walked up to him grinning widely, "Jus' tryin' to gets your attention lad." He smiled back tentatively. D1 continued, "Ye ken wher Tig be, lad?"

Baldy shrugged, "Guess he still be out setting traps lass."

"Ye ken where he be settin'?"

After Baldar told her exactly where Tigguhr was, D1 went back to her rooms. She unbuckled her armor and put it away, along with her shield. Reaching into a stone chest, she pulled out a box and removed a pair of mithral bracers and fastened them around her wrist. She removed her steel toed battle boots and replaced the with some softened suede boots that pulled up past her knees. Inside the top of the boots there was enough room for her to place various scrolls and a dagger. She strapped her sword back on and went to find Tigguhr.

Not having any duties assigned to her after waiting around for a week, D1 was feeling a bit useless and in the way, so she took it upon herself to keep an eye on Tigguhr. Quietly she made her way down the tunnel were Tig was supposed to be working. As she got closer she heard Tigguhr talking. Anyone who had spent anytime around Tigguhr knew that this was not unusual, the lad was always talking to himself. She was about to step around the corner and give the lad her greetings when she heard an unfamiliar voice. She listened quietly as the voice spoke in a strange tongue, magix obviously. Then, speaking in common again it directed Tigguhr to get close to the leaders and get better information. She smiled to herself as the voice stated, "Hopefully this will prove more fruitful tomorrow."

All was quiet, and D1 slowly peered around the bend in the tunnel to see Tigguhr covered with grease and staring blankly at a wall. "Poor lad," she whispered quietly. Remembering the words that were spoken to Tig, D1 amond gathered that the drow (had to be a drow) would come to Tigguhr again for information tomorrow. Using this information she formed a plan, then she went to snap Tig out of it.

-----Darkness Spreading By: ZYXOS



:: the hot mineral spring at one of the deepest points in the dwarven underhalls ZYXOS had scouted had been a welcome discovery for many reasons... but especially now ::

::: the armor and livery had been carefully cleaned and lay on the rock next to the spring... ZYXOS reclined in the spring having cleaned the grease from himself and now allowing the heat to relax his strained muscles and frayed nerves ::::

"Running for your life in an explosive environment, avoiding dwarven patrols, and now having to dart and dodge from those accursed Dwarven Clerics is not what one would expect from these armored tree-stumps. I would prefer a simple attack with life or death hanging in the obvious balance any day... but one must follow the directives of the Queen."

:::jotting in his notebook resting on the ledge next to the pool, ZYXOS described the unknown cunning of the Dwarven Clerics coupled with their well known Dwarven tenacity... luckily their magic was more rune and potion based which somewhat limited it's effective range, but it was no less effective than Elven magic if you allowed yourself to be caught within that range.. and the bull headedness of the Dwarves made up for the limited range.... for they knew the tunnels and the passages of their mount much better than an invader and could maneuver far more effectively :::

"Iblith!".. ZYXOS exclaimed disgustedly as he reread his entry regarding the "room" he though he had found. Now that the Dwarven Clerics were in full swing, whenever he had a moment to work his detect magic spells he kept finding "hot spots" all over the mountain.... so he scratched through the notation regarding the "vaunted war room" as just another short cleric at work.

::: the location and description of Tigguhr's recently finished trap was placed in the book as well as his instructions to Tigguhr to try to get closer to the Dwarven leaders for more specific information regarding plans for the defense of the mount ::::

>>> the rumbling began as a slow ominous sound within the ground itself... the water in the pool began to ripple as the sound built in intensity... and finally the resounding crash sounded throughout the mount... followed by the most deafening silence ZYXOS had experienced outside the underdark<<<<

"So... that is the mount being sealed..... truly an ominous sound and definitely a definitive step"....

:::however, the note that ZYXOS placed in his book dealt not with entry into the mount .... but with how escape to the surface was now cut off..... :::::

"I must find out how I can make sure that escape route to the surface is permanently cut off," ZYXOS chuckled and commented to no one in particular. :::as the comment was made, ZYXOS' eyes were drawn to the long crack in the lower wall of the small cavern that ran from the ceiling to the floor... and through which a slight breeze seem to blow.... a breeze carrying the warmth of the Underdark :::::

:::ZYXOS stepped from the heated water and began using some cloth he had found discarded near the Dwarven living areas to towel his muscular body dry ::: as he slowly dressed he began to feel the separation from his own people he had volunteered upon himself and began to wonder if he would ever see another female again other than the Dwarven Females running around in their armor... some of them even bearded. :::::

-----Fire in the sky!! WOW!! By:  
Darugh

A small leather clad gnome..Darted out the door of the Grocery Shop, on the east side of Rrindabal. The dwarven grocer hot on the gnomes heels, shouted angrily and waved a large sword threatenly over his head.

As the gnome turns up the street the ground seems to jump under his feet, knocking him sprawling on his back the apples 'borrowed' from the grocery shop scattered about him. His eyes widen, as a burst of flame exhausts from the peak of the ancient volcano.

"WOW!! Big, large..HUGE wump!!!", exclaimed Darugh lying on his back in the street.

Squirming excitedly on the ground his arms and legs pumping..The small gnome chants.."Wow..see..go..leave..by..find it..Ya,ya,ya!!!" Rolls onto his feet and charges off down the street, zig zagging toward the entrance gates to the dwarven stronghold. The apples forgotten.

The gnome had noticed the heavily armored dwarves coming and going in great numbers from the great gates.. and many of the Overunders where in a bad mood of late in the dwarven settlement. But Darugh, didnt mind..overunders where always grumpy. But he kept his distance from the heavily armored guards at the gates..and along the main roads. Armored overunders werent much fun anyway..and Darugh wasnt in mind to be wumped. Metaled overunders where hard wumpers!

But now!! The gnome thought excitedly..Big blow puffer and ground wumpers coming from the mountain!..He wanted to see what made such a racket..with thoughts of glitter sparkleys and fire puffers, the rambunctious gnome approched the inner gates to the Mount.

-----Wagons, rumors and a leg of  
pork By: Darugh

Darugh skidded to a halt as he turned a corner and came in view of the great gate leading into The Mount. Three companys of heavily armored and armed dwarves where arrayed outside the gates.

"Wow,wow...Lookit!", The gnome his eyes wide, stood pumping his legs in excitement.

Lots of overunders..hard wumpers! he thought and rubbed a bruse on his shoulder that had long ago faded. Looking on as the guards carefully checked a wagon load of berrels being hauled by a team of short dwarven ponys. Darugh grinned to himself..Yup,yup..yep!! lots ..many..holebunchs of stuff was going on here!! Excited and wanting to get a look in one of the berrels.. the gnome scurried over to the next wagon in line..and climbed onto the back.

.....

"ail! Fender", The captian of the gate guard bellowed in greeting to the second wagons driver as he pulled forward to the checkpoint.

"Thudul!, Calun." Fender Oakcart offered up in greeting. From his perch on the wagons bench, as he hauled back on the reins bringing the team of ponys to a stop.

"This grim times indeed's Fender..whot ya be bring'n in this day?", Asked Calun Copperhelm as he patted the near pony on its speckled flank.

"Grim indeed..Goblins, darklins and all manner o' murmelings go'n on in town..Buts 'ere I be ta due me duties.. Tha calls comes fur grain an supplies, I nae shurks me duties ta the Mount. Im bring'n in 20 berrels o' wheat an 20 berrels o' salted pork.", Fender leaned one elbow onto his knee, and the bench seat of the wagon creaked with the shift of his weight. "Thar be talk o' the Chief seal'n the Mount, in the lower valley, many o' the farmers an herders is gett'n conserved. Ya seals yeself in the Mountain an whot o' us 'ere in the valley? Sur'n thar nae weight ta such rumors?"

Calun, shifted his feet uncomfortably, "Aye, Fender..that be the word..An it holds the weight o' Iron. It does, Things be grim indeed. Moradinson fired one o' the lower tunnels. As Im sur'n I dinna fail to notice."

"Aye, who could miss such a deed. Still, sealing the Mount!?", surely Nystramo nae be think'n ta leaves us in the valley cuts off?", Fender shifted his weight forward again,"Ya know as well as I that the herders will nae leave thar stock an thar digs in the valley"

"Im nae privey ta whot the chief has in minds..But I knows thar was warn'ns afor the lower tunnels was fired..Darklings in the lower halls. That be pruff nuff o' the dangers. Darklin's in the halls..nae any'un safe..nae wonder the chief be think'n o' seal'n the Mount."

"Darklings!! By the Shards!", exclaimed Fender with a curse, sitting back ruffly, flicking the reins in his surprise, the ponys shifted forward abruptly, causing the wagon to lurch. "Ach!! wowa! thar!!", called Fender, bringing the team under control. "I 'as ta agrees, Darklins be cause fur cautions..but sur'n we in the valley nae gunna ken ta the seal'n o' the gates.", "Now'n..lets me unloads me wagon an gets back an spreads the werd..Sur'n some o' the herd'rs be lik'n ta gets thar young'n under the peak afor the gates be sealed."

"Aye..That they would.", agreed Calun, waving his childhood friend and his load forward into the Great Gate.

.....

In among the 40 berrels a gnome sat contently munching on a leg of pork.

-----Dark times indeed.... By:  
Nystramo

After the sealing of the mount, Nystramo knew he needed to leave his office and be among his people for a time. It was a tense time for all, and they needed the inspiration of their chief.

As he made his rounds, exchanging greetings and answering questions, he came upon a small knot of the valley dwarves. Herders and farmers, he knew the sealing was of great concern to them. Many, he noted, had chosen to remain outside rather than be sealed within the mount.

"Sonn ultok, kin," he greeted them.

"Sonn ultok, chief," one of their number replied. The farmer paused a moment, a look of concern on his face. Soon, however, he decided to speak his mind. "Chief, I nae gots ta tells ya tha' many o' us in tha valley nae ken ta yer decision ta seals tha mount. Wha' abouts those o' us wha' decided ta stays wi' their 'erds an' flocks? An' who be takin' care o' tha farms o' thems o' us wha' comes into tha mount?" The farmer, clearly uncomfortable with the idea of questioning the chief's decision, never the less stood his ground awaiting an answer.

Nystramo nodded somberly. "Aye, kin, I ken well thi' be a 'ardship fer ye an' yers, an' it be a step I nae likes ta be takin'. Still, we gots dark times upon us. Darklin's be loose in tha mount, kin, an' they 'as a'ready struck down kin."

This news was greeted with a stunned silence. Drow! In the mount itself! Nystramo continued. "As fer yer farms an' those wha' decided ta stays outside, I kin tells ya they nae be lef' alone. I sents word ta Nasher afore closin' tha gate. Ya kin be sure'n he'll nae leaves 'em hangin'." The assembeled farmers, sheperds and herdsman nodded. Nasher had always been a staunch ally of Clan Axepeak, and commanded the largest army in the region. It was no replacement for the protection of Clan Axepeak, but it would do. Still, they couldn't help but feel concern for the friends and family who had opted to remain outside.

"Well'n, chief, I ken it wa' nae a easy decision fer ya," the farmer replied. "Ya nae be plannin' on doin' tha final sealin', does ya?" He wasn't a stone worker, but any dwarf could tell the sealing of the mount was only a temporary measure, though how temporary was unclear. The stone gates that covered all of the

entrances, both above and below ground, were massive to be sure, but could still be removed at any time. The final sealing involved collapsing the various tunnels that these gates opened into. This measure, if it was ever taken, would completely close off Lonely Mountain from all contact for years to come; possibly decades.

Nystramo shook his head and smiled. "Nae kin, it 'as nae come ta that yet. Our clerics be searchin' out tha darklin's e'en now, an' we 'as doubled tha patrols. Again. We gits through this, an' we gits ya back ta yer farms soon a' possible."

This news was met with sighs of relief. As the chief turned to go, he returned his attention to the farmer who spoke for the valley dwarves. "Wha' be yer name, kin?"

The farmer stood a bit straighter, surprised by the question. "Fender, chief. Fender Oakcart." Nystramo smiled. "Findar torst, Fender. Lets me ken if'n yer people needs anythin'." Fender nodded and smiled back. The smile turned to a slight frown when he thought he heard some yelling amongst his berrels of oat and pork. He could have sworn he heard a high pitched voice shouting "Glitter sparklies! Fire puffers! Where? Where? Lots!"

-----Mine Tailings By:

MoradinSon

Many months ago Janan Rockears had returned from his day at the mines with a small bag of treasure. It was not the treasure of gold or silver or mithral but rather it was the treasure of a good prank about to be played. He went to his favorite Tavern in the mount, "The Rampant Mule", where he and his usual cronies were wont to go a drinking of an evening. He carefully hid his small bag of treasure beneath his shirt. His considerable girth made the bag bulge conspicuously.

"Janan!" A bright and cheerful female dwarf came running towards him, arms outstretched.

"Ach! Nae!" Janan tried to sputter but he was too late. The lass embraced him firmly (as dwarven lasses are wont to do). In doing so the press of the two dwarven bodies crushed the small bag beneath Janan's shirt.

There was a small "puff" sound as the air in the bag forced the bag's powdery contents up and out of the bag's mouth.

Those standing close by recognized the small cloud of dust that began to form around Janan and the bar emptied in moments.

Janan began peeling his clothes off, heedless of who might see him, as the patrons of the bar stood outside (they had, of course, had the forethought to carry a keg and their mugs with them) and laughed uproariously.

Janan ran screaming from the bar towards the icy sluice of mountain runoff that fed the Undermounts reservoir.

A few moments later, the attractive (and confused), lass who had hugged Janan began to squirm.

And scratch

And roll on the ground.

Soon she too had peeled off her clothes and run screaming toward the reservoir. Followed by the appreciative hoots and laughter of the bar's patrons.

"O! Janan found hiself a bagful o' Itchy Tailins peers like.  
The Slag brung um here ta sprinkle down our collars nae doubts"  
Laughed Hamer AnvilHard to his jocular companions.

"Aye", One answered " The lad'l be itchin fer days, hope he has nae had a hot bath lately 'r it'll be weeks o' itchin an scratchin"

The barkeep picked up the discarded clothing carefully with a broomstick. All of the clothing the rags used to mop the room, and the remnants of the bag were deposited in an alley.

Months later, a lone greasy drow picked up the rags on his way to a long hot bath. After a relaxing soak he Zyxos picked up the cloths and used them to towel himself dry before wandering off to search the mount further. The microscopic mine tailings, which bring such violent itch attacks, began to sink deep into his open pores.

-----Mystery Theatre 1 By: Tigguhr

Tigguhr regained his normal consciousness when ZYXOS departed. He blinked hard to remove an inexplicable blurring in his eyes. He reached up to rub them, stopping just short of putting pig grease in his eyes. He then remembered what he was doing.

"Werkin so 'ard I musta felled a sleep on tha Job! Morad nae be liken that!" the jungle dwarf said aloud. He bounced up and nearly lost his footing on the smears of pig grease on the floor.

He steadied himself with a bend of the knees and a look to the floor. It was then that he noticed an odd looking set of footprints in the grease smear. The footprint didn't look like a dwarven war boot. The footprints lead off down the corridor a few paces then stopped. Something walked by, then well, didn't walk any further.

Just then D1 came around the corner, without battle gear, dressed for stealthy movement. He noted her leather shoes and only half thought about the fact that the strange footprints might be D1's. Tigguhr found the lass charming and an inspiration, despite her gruff exterior, so he quickly forgot about footprints, and said hello. "Har dee Doo lass! Fer certain ya gots more important thin's ta be doin than sneakin' up on me?"

"Sneakin? Me? Nae lad, I jus' doin a little eh, ah 'spection for Nys. Aye tha' be it. How be this trap? Ya finished?" Tigguhr was odd, some called him daft, but he wasn't stupid. He sensed that D1 was up to something. He heard about a drow loose in the mount before duty call in the morning. He had no idea that he was under ZYXOS's spells, so he quickly wondered if the drow had gotten to D1, just as a drow had charmed Tigguhr not to long ago. On his off hours Tigguhr decided that he would don his own thieving garb, and check up on the lass.

"Aye lass, tha trap be finished 'n I be parched, bit o ale I be thinkin!" Tigguhr pointed back up the tunnel towards the main halls. D1, not ready to confront or intervene just yet, accompanied the bouncer back, without any further questions.

-----Mystery Th. 2

By: Tigguhr

Later that night, Tigguhr put on his own stealthy garb, and set out from his cave. He was growing more and more frustrated that he wasn't included in discussions regarding defensive plans. Each day he was assigned to build one trap. His unfulfilled desire to be involved in strategy, pumped artificially by the drow magic, forced him into action. He had to find out something!

Slipping through the main hall unnoticed in the shadows beyond



the torch light, he made his way towards the Chief's office. He was thinking more than watching where he was going and bouncing a little to fast, so he went right by the office and found himself outside the war room. The guards were present, but the door was ajar slightly. Just before the guards shooed him away, he overheard Morad say, "a double set pit in front o' tha gas corridors. Drowies pass tha pit nae trouble first time, sets off tha gas, 'n any one o' tha jarghed darklins what flee then sets off tha pit..."

A timer went off in his subconscious, and he trundled off, heading back to the fifth lower access tunnel for his report to ZYXOS. An annoying buzzing in the a back of his mind kept saying "footprints" but he kept it in the back of his mind for now.

-----Follering By:

DIAMOND 2

Diamond had an enjoyable ale with Tigguhr and they parted ways. At least that's what Tigguhr thought. D1 followed him back to his digs and set herself up to secretly guard his door. Later that evening she was roused as she watched him sneak from his quarters. She tip-toed after the bouncing sneak and watched him as he listened outside the war room. By the excited look in his eyes, she could tell that he had overheard some valuable information. "I'll be a kolbold, if he's tellin tha darklin abouts it," she whispered as she followed Tig and formed a plan.

She quietly called out to him as they left the main part of the city. He turned and frowned, "Diamond?"

"Aye lad it be me," she winked and sauntered up to him. "Mind if'n I joins ya on yer lil stroll. Nys be busy again and I'm lonely." She grabbed his arm and snuggled up close to him.

Looking the lass in the eye, Tig knew that she was up to something. "Tha drow gots her!" He thought to himself and tried to pull his arm away.

Before he knew what happened Diamond had twisted his arm up behind his back and pushed up hard on it whenever he tried to struggle free. She leaned forward and said, "Sorry lad" Then he felt a hard blow to the back of his head. Not hard enough to knock him unconscious, but enough to stun him while she tied him up and gagged him. She dragged him to a side tunnel and quickly left.

-----A

Fite By: DIAMOND 2

The dwarven lass didn't have to wait long before a dark figure appeared in the tunnel before her. D1's hope had been to surprise the dark elf and hopefully take him captive. She slowly peered around the rock to find the drow pointedly looking in her direction. Then he spoke, "I thought my foolish charge had come early with some urgent information, but I find a little lass in hiding instead. Planning on ambushing me all alone small one?"

D1 quickly sat back down behind the rock and cursed under her breath. "A fite it be then," she whispered and she pulled a scroll out of her boot. Knowing that drows prefer to fight with magic instead of steel, she cast a globe spell on herself and stood up behind the rock. This giving her partial cover. "Greetins darklin. Yes I had hoped to surprise ya, but now I sees we gets ta have a lil fite." D1amond smiled at the drow who was leaning casually against the far wall.

"Indeed?," stated the drow as he pushed away from the wall and took a fighting stance, an evil grin crossing his face. "This should prove to be entertaining." he stood there confidently. "I'll even let you take the first shot." Seeing her holding nothing but a broadsword he had expected her to close with him and melee.

"Well, never let anyone say you were nae polite, ya trespassing spider kisser." D1 quickly whipped another scroll out of her boot and read it. As she pointed her finger at the surprised drow, a lightening bolt shot from her fingers and hit the drow square in the chest, bounced off the wall behind him, hit him again from behind and D1 had to dodge behind the rock to keep from getting hit herself.

She scrambled to her feet to see the darklin cast a protective spell on himself and advance towards her. Grabbing a hand full of spines, D1 took aim to throw but the drow was already too close, so she pulled her sword once again. Smiling wickedly down at the dwarf, his red eyes burning with anger, he began to cast a spell. A ball of fire filled the tunnel. When the smoke cleared, D1amond stood grinning up at the astonished drow and swung her blade, which he deftly dodged.

"Seems I took you for granted pudgy one," the drow said and cast another spell.

-----A Fite2

By: DIAMOND 2

"Nae pudgy, ye gangly finger wagglin slag, just stocky." D1 spoke as she stood and resisted the affects of the spell cast. She knew that, with all his spells the drow was at a definite advantage, so she had to hurt him quick. To throw him off and too hopefully get some divine help, D1amond started singing a dwarven battle song at the top of her lungs. The drow jumped as she began bellowing and that was a good enough surprise to knock him off guard, so she launched herself at him with a tackle. As she pushed forward and the drow swung his arms about wildly to keep his balance, D1amond's foot landed in a metal bucket that had been slightly hidden behind a small pile of rocks.

"Shards!" she cursed as her foot was caught in the bucket in mid-stride. As she stumbled forward, she managed to shake the bucket off, only to find out too late that her foot was covered with pig grease. "Ach! Curse you Tigguhr!" she hollered, as her momentum carried her forward and she tripped onto her greased foot. As she stepped with her slippery foot her feet slipped out from under her and she slammed backwards onto the stone ground, bashing her head against the pile of rocks that had hid the dreaded bucket.

As D1amond lay dazed on the ground, thinking of all the ways to torture Tigguhr the drow quickly stepped over and cast a hold spell. Which, must to her disgust, took hold. He quickly bound and gagged her, picked her up and stepped through some kind of dimensional door.

D1amond looked around to find herself at some hot springs. The darklin sat her down and patted her head. "You be a good little captive and stay out of trouble till I get back." With that he stepped back though the wall and was gone.

-----The Pattern of Little Feet

By: Tigguhr

"Trussed up n tossed ta tha floor like a sack a seed!" Tigguhr thought, grimacing from the rising bump on his head. It was painful, but the smack on the back of the head brought a few things forward in his mind that were long overdue.

First he thought about D1amond. He knew it wasn't for real, but Har dee doo, that one fleeting moment when she snuggled up to him made him tingle. "Tha lass be sumpthin else," he said

through his gag, so it came out "Hag ath ee uh uh ell!"  
Although his male ego was slightly bruised by D1's ability to  
fell him so quickly, he allowed himself finally to admit that  
he was totally enamored with her. "Tha chief be a lucky dwarf,  
an' I be honorable. So's I never says a thing. Wish she ha' a  
sis...oh well...a long lost sis? Ah well, mebe tha lasses has  
daughters one day...jus' think how ole Nys or Morad be likin' me  
as a son-in-law." But substitutes were just that, he felt.

Second, he thought about shoes. As D1 sped away, he could not  
help but notice that she had the daintiest, tiniest feet he had  
ever seen on a dwarf. They were adorable and the leather thief  
slippers were quite becoming. Tough as granite she was, but the  
feet of a dancer. No way those feet were the foot prints he saw  
in the grease. Tha drow!

Fear, determination and painful realization filled Tiguhr.  
"Dinna falls asleep in tha tunnel ya jarged gully  
dwarf...darklin gots ya agin." He chewed up the gag and  
swallowed it. For the second time since joining the clan,  
Tiguhr feared that he had betrayed his kin and it looked like  
D1 was off to stop the drow. It looked like she was off to  
fight Tiguhr's battle. Breaking free of the vestigial drow  
magic, Tiguhr summoned all his strength and broke his bonds  
wiith a snap. "Drowie wans me eh?" He loosened his axe, Coral  
Joe. "Comon Joe...lets gos ta see how much 'e wants me!"

Tiguhr sped off towards the appointed meeting place, ready  
finally to be a hero, or die trying.

-----True Darkness Revealed By:  
ZYXOS

:::: as soon as ZYXOS had left the female in the cavern and  
returned to the main tunnel he sensed that something was amiss  
::::

:::: the magical tie to his dwarven agent had been severed...  
searching the magical ties as he might it was obvious that the  
small one was now free of the spell :::

"So small one... you are free... and quite obviously you will  
wish to discover what has been happening to you....."

::: Di's eyes widened in surprise as the Drow reentered the  
cavern so soon after having left it ::: she ceased her struggles  
to free herself and lay there watching as the Drow moved about

the cavern obviously packing some things away and preparing for something:::

:::Zyxos made some final notes in his book regarding his continuing surprise at the prevalence of magic among the dwarves... not only with their clerics but with the ones that were obviously trained thieves :::: the the book and several of the charts and maps were all placed into a pack:::: He finished out some maps dealing with the routes he had found within the Dwarven underhalls :::

::: Di watched with some fascination as ZYXOS moved to the limits of her vision around a large rock and seemed to be facing a solid wall cracked from the top to the bottom ::: after a moment, ZYXOS turned and he was no longer holding the pack ::::

::: Next ZYXOS began strange mystical chanting ::: having battled the drow on several occasions in the past, Di immediately recognized the summoning spells and preparation spells of a Drow preparing for battle and began to become concerned for what must be going on ::::

::: ZYXOS seemed to shimmer as prayers and blessings to and from his evil goddess were offered, cast, and received :::: ZYXOS very being seemed to become darker and more ominous... his eyes began to deepen into a blood red and shimmered with an evil fire that was almost painful to even gaze upon :::: the cavern itself began to darken as corners deepened with evil magic and globes of darkness filled areas where traps could obviously be sprung on the unwary :::: then with an evil laugh and incantation the room was filled with mirror images of the Drow Faern each one taking a different location and posture including one standing menacingly over her :::: and then to her amazement the final preparation spell was cast and Di watched as the real ZYXOS faded from sight behind a spell of invisibility ::::

Di began muttering prayers to her god that the one about to enter the evil filled room was a cleric... or at least a thief with a supply of scrolls... for they were about to face a Drow that only the Dwarven legends spoke of.... Di realized this was not one of the hot headed young fighters that the Dwarves so often encountered and had to deal with... this was one of the ancients... an elder Drow Wizard of horrible power.....

"Oh Moradin..." her prayer began... but was suddenly silenced as she heard approaching footsteps outside the

cavern.....

-----An End to Darkness <1> From:  
ZYXOS

::: Tigguhr came storming around the edge of the opening of the cavern with blood in his eye and his Axe in his hand :::

"ACH!!"... was the only exclamation from the burley dwarf as he suddenly beheld the hot springs cavern with darkened areas, some squirming bundle over by a big rock... and above all... more drow than he had ever seen in one place.

::: a quick roll to the side using the pommel of his great axe as a fulcrum to his roll brought him near enough to the first drow for a throw.... the axe whistled through the air and seemed to cleve the drow in half.... but all that was heard was a "POP" and the entire Drow was gone :::

"de jargh drowie be usin' mirrors it wou' seem", Tigg muttered to himself and made a quick dash to retrieve his axe and go into another defensive stance in the middle of the room. ::: looking quickly about the room his gaze fell upon the bundle by the rock at the foot of another Drow... and the drow seemed to be quite protective of it.....

"Har! so ye got's sump'n ye be want'n ta perfects, does ye?"... and with another roll and dash the young Dwarf found himself across the bundle from the Drow ::: his axe was quickly raised to strike the bundle when the fireball struck him in the back and knocked him across the bundle shattering the mirror image that had been standing above it :::

::: the searing flames had warmed his armor to an extreme temperature.... and the hair on the back of his head and his beard were singed, but the dwarf stood and stared across the cavern at the globes of darkness... one of them obviously held the drow :::: but to be sure Tigguhr began his well known bouncing and started bounding off the walls of the cavern shattering mirror images as he careened about the cavern :::  
"HAR DEE DOO!"

::: he hurtled towards the last of the images but his triumphant yell was stopped short as he bounded off the solid figure... the Drow was outside his globe of darkness!!::: a quick swing of his axe drew blood on the leg of the Drow and with a muttered phrase ZYXOS drove a magic missile into Tigguhr's chest...

partially penetrating his armor and knocking the wind from him  
::: ZYXOS's hammer was raised on high and brought down in a  
sweeping arch towards Tigg's head... but the dwarf blocked it  
with his shield and rolled to his feet drawing deep breaths into  
his lungs to regain his senses:::

::: a quick heal spell had stopped the blood from ZYXOS's leg,  
but the drow had been slowed ::: a quick spell dropped another  
globe of darkness about the Drow and the Dwarf but each was used  
to operating in the darkness of the underground ::: Tigg closed  
with the point where he felt the Drow should be and swung his  
axe... he felt it connect with a magical shield and then felt  
the Drow Hammer pounding into his shield ::: preferring to get  
his orientation again Tigguhr backed carefully from the Globe of  
Darkness ::: as he backed into the light of the cavern, his eyes  
again fell upon the bundle by the rock ::: obviously something  
the Drow wanted... so perhaps an item to draw ZYXOS's attention  
:::

:: As Tigg bounded over to the bundle and raised his axe high,  
the Drow stepped from the Globe of Darkness and smirked ::: "So  
little one.. you think it means that much to me... go ahead...  
drive your axe into it." the Drow taunted. With a growl Tigguhr  
started to bring his great axe down when suddenly..... THE  
BUNDLE SQUIRMED. ::: shocked by the movement Tigguhr tried to  
stay his swing but only caused the path of the axe to change and  
cut into the bottom of the bag ::: with a female shriek, the bag  
was opened and a cut put into the leg of Diamond :::

:::: Tigguhr was beside himself when he heard the scream and  
recognized the now unconcealed boots ::: he quickly ripped the  
rest of the bag away, releasing the lass he cared for, and he  
tore a portion from his shirt and bound the wound to her leg :::

"ye bliter'n kobolt lov'n bounc'n....." Di had started to tear  
into the lad when she realized not only was she free, but they  
both had to deal with the Drow now.....

Di laid a quick kiss on the cheek of the Dwarf to sooth his  
suddenly deflated eagerness... and jumping to her feet pulling  
scrolls and dagger said .. "C'mon lad... we got's ourselves a  
Drowie ta defeats..."

As the pair stared around the room, it was again suddenly filled  
with images of the Drow... but with a mutter, Di used one of her  
precious scrolls against the images and one of the globes of

darkness... the images disappeared and the globe was gone... but now there were only 2 globes of darkness the drow could be in. From one of the globes came a hurtling fireball which Tigguhr quickly deflected by throwing his shield in front of the lass and himself, but it almost broke his arm in doing so.... with a quick healing scroll, Di healed Tigg's arm but it was still not up to what it should be and would not work as well as would be needed if they were to have to fight for long.....

::: quickly waving her wand, Di hurtled a Magic Missile into the globe from where the Fireball had come but heard it hit the back wall of the cavern.... and just as amazingly, the Drow seemed to materialize across the cavern from his globe of darkness....

"HAR!! ye sneaky darklin' longear... so ye be use'n dim doors... well... it nae be 'nuff ta stops us dwarves"...

Tigguhr immediately bounded across the room towards the Drow, but in the next instant Di was horrified to see a Spell of Slaying spring from ZYXOS fingers.... luckily, Tigguhr's natural resistance to magic saved him... but the damage done was horrible to behold, as tufts of hair and skin were struck from the shoulder and shield arm of Tigg.

ZYXOS stepped up to the staggered Tigg and began a Cause Critical, which Di knew in his weakened condition, Tigg would not withstand... so she did the only thing she could do quickly and threw her dagger at the Drow... the small dagger buried itself in the shoulder of ZYXOS... and although the damage was not great, it interrupted his spell and allowed Tigguhr to again gain his feet... with the damaged shield arm holding his shield before him.

ZYXOS quickly rattled off a spell of holding, and even he was startled when the battleraging Dwarf was held in place... but with a quick chuckle, ZYXOS spun and was upon Di before she could react. Without her armor, Di had to move quickly and dodge as best she could to avoid the hammer ZYXOS now wielded as a trained Sargtlin... as well as the spells he threw at her. This entire time, Tigguhr stared on in horror unable to move and assist the one he held dear in his heart.... as Di was pummeled back towards the back of the cavern.

A quick slash from another of her daggers had almost hamstringed the Drow, but instead had only inflicted a deep bleeding gash in his lower leg... he had countered with an overhead smash of his



hammer which almost broke the knife arm of Di... and only her strong dwarven body had allowed her to take the blow on her upraised arm and saved herself from having her skull fractured. Her next lunge carried her dagger past the defense of the Drow and allowed her to open a small cut in his side... but a Cause Critical suddenly sprung forth and knocked her back against the cavern wall, very near the crack in the wall that ZYXOS had been so interested in.

Tigguhr's eyes opened wide as Di's defenses seemingly began to give way... but it was then he noticed... his eyes HAD widened... the hold spell was being thrown off... if by no other effort than his dwarven stubbornness and his overwhelming desire to assist Di.

Using 2 daggers now, Di tore a chunk from ZYXOS' leg but a quick magic missile spell from ZYXOS tore into the shoulder and upper chest of Di... and although she had tried to get a defensive shield up the missile had still laid open her shoulder and torn away much more of the light shirt she wore than the maiden dwarf preferred. It was this sudden exposing of the body of Di that tore the primal roar from Tigguhr's lips and the hold spell was thrown completely away from him.....

"NAE!!! Nae mor'n Drowie spells shall I endure.... Nae more shall ye threaten this love of me..... me chief's!!! NAE MORE!!" ::: and with all the strength remaining in his body he hurled the Great Axe in an overhand throw.....

:: had it not been for the fast reflexes of the Drow, ZYXOS's head would have been severed from his shoulders... but even with his quick move the axe still buried itself deep into the back right shoulder of the Drow causing him to curse in pain ::: with his right arm all but useless, the outcome of a fight against 2 Dwarves was more than obvious....

ZYXOS muttered a quick incantation... and before the startled eyes of Di and Tigguhr, he seemed to thin and pass through the crack in the back wall of the cavern... as they both stumbled to the crack they could hear ZYXOS picking up the pack with all his notes and making his way deeper into the darkness into which they tried to stare....

A hot breeze coming from the crack told Di what they had found..... "the underdark" she muttered..... then quickly turned to Tigguhr and caught him as he was about to fall. The only

concern in the young warrior's mind was using the tattered remains of his cloak and trying to cover the exposed Di from any prying eyes, even his own.....

===== Re:  
End of the Darkness From: DIAMOND 2

With cloak safely wrapped around her, D1 slowly helped Tigguhr back to the main caverns. It was late at night now and much of the Mount slept. They got as far as the main hall before they lost their strength to walk. Both sitting down together, D1 took a deep breath and yelled at the top of her lungs. "CLERIC! We needs a healer here!" Then her head slumped over onto Tig's shoulder from the effort.

===== A  
Lurking in the Dark From: HiuFang Li

Nothingness pervaded these lightless tunnels.

Once or twice, a hideous creature of some sort skittered or slithered across the warm, dark rock that covered these chaotic chambers; but otherwise, all was silence and darkness. Lifelessness. How could life exist? These were the corridors that the sun's rays never touched, that the cool breath of the gods of the air never wandered in. Only the cloaked shade of Death could dwell here.

The Underdark.

But even the silence is broken, at times. As it is now...

A soft panting, the sound of dull heartbeats... suddenly, these subtle noises invade, echo, beat upon the dark rock. And then voices.

"NoNoNo.. I told you, you stupid dwarf!! I told you it was the other tunnel.. if you had listened, we would be safe at home by now," sobs a small voice, "Boohoohoo.. WHY? Why did I ever come with you, anyway? Ah, the gold. Surely no amount of gold can be worth this!!" After a short moment, a deeper, richer voice echoes in response. "Good cousin, we must keep our minds on the path. If we cannot be joyful and glad that we still live, we may as well die here in these accursed tunnels. Come now, we continue.."

After this exchange, the noises of climbing and scrambling across gravel and rock become apparent. The first voice jabbbers

on, but the second seems silent from this point. If an eye might see so deep within the earth, in these dark tunnels where voices dance about the walls, it would witness quite a curious sight. For here, two figures struggle through the deep, one speaking loudly, another forging on, patient, silent.

In the darkness, a dwarf and a gnome strive to return to their home... on the surface. It has been many days since they have seen the surface: the dwarf, dressed in blackened garb that lies rather tattered and worn across his shoulders, but wearing an ebon mask about his bearded face; and the gnome, pointed hat smashed to a crumpled mass sitting on his balding head, clothes torn and soiled to rags. "We must make haste, good cousin Yngelb.. to the Mount with our news!" the dwarf often mutters. "By all the gods of Faerun, we shall never see the light of day.. oh my aching body!" replies the one named Yngelb. "You rascal! For many days have I heaved you 'pon my back. I carry you, and yet you complain! Not another word, lest I leave you in the dust.."

Silence punctuates these last words, and the two weary ones continue on their journey through this hell that is the Underdark...

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Little Lancelot From: Tigguhr

Every inch of his body hurt. His arms hung by his sides as he leaned against the wall of the cavern. His head lolled to the side, contacting D1's head, which was on his shoulder. She had passed out and Tigguhr was about one half a breath away from passing out again. But honor and loyalty to his chief demanded on last heroic act.

Tigguhr half hoped that the foul drow magic might have irradiated certain feelings. The spells took a toll on his body, but unfortunately, his mind and his heart were intact. So he shut those troublesome feelings away again, gently moved D1 off his shoulder and shifted just a hand breadth away. He leaned a little more away from the chief's betrothed and passed out before he hit the floor.

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Kagis returns to scouting.... From: KAGIS

Kagis looked down the dark tunnel leading away from Axepeak halls. Fulcrum rested easily over his right shoulder. He wore

a new set of armor and a new shield. He'd gotten them from the clan armories to replace his family mithril until it could be mended. Sedaric, the watch captain looked sideways at the battle garbed dwarf. He couldn't help but chuckle slightly... here was a dwarf who'd barely stumbled past this same guard captain only a few days ago, now standing tall and proud - ready for action. There was something different about Kagis, almost a presense of power. Sedaric shook his head, "Ya shur ye be headin' back ou' dere alone?"

Kagis looked at Sedaric and smiled, "I be a scout an' a warrior goo' cappy. My place be ou' dere." Sedaric frowned slightly, but Kagis quickly added, "dinnae worry. I gots me pappy's ring, Fulcrum, and..." Kagis patted a thick scroll case at his belt, "I gots some s'prises fer any darklin's I runs inta." Kagis mentally reminded himself of his Axebow and mithril bolts; adding, "nae ta menshion me bolt flinger."

Sedaric didn't look much happier about sending out another dwarf, the last two scouts hadn't returned at all. "Welp, as long as da chief done says it be ok, den I guess I gots ta let ya lose." Sedaric patted Kagis on the back. "Goo' luck lad... an' may Moradin strike yer blows true."

Kagis smiled back, then headed into the dark passage. He didn't have the nerve to tell the captain that Nys didn't know about this scouting expedition.

It didn't take long for the scout's senses to pick up the signs. A scuff mark here, a boot imprint in some mud there. "Yep dere wa' a' leas' one darklin' here nae long ago." After some time searching the side passages, Kagis found the tracks more easily and began his hunt. He followed the darklin' to a small room with a natural spring in it. There were obvious signs of battle, which made Kagis immediately worried. There was only one other set of prints leading into the room, but two sets leaving and neither was the from the drow.

A pair of sacks are found.... From: KAGIS

Kagis examined the room more carefully. He could still smell the magic radiating from the stone. "Loo' like da fight done end none too long ago." Kagis decided that the drow must have used magic to leave the room without making any tracks. What worried the scout was the obvious limp one of the dwarves who'd left had. The slender soft footprints seemed familiar, but he

could quite place it. "I bes' make sure me kin be ok."

With that thought Kagis began following the tracks leading away from the room. Within a few hundred paces he found them, slumped together like a pair of grain sacks. Kagis nelt next to them and checked for breathing. They were both alive, so Kagis took the time to light a torch. After lighting the torch his breath left his lungs in surprise. "Sandstone! Wha' da heck is Tig and Di doin' ou' 'ere?" Kagis reached over to shake Tig. "Bouncer! Wake up Bouncer!" Tig only grunted and rolled over.

"Grrrr. Dis is nae place ta curls up an' rest." Kagis sighed, "ah well, dere's gonna be da abyss ta pay when Nys realizes Di's missin'." Kagis checked both dwarves carefully. They showed numerous signs of exposure and several serious wounds, mostly from magical attacks. "Gone drow huntin' did ya?" Kagis mumbled to himself while he worked.

Kagis was no healer, but he knew a trick or two about bandages and the sort, to keep out infection. Working quickly the dwarf soon had both Tig and Di bandaged up well enough for travel. Pulling a potion out of his pouch Kagis quickly drank it down ignoring the horrible taste. Immediately Kagis felt his strength grow by immeasurable factors. Looping Fulcrum on his belt, Kagis tossed his shield so it hung across his back and bent down to pick up his two fallen kin. Dwarves were stout creatures that were quite solid. Even with the potion of strength Kagis struggled a little to position each dwarf on a shoulder. They weren't far from Axepeak halls so Kagis just made the best of it.

Soon, Kagis stumbled through another defense picket carrying his two kin. After signaling to the guard, a warrior rushed over to relieve Kagis of Tig while Kagis switched Di so he carried her more comfortably. Kagis looked at this watch captain, "Well? Call fer a cleric ta meets us at da plannin' room. An' someone go get Nys... tells 'em ta meets us dere." Kagis and the guard quickly trot to the center cavern, and placed Di and Tig on cots inside the plannin' room. Shortly after a cleric entered quietly and began administering potions and salves to the two wounded, and still soundly sleeping dwarves.

Kagis dismissed the guard telling him to get back with his kin at the defense post, crossed his arms over his chest, leaned against the door jam and watched the cleric while waiting for Nys to storm into the room any moment.

## Kagis Ironpeak Axepeak BattleScout

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Subj: And he is gone...and returns. From: Niord

Niord woke with a shudder. At first he thought it was just him, but then he felt the ground shudder, and with a sudden violence, the mount felt as if it were rising off of its ages old foundation! He saw Dwy and the others across the tunnel from him. The roof above them cracked, and was about to collapse on them! Niord sprang to his feet, bringing his axe up as he did so. He stood over the tired group, forcing the hilt of his axe into the ground between them with a mighty heave. Quickly he put his shield over the axeblade, just as the roof caved in. His last thoughts were of his kin, and that he hoped he had done enough to save them.

Not under the shield with the others, as there was not enough room, the cavein from Moradinsons trap hit Niord with full force. He was crushed, and the death was quick. His kin did not notice the faint glow and slight settling of the area Niord was buried in....

Niords mind was grey. He knew not this place, but somehow it felt familiar. An image appeared before him, and he did not recognize it as his dead wife. The image smiled at him, told him it was not his time, and in a blinding flash, was gone. His mind went black...

He awoke and found himself sitting up. There were three week kin about him, and he knew them, from where he new not, but he knew them. His kin, axepeak, home. Dwy's eyes widened with horror. Niord looked questioningly at him. "Whot be wrong lad?" "I..I jes saws ye dies! Ye ken nae bees 'ere!!" "Whot ye talkin lad? Ye jes nae feels gud, I fixes ya..."

He reaches into a scroll pouch that now hangs by his side. He never noticed it before, but it felt right somehow. It was well stocked. Looking at the paper and muttering a few words, his kin seemed to revitalize themselves. Pulling forth another scroll, he again muttered strange words and the cavern began putting itself together. The stone rose to where it was supposed to be, and mended itself. The tunnel was quickly cleared.

All 3 kin looked at him, their eyes almost popping out of their heads. Niord passed it off as trauma, picked up his axe and shield, and readied his kin. "Cammon lads, we gots ta helps our kin!" They were obviously dazed, but they did as he ordered, and soon they were heading back up the tunnel and heading towards the goblins, and the rest of their kin.

Niord ignored their stares, and led the way, so as to not let them disturb him. He did not notice the mysterious amulet was gone. He did not notice he was younger, nor that he was suddenly able to use scrolls. And above all, he did not notice his past, and his dreams, as they were now gone forever. A new life, a new beginning. Somewhere deep within him he felt a burning hate for giants, and even looked forward to a dragon hunt. But for now, his kin needen him, and he was finally sane.

Niord Thunderstrike

OOC: Har! I even managed to work my "forced" reroll into it (host decided my char tasted good and ate it ;/)

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You knew it was going to be ugly From: Nystramo

Nystramo bulled his way into the planning room, almost knocking down the two guards at the door who barely stumbled out of his way. Behind him, his assigned guards tried desperately to keep around him as was their assignment. Unfortunately for them, the chief was not in a cooperative mood.

"Wha' in tha slagged nine 'ells 'appened!?"

Kagis winced involuntarily. Steeling himself, he reminded himself that he knew from the start that this wasn't going to be easy. "Well'n, chief, seems Dlamond an' tha bouncer gots a bit scraped up. A darklin' we thinks. Tha 'ealers gots 'em mos'ly patched up, tho', an' they be restin' easy."

Nystramo fumed silently for a full minute. Kagis watched him uneasily, hoping the chief didn't think to ask who found them, or how. Now would not be the time to discuss his unauthorized scouting mission.

The chief paced and tried to calm himself. Tried, but failed. Again! It almost happened AGAIN! His taerin had come within a hair's breath of dying at the hands of his enemy. And he had known nothing about it until it was all over. It fell to another

kin to find her and rescue her, and then tell him about it. All while he pored over maps and battle plans and trap designs like some slagged librarian, not standing by her side in battle as he should have been. As any real dwarf would.

He glared at Kagis and barked, "I wants ye ta finds out 'ow this 'appened. 'ow did D1 an' tha bouncer evade tha sentry net, 'ow did a battle rage in tha mount itself wi' naebody kennin' it, an' jes' where tha blazes di' tha darklin' git ta!? I wants answers an' I wants 'em yesterday! Ya unnerstands!? An' if I nae gets 'em dere'll be some sorry kin, ya kin depends on it!!"

Kagis gulped, nodded and ran off to see if there were any answers to be found. In the planning room, Nystramo looked at the sleeping form of his taerin and swore this would never happen again.

---

Undermount Scout ... From: KAGIS

I scrambled to get out of Nys's fuming gaze; glad that the enraged dwarf hadn't asked how the two were found and by whom. "I be a lucky scout." As for finding out more information I thought, "Whal now, who better dan me ta finds ou' more infermaschion?" Nodding. "Yep it make sense. Di and Tig aren't likely ta wakes u' anytime soon, and da only odder person who could shed ligh' on dis mys'try is da drow who gone an hurt me kin."

Scratching my head I look down as I notice strips of cloth bunched up in a corner, "Whats am I doin' 'ere?" I'm standing in one of the side corridors that is seldom used. It's dark and dirty but the scraps of cloth seem familiar. I reach down and examine them out of habbit. "Undermount scoutin' be a tough habit ta quit once it gets in me blood." I lift the rags and sniff them. ::sniff, sniff:: "Hmmm... If I didn't know any better I'd say dis smelt like dat speschial per'fume me chief gave Di as a gift. Dese mus' be some o' her clothin'" I notice they've been torn into long strips and then ripped in half. One a large wad of cloth I can make out the slight stains of moisture and it smells more of ale than perfume. "hmmm...A gag, dis must've been." Taking an empty pouch from my belt I carefully place the rags inside and retie the pouch.

I examine the thin layer of dust and dirt in the alley. There's two sets of boot prints, one is slender and made form soft leather boots, the other from standard steel-toed battle boots



all dwarven warriors prefer. "Even dem bouncin' type." The slender prints leave the alley alone first, while what I guess are Tig's footprints remain behind. "Di done waylayed da poor lad an' done tied 'em up eh? I be gonna hafta re'members nae ta gets da lass mad at me."

I follow the slender boot prints until I loose them in the main hall of the mount amidst the myriad other tracks and markings left behind by a clan preparing for war. It doesn't matter much because I can tell from the direction the prints were headed Diamond had been heading for Southeast exit of the mount near where Moradinson had collapsed the eastern main tunnel.

"Curious.... down righ' currus."

I moved quickly to the Southeast gaurd post and find the post manned by no less than ten dwarven guards. The captain approached me, "Findar Toarst kin." After examining the well cleaned rock ground and giving up on finding any tracks, I turn to the guard captain. "Goo' day ta ya cappy. I be 'ere on business fer da chief. I be thinkin' I'll be headin' ou' thru' dis 'ere guard post. Buts I gots some queschions fer ya firs'."

The captain readily agrees, "ask away Underscout."

"Has dere been a guard change in da past 20 cycles?"

"Sure ha'. But I be here fer da past 30 cycles. Us cappy's gots ta put in extra cycles on watch ya know."

I grin remembering a time when I performed the role of a gate captain. "Goo' lad. Now, does ya rem'mber anyone else exitin' thru' dis 'ere gate?"

"Only da bouncer, he came thru' here abouts 24 cycles past, bu' I figered he jus' be goin' ou' ta sets anodder o' his traps." The captain frowned slightly, "I does rem'mber da bouncer wasn't bouncin' as mu' as usual... he seemed almos' upset 'bout sometin'."

I smile, "Thankee cappy. Ya's doin' a righ' fine job. Now when yer shift changes be sure an' get plenty of rest."

"Ya knows it Underscout. An' goo' luck ta ya ou' dere... I hear dere be darklin's and gobbo's crawlin' all over da place."

I turned and passed through the guard post moving quietly and quickly into the dark tunnel beyond. I recognized this tunnel as leading close to the room with a natural spring in it. There should be a tunnel up ahead that branches off and meets the tunnel where I found Diamond and Tig. I move quickly through the tunnel, barely avoiding one of Tig's nature traps. Only a few grease smudges give it away. "Whew... dat Tig's gonna be bouncin' righ' happy like when dem gobbos start settin' dese tings off."

Within a few short minutes I'm back in the room where I originally noticed signs of battle. The signs are still evident, but this time I'm looking for more information. After searching for a few moments, I sit down with my back to the spring facing one of the walls. The heat from the magical battle has died down more, and I'm able to sense the variation in natural rock heat on the walls. With the hot spring behind me and out of my vision, I notice an odd fault line running the length of the wall in front of me. It's about three hands wide and just tall enough for a sneaky elf to scrape through. "Well I'll be... I bets dat sneaky darklin' done squeezed thru' dat crack and went into da underdark. Sandstone! Why didn't I catch dis 'fore?" I scratch my beard as I peer through the whole. "Ahh well nothin' ta does 'bout it now. I best go inform da chief an' den come back an' see if'n I can catch dat sneaky darklin'."

I turn to head back and report.

Kagis Ironpeak Axepeak Undermount Scout

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Nae ta worry lad From: DIAMOND 2

Diamond awoke to Nystramo's fuming. She cracked open an eye and watched as he reemed Kagis for answers. As Kagis was leaving, Nystramo turned back towards D1, and she quickly closed her eyes again. Best not to face him in this mood, she thought.

Tied up and laying under a sack, she had had plenty of time to think. Maybe she hadn't been too wise trying to take on the darklin herself. Maybe she should have reported to Nystramo when she found Tigguhr meeting with the darklin. Maybe she had been a bit steamed when her suggestion about watching Tigguhr had been ignored and that made her make wrong decisions. Maybe standing around with battle armor on for a week with nothing to do had made her a bit bored.

It was done and in the past now. Nothing she could do to change what she had done. At least her and Tigguhr were alive and the darklin was chased from the Mount. They saw the route of his escape, so they could seal it. It all turned out well enough, now that it was over. Just a goblin horde to face now.

She started to doze off again, when she felt Nystramo sit down beside her and take her hand in his. She cracked open an eye again. There he sat with such a look on his face. Concern, fear, anger and determination were in his eyes and his jaw was set firmly. Wanting to do something to ease his mind, she half sat up, startling him, and gently touched the frown on his forehead, "Such a face Taerin. It be o'er. The darklin has left, me and Tigguhr be healin, nae need to look so worried."

Before she knew it, Nystramo reached over and pulled her into his lap. Wrapping his arms around her, he hugged her with the fiercest bear hug she had ever received.

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A mild dressing down From: Nystramo

Nystramo finally released his hold on D1amond; his taerin; his anchor. Without her, he knew, he would still be a slave to the black moods that had almost engulfed him. Were he to lose her, there would be no saving him a second time.

"Blast ye, lass, wha' was ya thinkin'?" he asked, not ungently. Just seeing her awake and alert was enough to push back the tides of rage he had been feeling. For now.

"Hrmph! I wa' thinkin' ta gits rid o' tha darklin' tha' wa' plaguin' tha mount!" she answered with her usual fire.

The chief opened his mouth to respond, but cut himself off. He wanted to tell D1amond to not go running headfirst into trouble without thinking. He wanted to tell her not to leave the confines of the mount without telling him. He wanted to tell her to stop doing things that could get her killed.

One look at her defiant look, however, reminded him that he couldn't ask these things of her. Not because she would refuse (which she would); not because he didn't want to argue with her (what dwarven couple DIDN'T argue?); but because her fire, her determination, and her need to contribute in any battle were part what she was. They made her D1amond, and it was D1amond he

had fallen in love with, not some weak kneed long ear that jumped at shadows.

"Ach, lass, I jes' wishes ya wou' be a bi' more careful when ya dives inta battle," he finally said. "I means, darklin's nae be gobbos. Ya takes 'em serious!"

D1 nodded. "Aye, lad, I ken tha'. I be more wary o' tha drowies in tha future. I promises." The twinkle in her eye, however, told Nys that part of her had thrilled to every second of the battle. In spite of himself, he found a smile growing on his face.

"Ach, wha' I be goin' ta does wi' ya?" he asked in mock exasperation. "Well'n, if ya be determined ta gits yerself inta scrapes anyways, I guess I mi' a' well makes sure ya gots some backup when it 'appens."

"Wha' ya means, lad?" his taerin asked.

"Hrmph. I means reports ta Moradinson when ya be rested an' ready fer duty. I be needin' ta raplace a few o' The Ten wha' be busy on o'er duties. Storm'll be seein' if'n ya be up ta it." D1's snort told him what she thought of being "tested", but he only grinned in response. "This way, a' leas', I kin keeps me eye on ye."

D1 grinned back and kissed him on the cheek. "An' I on ye, taerin." Still exhausted from her ordeal, she lay back down on his lap and fell asleep.

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The moment of truth approaches From: Jhaelryna

The drow captain cursed quietly as he read the orders from the Queen. He had been relieved of command! After all his hard work and careful planning, he was now to hand over control of the patrol to this faern. Such was life in service to the Dark Queen. The captain stood, squared his shoulders, and bowed to the dark figure. "The patrol is in your hands, Jabbuk."

"That is not necessary, Captain. You will retain command over your men. You know them best. They are yours. I am simply here to fulfill the plans of the Valsharess. I will instruct you as to our operational plans immediately."

"As you see fit, sir". "Then let us begin. There is no time to lose"

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The dwarf soldiers moved unobserved to their planned positions. They camouflaged themselves and waited. Waited for the remnants of the goblin army and the dwarves to finally meet in pitched battle.

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The battered goblin army had finally reached the Mountain. Its numbers had been decimated by the guerilla warfare of the dwarven patrols, and by the fiendish traps laid by the dwarves. The force that remained was still sizeable, however. Nystramo hoped that the outer defenses had pared down enough of the gobbos' strength. The inevitable had finally come. The goblins were at the gates. Now was the time when the dwarves would have to stand shoulder to shoulder, and fight for their home.

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The goblin horde screeched in frenzied ecstasy as they finally bashed their way through the initial outer defenses of the Mountain. A battleline of armored dwarves stood impassively in the hallway as the green tide swept towards them. Within seconds, the first major engagement of the war had begun. Screams of dying goblins and dwarves filled the dark tunnels as the two ancient enemies grappled with each other yet again.

"Somebody get Storm! Dem goblins gots tru da tun'ls somehows! We gots ta get reinforcements here rite quick! Hold steady, lads! We gots ta hold at all costs!" The dwarven veteran began to sing a song of battle at the top of his lungs. Soon, the entire dwarven line was singing in unison, smashing goblin bodies with every note. When a soldier inevitably fell to the wicked blades of the goblins, his surviving comrades increased the volume of their song, and quickened the tempo of their blows. But the weight of the goblin army was too much, and the outnumbered dwarves were inexorably forced backwards....

Valsharess Jhaelryna GM, TOL

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The powers are awakened From: Gaglug

Gaglug's mind whirled with the immense power of the goblin army. His manipulation and control over the goblins was complete. The raw, insane emotions of the goblin army was feeding the power of the Shaman. The army itself was a giant psychic battery, a immense power source that Gaglug could tap. Gibbering madly, Gaglug lost control for a split second, and a random bolt of magical energy shot from the shaman's head. The massive bolt blew a large hole in a nearby wall (killing several goblins unfortunate enough to be standing nearby). "MINE IS THE POWER!!!" hooted the deranged shaman. Gaglug looked around for Gunklob, but the goblin chieftan was nowhere to be found. Gaglug immediately set out to find the chieftan. Magical energy crackling visibly around him, the shaman moved through the horde towards the front of the army.

Gunklob found himself in an uncomfortable situation. He had planned to lead this assault from his usual position...the rear. But somehow, he was near the front lines. How had that happened? He resolved to move to a safer location, and turned around, then froze. The chieftan's hand moved involuntarily to the hilt of his sword. As his fingers touched the pommel, Gunklob's eyes glazed over. He threw his head back and let out an unearthly roar.

"I SHALL FEAST ON THE SOULS OF MANY DWARVES THIS DAY!!!! FOR I AM THE KIN-SLAYER, AND THE KING-EATER. I HAVE SLAIN A THOUSAND DWARVES, AND MY HUNGER IS UNABATED. LOOK UPON ME, DWARVES, AND TREMBLE! I AM H'RATHN'GON, BORN OF THE ABYSS."

Gunklob drew the sword and held it over his head. In that moment, Gunklob vainly tried to resist possession by the sword, but it was too late. H'rathn'gon, dwarvenslayer, had fully awakened.

Mighty Gaglug, Dwarf-Ripper and Troll-Eater Shaman of the Goblins

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The storm that has broken... From: Nystramo

Diamond woke with a start on Nystramo's lap. She smiled up at her taerin, but the smile turned quickly to a frown when she saw the look on his face. He looked at her and said simply, "It's started."

She nodded and stood. With the practiced ease and efficiency of a kuldar she donned her armor and weapons, which had been thoughtfully brought to the planning room for her. She noticed Tigguhr was also awake and ready for battle, as were Baldar Hmr and the rest of The Ten.

Noticing her look, Nys said "Almos' all," with a frown. Dwyvyrn had still not returned. The First of The Ten remained missing. As he took up Rorn Norogh, he couldn't help but feel a sense of doom at the lack. One of his oldest friends and most formidable kuldar, the chief hated the idea of going into battle without him. Dwyvyrn's ready pike and unwavering courage always gave him a sense of confidence. Now, when he needed him most, the captain was nowhere to be found.

But, there was no time for morbid thoughts now. "Ya ready kin?" The Ten all nodded grimly. "D1, ye be tha captain now. Keeps yer kuldar on their toes." D1 nodded once again. One look in her eyes almost made Nys feel sorry for any goblin that came face to face with her. Almost.

"Alri' den. We goes ta battle." He jogged out of the planning room, Rorn Norogh at the ready and glowing with a golden light. He could almost feel its thirst for the goblin blood. As soon as he was out the door The Ten formed a running circle around him. For the first time he noted the kuldar that had replaced Dwyvyrn to fill out The Ten for the battle; Dorgan, a sturdy kuldar and a veteran of the orc wars. When he noticed the chief looking his way he grinned and tipped his morning star in salute. "Raugh ar dun, Olor Kuld." Nystramo laughed and replied, "Raugh ar dun, samman." Privately he thought, death from below, to be sure, but for who, and how many?

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They came upon the fringes of the battle quickly. The Ten quickly cut through any goblins they came upon. They battled with the practiced ease of Kuldmorndin, their attacks and parries in perfect harmony. Not a single enemy got even close to the chief. As they got nearer the center, however, it became more and more difficult to hold off the massive tide of goblins. Their weapons whirled, thrust and parried in a deadly dance so swift Nystramo made no attempt to follow them. Besides, his attention was demanded elsewhere.

In the center of each knot of dwarven kuldar was a captain, also

protected by a knot of veteran warriors. Each one kept an eye on their chief, looking for the signals they had all committed to memory so they could communicate in battle. Looking toward one such squad which was being hard pressed on all side, Nys gestured toward the captain and gave the signal for an ordered withdrawal. The captain nodded and barked out "Kuldar! Rear!" As one the warriors reversed their direction in the blink of an eye. Caught off balance, many goblins stumbled and were quickly cut down by the retreating dwarves. The captain had his eye on a good defensive position near the inner gates and steared his kuldar in that direction. Nystramo nodded in satisfaction and turned his attention elsewhere.

Around him and his gaurd the battle raged. Suddenly, a voice boomed out, filling the caverns with an unnatural intensity.

"I SHALL FEAST ON THE SOULS OF MANY DWARVES THIS DAY!!!! FOR I AM THE KIN-SLAYER, AND THE KING-EATER. I HAVE SLAIN A THOUSAND DWARVES, AND MY HUNGER IS UNABATED. LOOK UPON ME, DWARVES, AND TREMBLE! I AM H'RATHN'GON, BORN OF THE ABYSS."

Nystramo felt his kin waver, ever so slightly. There was no rout, no panic, no sudden call to retreat; these were dwarven kuldar after all, no weak kneed tree huggers or ganglies. Still, he could feel the slight hesitation that meant his kin were beginning to know fear. It would have been imperceptible to any but a dwarf, but it was enough to mean trouble for his forces. He felt it himself.

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The storm that has broken (2) From: Nystramo

The power radiated from in from of the goblin lines, dark and menacing. It gnawed at the souls of his kuldar, and at his own. Whatever or whoever this H'rathn'gon was, it had to be stopped. The goblins were in a frenzy now, the dark power giving them strength and fire. The already embattled dwarves fought bravely, but their numbers were beginning to fall alarmingly. The tide of battle was turning against them.

Nystramo ordered The Ten in the direction of the power, and they cut a swath through the goblin forces in their way; D1amond whirling her blade with a ruthless efficiency, all the while muttering oaths and curses at the enemy; Tigguhr, incomprehensibly bouncing while maintaining his position in the circle, shouting a gleeful "HAR DE DOO!" with every goblin that



fell before him; Baldar maintaining a grim silence as he quickly dispatched any goblins that would dare try and approach his chief; Dorgan bashing in skull after skull with his morning star, singing a dwarven battle song, bellowing it with all of his considerable dwarven might.

Nystramo, heartened by Dorgan's song, took it up himself. His voice boomed in the caverns, a counterpoint to H'rathn'gon's vile boasting. Soon, all of The Ten were singing. Within moments all of the kuldar in the cavern were singing, every dwarf in unison with his brothers and sisters. The song gave the dwarves courage and strength. Just as importantly, it gave them rhythm. Dwarven weapons cut, thrust and parried in time with the song. Every kuldar knew instinctively what his shield mate was going to do and timed his own actions accordingly. Ferocity was replaced with a deadly and fearsome efficiency. The dwarves fought as one, singing all the while.

The goblins, who just seconds before had been in a frenzy for dwarf blood, faltered. The power of the dwarven song overwhelmed them, pounded into their brains. They didn't know what to make of this magical song that gave their enemies such power. The, suddenly, horribly, the song became even louder.

Nystramo grinned as Moradinson and his forces smashed into the battle like a wave, all of his kuldar singing in unison. The goblins began to buckle in spite of their still superior numbers. A cowardly lot, they didn't have the stones to face an army of dwarves, all singing and battling together as a single kuldar.

Finally, The Ten neared the source of the power. Nystramo's eyes widened as he saw the goblin chieftan. He huge beyond all of Nys's expectations of a goblin, and he held aloft a glowing sword that the chief could feel thirsting for dwarven blood. Rorn Norogh's own golden glow brightened in response. These two weapons would do battle this day, he knew.

In a line in front of the goblin chieftan were what remained of the Hammer Warriors. Nystramo recognized them from the reports his scouts had given him. Huge, formidably armed and armored, they could be nothing else. There were a dozen of them, charging toward The Ten in well drilled formation. Nystramo shook his head in amazement. Well drilled goblins. It was almost too alien a thought for his mind to accept. "RAUGH AR DUN!" he shouted, and The Ten surged forward to meet them.

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Gunklob turned, feeling the presence of the other weapon and hearing the dwarven war cry. His eyes filled with rage as he saw the golden axe held aloft by the dwarven chief. He felt the blade urging him forward to slay his enemy, and he advanced. Ahead of him, his Hammer Warriors closed on the dwarven chief's personal gaurd. With them out of the way, Gunklob could face the dwarf chief personally, as he wanted.

In the back of his mind, the goblin in Gunklob shouted and struggled. Leading a battle from the front? Seeking personal combat with the dwarven chief? Who had a powerful magical weapon of his own?? He cursed the drow for their "gift", but struggle as he might he couldn't weaken the sword's control over him. He watched in a combination of excitement and dismay as his Hammer Warriors clashed with the dwarven chief's gaurd....

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And Darkness Is Found From: Niord

They had been walking for some time now. The small scouting party had heard echos of battle through the mount. Only four of them, but all kin would help. They had quickly picked up speed, running as fast as their small legs could carry them, towards the battle.

Drinking potions and reading from scrolls, I prepared myself for the comming battle. My speed and strength increased, and I quickly outpaced my kin. I could see the battle now. There it was. In the middle, some huge goblins in armor of fine construct were fighting the Ten. The two forces collided with such power I could feel the shockwave. And there was the chief, and the goblin chief, and much to my surprize, the goblin was advancing toward Nystramo.

I entered the antichamber before the inner hall where the battle was being pushed to. The darkness and evil in the air was so heavy, I suddenly stopped cold. I looked around, and there were drow! A whole squad of drow! But they paid me no attention, intent on the battle ahead, waiting for their moment to strike. I silently thanked Moradin for the detect invis scroll that had been in my pouch. I looked around, till I saw the drow I wanted, the evil emanating so strong from him it had to be one of their feared Jabbuks. I acted as if I were going to charge

into battle, pulled out a scroll, and with a cry of "Fer Moradin, and fer me kin!!" I read from the scroll and saw a flash upon the Jabbuk. His surprise was warming to my heart. My cry momentarily stopped the battle ahead, as all eyes turned back, all song stopped. The drow looked at me in amazement as he started muttering, but nothing happened! My scroll had worked, the drow had the intelligence of the cave walls!

No time for gloating, I quickly pull out another scroll, axe in one hand, shield over my back, reading. The Ten had used the distraction well, and the goblin Hammer Warriors lay smitten before them. Reading from the scroll, I pointed a finger at another drow, nothing! I felt the raw energy of a magic missile slam into my back, thank Moradin my shield took most of the blow. A curse of Gordul! as I fell forward, another magic missile tore into my shoulder, and I dropped the scroll in a scream of agony. Dwyyvyrn and the others were almost there now, my heart raced, I screamed NAE KIN, NAE COMES! for I knew the drow would kill them quickly, and they would never know. I saw a drow turn toward them, a fire starting in between his hands. Nae! Nae! On my knees, I drop my axe, my left arm hanging useless. I pull one more scroll, hold it toward the ceiling as I read it, then close my eyes tight as the paper disappears, and a blinding flash fills the chamber, the screams of suddenly blinded drow all around..

Niord Thunderstrike

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Dis Nae Bees Gud From: Niord

Slowly I look around.....what have I done? All cohesion between units are broke. Dwarf, goblin, and drow wander around aimlessly, bumping into each other, not being able to see. What a mess, everyone is mixed into everyone else! I spot members of the Ten, seems the Hammer Warriors really tore them up, alot more than I had figured. What worried me more is I didn't see either of the chiefs. Quickly I look for the Jabbuk. There he is...what is he doing? The Jabbuk looks at me, then swallows a vile of black liquid, I swear it was alive! He smiled at me; my heart sunk. I picked up my axe, just as a pillar of flame shot out from the Jabbuks hand. It hit me in the chest, I felt ribs breaking. It seemed an eternity before I hit the wall 30 feet behind me, the impact cutting off my howl of pain. What was in that vile? He negated my scroll. The thought went through my head over and over again.

Vision was returning to everyone. The looks of surprize as they found themselves amongst the enemy in melee momentarily froze all. Dwarf, goblin, and drow looked at each other stupidly, before raising their weapons and going at it. Quickly the sounds of battle rose to new peaks.....

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The Report From: ZYXOS

::: ZYXOS was once again before his Queen ::: Jhaelryna sat upon her ebony throne, surrounded by the heads of the 3 schools of the University and her closest advisers :::

::: From his kneeling position, ZYXOS offered forth the books, drawings, maps, and diagrams :::

"My Queen, I present you and the University with the information you charged me bring before you. There are maps of the upper and lower tunnels of the Underhalls of the Dwarves, drawings of the workings of many of the traps that will be used, locations of the known traps, and my notes regarding the fighting style of the Dwarves. I ask thee to please pay special attention to what I feel to be the foremost of my findings... the Dwarves are using magic in much greater quantities than I have seen before. Their clerics are growing in numbers and their thieves have become quite proficient in fighting with magic. We cannot underestimate their ability to mount a magical defense as well as magical attack.

The Dwarves still seem to put all they have into the first battle... with limited reserves held back.

Their traps are as deadly as we have ever heard and many may die in passing them.

Most importantly, I have mapped several ways into the lower levels of the underhalls from the underdark itself. If used properly, with the goblins and your shock troops fighting at the mountain entrance, this might give you a second front which could trap the dwarves with their escape blocked not only by your troops, but by the very sealed doors of the Mount itself."

ZYXOS remained kneeling as the University and the Queen discussed the materials he had brought to them.....

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Chaos reigns ..... From: KAGIS

As a scout I've always taken my duty of gathering information as paramount. So I spent a good bit of time examining the fissure where the drow had obviously disappeared through. It wasn't wide enough for me to get through without the aid of magic, and none of the scrolls I currently carried would be much help. I had been prepared for battle, not movement. "Har! Dat 'bout does it. I cannae very well go bashin' through dis whole. I best be gettin' back ta da mount fer when da fightin' starts."

Just to take a quick check, I went through my scrolls. Most of them were geared for fighting drow one on one, but I had a few mass damage scrolls that would look rather spectacular; especially if dozens of goblin were stuck in the middle of it.

Replacing the scroll case carefully on my belt and hefting Fulcrum I headed back toward the mount. It wasn't long before I began to hear the tell-tale sounds of battle ahead. This was no scirmish, there was just too much noise. Above the din of battle I heard a sound that made my heart leap within my chest. Nothing I'd ever heard in my days ever held the joy of hearing the entire clan singing as one.

I would've gladly joined my voice to my kins', but that would not be possible. I was behind enemy lines... that much was obvious. I didn't wish to be discovered right away so I took out one of my many scrolls and began casting a few spells to keep myself well hidden. "Firs' a spell ta makes me faster dan lightning'." I took out one of my mithril crossbow bolts and placed in on the ground a good distance away. Casting my second spell only took a heartbeat. Finally I finished my third spell which made me disappear from sight.

Grinning from ear to ear, although no one would've been able to see me anyway, I walked quickly to pick up the enspelled bolt and place it in my Axebow. I noticed that I couldn't hear any more signs of battle, but that didn't worry me... it ment my enspelled bolt was working like just like it should.

I rounded the corner in the cavern and nearly fell over as a bright flash blinded me briefly. I recovered quickly though and noticed several drow standing almost in a circle around me! A

young dwarf I'd never met before stood before me rubbing his eyes painfully, the tattered remains of a scroll crumpled at his feet. Three of the drow near me quickly began to recite spells but stopped immediately when they realized they couldn't hear themselves speaking. They immediately began signing to each other in their wierd sign-speak hand language. I would've loved to know what they were saying, but there just wasn't time for that now. "De gonna fig'er ou' soon 'nuff dat young dwarf dinnae cast nae silence," I thought to myself.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the goblin hammer troops engage the Ten and Nystramo. All I could do was mouth a silent prayer to them, and then I set to action. One of the drow outside the current range of my bolt was beginning to move his hands in an odd weave. He had placed his back against a stone wall and his concentration was complete. So it was that he didn't even realize why his spell hadn't worked until he looked down and saw a mithril bolt stick through his left shoulder, pinning him to the stone wall. He called out an oath, as a dwarf appeared out of nowhere in the center of his fellow drow troops but realized that he could no longer hear his own voice.

I laugh a hearty chuckle (glad to be able to speak again), and began firing bolt after bolt from my Axebow into the temporarily confused ranks of drow warriors. Two bolt sent one drow to his knees. He quickly fell over never to rise again.

But these were seasoned drow warriors, and they reacted quickly. Two lunged at me; knocking me to my feet and sending my axebow flying through the air. "Arghh! Ya durn pointy ears!" I twisted and flailed my mailed fists connect with a drow nose sending him backwards through the air.

The second warrior was stronger than the first, and his longer reach was making it difficult to get an advantage over him. We rolled and tumbled on the ground. I was glad we weren't near the goblin hoard or we would've both been trampled to death. I twisted and shoved with my feet against his chest. His hands were locked on my shoulders like a vice and instead of sailing through the air as I'd intended the drow flipped in the air, landing on his back with his hand still gripping my shoulders. I heard a telling "Uumfffff!" and the drow's grip relaxed a little. I twisted hard to my side, rolling away from the drow and the open floor toward the relative safety of the nearest cavern wall. As I rolled Fulcrum, my axe, found it's way into my hand.

## Kagis Ironpeak Axepeak Undermount Scout

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Reinforcements From: MoradinSon

Storm was an experienced goblin fighter. Many times he had driven so-called goblin hordes from threatening dwarven citadels and encampments. Never before had he seen the like of this massive grouping of the vile little creatures. Indeed he had believed it to be impossible for such a number of the chaotic little monsters to abide each others company long enough to be a true threat.

His scouts had reported thousands of goblins dead in the tunnels from the deadly traps the Clan had set but there was still an army of at least two thousand battle crazed goblins pressing the attack. Clan Axepeak was a small clan but an active one. Although the numbers of goblins were unusual, Storm had no doubt that the hundreds of battle hardened Axepeak troops could handle them. He turned to his 2nd as the two armies closed. "We be th' designated reinforcements, we waits here in this gate till Nys calls or the battle gits desperate."

The battle got desperate far sooner than any one suspected. Storm joined in the song and his trident and net began a deadly harvest as his troop of reinforcements hit wavering goblins.

"Cuts of the main tunnels lads, push forward!"

The fresh troops cut the goblin horde in two. A goodly number of the goblins were surrounding a well armed grouping of hammer armed goblins that were assaulting Nystramo and the Ten. Even more impressive than a well armed squad of goblins was the insanely huge goblin who was fighting stroke for stroke with Nystramo himself.

"Holds the line lads" MoradinSon Bellowed. "We caint lets the horde reinforce them hammer wielders!"

Morad heard an insane cackle and felt the hair on the nape of his neck rise as he saw the fierce glee with which the goblin chief fought the Olor Kuld. Worse yet. Another wave of goblins crashed against the bulwark of Storm's troops trying to reach the goblin king and the Ten. The goblins fought like maniacs, some even frothing at the mouth in rage as they attacked. Storm

noticed that some of the goblins that had been cut off from the main force by his troops charge were beginning to look as if they weren't too crazy about being where they were, yet the goblins in the main force were rabid in their ferocity. It was then that Storm saw the capering goblin shaman. The shaman danced about exhorting his troops as fire and sparks flew from his eyes and fingertips.

"This nae bodes well" He muttered between the gutting of his 10th and 11th goblins

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Thunder and lightning.... From: Nystramo

When they clashed, the underhalls shook. The Ten and the goblin Hammer Warriors battled with a skill and a ferocity that gave everyone nearby pause. Never had the hardened Axepeak veterans expected to meet such a challenge from mere goblins. It was unthinkable.

Nystramo watched the battle in stunned amazement. Diamond, Baldar Hamr, Tigguhr, Dorgan and the rest of The Ten, battling for their lives and the life of their chief, every trick of battle they had ever learned was being played for this fight. Diamond battled with the ferocity of a cornered lioness, still managing to fit in an expletive or two between verses as she sang the battle hymn that had been taken up by the entire clan. Tigguhr managed to mystify his opponent with his bizarre bouncing fighting style, but not enough to gain a clear edge yet. Baldar simply relied on sheer dwarven determination to carry him through. Dorgan's face was almost expressionless as he measured every arc and every parry of his morning star quickly but correctly. Amazingly, however, the goblins were holding their own. They were so well coordinated, Nys almost began to doubt they WERE goblins. Surely the little tunnel creepers didn't have this kind of skill in them?

His attention was momentarily drawn to a jumping, gibbering goblin on the fringe of the battle. He was too far away to hear, but he was clearly shouting something at the goblin hoard. By his look he was a shaman, and whatever magic he was working had whipped the goblins back into a frenzy. He needed to be dealt with, and the chief was too far away and too occupied to take care of it.

Nys quickly caught Moradinson's eye and made a few quick hand



signals. Moradinson nodded, having already noted the shaman. One way or another, he would make sure the goblins no longer had their magic to help them.

Nys returned his attention to his own situation, satisfied that his Rrin Kuld would take care of his end. The Ten were beginning to tire. The sheer size and number of the Hammer Warriors was beginning to tell. Dorgan finally found an opening and smashed one of the goblins in the face with his morning star, felling him on the spot. He barely had time to grin, however, when a fresh one took its place. Still, The Ten had drawn first blood, and they took heart from that. The dwarves fought back with a renewed intensity, once again gaining a temporary edge.

Nys caught a flicker of movement to his right, and barely got his axe up in time to block the glowing white sword that had nearly cleaved his skull. Sparks flew as the two ancient magical weapons met. Both combatants were momentarily blinded by the flash. When Nys's vision cleared, he looked up at the grinning goblin chief who had somehow slipped between the embattled Ten. "Now, dwarf, I kill you and drink your soul," he growled in Common.

"Hrmph, we sees, gobbo," Nys replied, and the battle began in earnest.

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Answered Prayer? From: Splendarr

The battle line moved back and forth. She watched from an alcove off of the main hall where she was guarding the clerics as they healed wounded that had been dragged this way. At present the battle line was moved forward and the kin she guarded were behind enemy lines, so she hid back in the small cave out of sight.

Her view of the main battle was not spoiled though, and she watched jealously as the mighty Axepeak warriors and the chief bravely fought and sang at the top of their lungs. She itched to run forward and join in the battle, but she dutifully remained at her post.

I hates missin a good fight. Splendarr grumped.

Moradin must of heard her discontent, because at that moment a number of goblins grew too frightened to fight and ran blindly

in her direction. She grinned as they saw the alcove and made to come hide in it. It didn't matter that there were over 15 goblins heading her way, she stood forward and braced herself to defend her charges. Luckily the cave opening was only small enough to allow 2 goblins at a time, but they relentlessly pushed forward. More out of a determination to hide than wanting to fight.

She joyfully swung her beautiful new ax back and forth in a methodical rhythm, slicing goblin after shrieking goblin. Her face grew disappointed as the last of the monsters turned to run from her and she neatly cut its retreating head off. Keeping one eye on the entrance she quickly leaned down and wiped the green blood from her weapon. Something moved in front of her and she quickly looked up. A tall dark form stood just out of weapons reach. It was too slender to be a dwarf and too tall to be a goblin. Splendarr readied her ax and continued to examine the strange creature.

Further back in the alcove someone moved a torch and a light struck the creature before her. A slender male elf, but with dark skin and white hair. It dawned on her as she looked into the blood red eyes of her enemy and the subject of many spooky stories she was told as a child, a DROW! She swallowed hard and didn't let the fear she felt in the pit of her stomach show in her face. Drow were magic users, she knew she couldn't let it get a spell off, so she rushed straight for it ax ready. It quickly dodged her swings as it weaved its hands and chanted ominous sounding words. Magic instantly shot from its fingertips and hit her hard causing her to stumble backwards. Splendarr grimaced in pain and came at it again, this time flinging spines with each step. One of the spines managed to ruin the drow's next spell, but it began casting again as she closed with it. She swung and hit the drow squarely, only to be knocked back again by a shield of fire that protected it.

Ach! I nae know how long I can hold this one back, kin. She hollered to the healers in the cave.

She looked at the conjuring drow and saw a ball of fire forming between its hands. That spell she had to stop or the wounded in the alcove would be even more seriously injured or killed. She ran forward again throwing spines with all of her might, hoping to stop the spell. She yelled a prayer as she ran forward.

I'll never complain about nae bein in a good fight again,

Moradin, just help me out of this! Please? (tbc)

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Looks, Thar Behind Ye! From: Tiguhr

Tiguhr felled another foe. With each one that died, the third of the ten felt that he was slowly redeeming himself. He had caused enough trouble. Time to earn his keep, he thought.. His unique form of battle raging confused his foes-they had no idea where to swing since the bouncer seemed to hop from one spot to the next with nervous energy unmatched. "Har Dee Doo, Joe! Le's gits annuder," he cried. One eye on the foes, one ear listening closely for commands, the bouncer redeemed himself over and over.

He sang along with his kin:

Stone and steel, Mountain thunder, til our foes be torn asunder.  
Rise ye kin! Rise ye kin!

Slash yer ax Slam yer shield Fight on 'til tha vile ones yield.  
Rise ye kin! Rise ye kin!

Facing off now with a Hammer Warrior Tiguhr pulled every trick he could think of. Allowing his normally random bouncing to become repetitive, he tried to lull the Warrior. When he thought the warrior had seen the pattern, he jumped to the opposite side, hoping for surprise. The Warrior stayed right with him, banging the bouncer on the head hard. "Thankee Emmy!" he barked as his helm absorbed the impact.

The warrior bellowed in common, "Foolish little one!"

Tiguhr absorbed another blow with his shield. The shield slammed against his breastplate, crunching his arm, but it gave him the opportunity to grasp a length of coiled cord he kept tucked between armor plates. The coiled length had a stone attached to one end. Holding the stone in his shield hand, he parried the next blow with all his might, sending his foe's weapon out of reach just long enough to pivot on his heel, swing out his shield arm and toss the stone over the head of the Warrior.

The Warrior, aware that the dwarves were employing magic more than ever, paused for a split second to consider the completely harmless twine and stone above his head. Tiguhr bounced at the opportunity and swung low. But the Warrior was quick to recover

from the simple ploy, parrying most of the low blow, though the dwarf had drawn first blood.

"Ya nae as dumb as ya looks ya goobie gobbo!" he taunted. The Warrior kept his disciplined cool, slamming hard down towards the dwarf's head. Tigguhr parried the blow, desperately raising his shield. The Warrior quickly took a second swipe at the Bouncer's exposed mid-section. Tigguhr didn't quite bounce out of the way fast enough, taking the blow in the side of the ribcage. His breastplate held, but the force of the blow cracked a few ribs.

"Ye be a challenge ya dirt chewing son o a sea slug!" Tigguhr taunted, hoping his energy would hold out. Either that or he was going to have to come up with the trick to end all tricks. Taking note of the Warriors skill, Tigguhr doubted any trick would have much effect. He gripped Coral Joe tighter. He swung Coral Joe harder....

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Dwarven War Hymn From: MoradinSon

DEATH FROM BELOW Dwarven war hymn heard in the battle of the Underhalls

We sing the song Of the underhalls Of warriors strong When duty calls Our goblin foes straight down we'll MOW Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of dwarven king Of warriors strong His praises sing The goblin foe shall suffer WOE Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of battles won Of warriors strong When duty done Who'll lift thier ales and clamor HO! Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of fallen kin Of warriors strong Who die and grin In the face of death and as they go Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song of brethren lost Of warriors strong Who pay the cost That we may sing as free dwarfs SO Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of dwarven host Of warriors strong Their might

to boast Our legions march forth, heel and TOE Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of mountain stone Of warriors strong Who  
defend the throne Of the Olor Kuld King NYSTRAMO Shout louder  
lads \*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of Nystramo's ten Of warriors strong As a  
hundred men Their enemies fall dead row by ROW Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song of Lonely Mount Of warriors strong In might  
past count No goblin horde will say us NO Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of hearth and home Of warriors strong No more  
to roam In battlefield with axe and bow Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

We sing the song Of victory Of warriors strong Of Axepeak we  
Will fight the fight and slay the foe Shout louder lads  
\*\*\*DEATH FROM BELOW\*\*\*

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Re:Dwarven War Hymn From: Tigguhr

Tigguhr banged his helm with his mailed fist. "been singin tha  
wrong tune, Tha be me trubble!"

He listened to the others singing and slowly picked up the  
proper words. Slamming his ax into the Warrior, he found renewed  
strength from the song.

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The queen is angered From: Jhaelryna

Valsharess Jhaelryna looked up from the detailed reports arrayed  
in front of her. "You have done well, Zyxos. I am most pleased  
with you. I agree that your plan of a second front of attack  
could destroy the dwarves. I shall contact the patrol with their  
new orders..." The Queen sent her awareness out to the patrol,  
seeking mental contact with the wizard in command. As soon as  
she connected with him mentally, her mind was assaulted with  
chaotic images of death and conflict.

"Faern? What in Lloth's name is going on?" queried Jhaelryna.

The response was fragmented and disjointed.  
"Patrol...discovered...no easy way out...will contact you...no time to chat with you..."

The wizard severed the telepathic contact with his Queen, leaving Jhaelryna sputtering angrily. "Unbelievable!!! What gall! He shall pay dearly for his impudence and his failure!" Knocking a table to the floor, she strode about the room screaming. "This shall be the last time he fails the temple!" She spun on her heels and pointed an accusing finger at the Jabbress d'Arach Tinilith. "Your brother walks a fine line, Jabbress. You would do well to instruct him to follow the narrow path. I shall teach him a lesson in humility! As of this point I relieve Zor'ak from his command. Never again shall he lead other drow." Turning to Zyxos, she continued. "Faern, you are now given command of the expeditionary force. Make all speed to the Mountain and attempt to salvage what you can of the situation. Relieve Zor'ak of command, and send him to me. He shall answer for his incompetence. Go now."

Valsharess Jhaelryna GM, TOL

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Enter Zor'ak... From: Zorak

The drow wizard parried the goblin's attack easily, knocking the club from the foul creature's grasp. Almost as an afterthought, he drove his sword deep into the goblin's chest while he attempted to make sense of the situation around him. All those around him were still partially blinded from the blast. The blinding flash actually gave the drow an advantage. All drow warriors were trained in blind fighting. Fighting blind is their preferred method of attack, and they practice their skills intensively.

He could hear the screams of dying goblins and dwarves all around him. Barking out his commands, Zor'ak ordered his patrol to form up and to attempt to withdraw from the whirling melee. He felt the touch of the Valsharess' mind as she began to query him about his progress. Grumbling at her ill-timed intrusion, the Faern responded "...no time to chat with you...", as he abruptly severed mental contact with the Queen. He had the safety of his patrol to think about, there was no time to get in a discussion with the Valsharess.

Most of the patrol formed up around him, and they began to fight

their way through the goblin and dwarven lines to relative safety.

Zor'ak Alur Faern

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The Stormtroopers From: MoradinSon

Storm MoradinSon's troops were a welcome aid to Nystramo and the Ten. The charge of MoradinSon's brigade of reinforcements had cut off the majority of the goblin horde from the goblin king and his hammer armed shock troops. The goblins that were separated from the horde and it's gibbering shaman were visibly less anxious to do battle with the well armed and armored dwarven warriors.

Although Morad's "Stormtroopers" , as he liked to call them, had given Nystramo a greater chance for survival, the move was not without cost. The Stormtroop was now caught in a melee crossfire. Struggling mightily to decimate the troops they had cut off while maintaining the bulwark between the main goblin horde and the gates of the Mount's Underhalls.

Ironfist, Baldar Hmr, Element, Erovo and Ninnyhammer had worked beside Morad for the past weeks as the Rrin Kuld has striven to prepare the mount for the present siege. After so much hard work ,sweat, toil and worry, the dwarves had vowed to defend one another's backs from harm. Morad had regretted having to appoint Baldar to the Ten but Nystramo's safety was more important than the comfort Baldar's ready axe would have provided to Storm and Storm felt that much the better for knowing that Baldar would fight to the end, if need be, for Nys's sake. Baldar was the only one of his Stonewerks employees who was not now fighting by his side. Although Storm had tried to maintain his gruff exterior he had been moved by his fellow dwarfs loyalty.

"We fights harder ta pertecks the Kuldar whut signs the paychecks" Ninny had told him with a grin as the he and the others had demanded to be posted in Storms command. "Besides I nae has had a chance ta wins a wager wit ye yet"

"Hrmph " Storm had replied " Winnin this war will nae makes that any more likely"

Now Storm, Erovo, Iron, Element and Ninny and a few others made up the center of the Stormtroop battle line. From time to time

they could not help but glance toward the battle raging around Nystramo and the Ten. When they did they could see Baldar swinging and singing along with the rest of the dwarven army and it was a comfort to know he had not yet fallen even under the heavy blows being rained down on his shield by the huge goblin who faced him. It was clear to Storm that the goblin shaman who was exhorting his troops on was the key to the battle. The goblins that had been cut off from the shaman's sight and who could not hear him over the sound of the Dwarven war hymn were beginning to rout with the exception of those heavily armed troops who surrounded the battle between the two kings.

Singing louder than ever before he urged his troops on. Between shouts of "DEATH FROM BELOW " and punctuating the impalement his next goblin he began to grind his teeth and strike himself upon his helm with the butt of his trident. He could feel the berzerker rage begin to take hold. His eyes focused on the shaman and his wrath rose until he could hold it back no longer.

Heedless of the torrent of goblin bodies that stood between himself and the Shaman he began to push forward. It began as a single dwarven whirlwind. A deadly trident wielding, berserk dervish of a dwarf. The bond that had been forged between the stoneworking dwarves and their leader was a strong one and as they saw him rage and push forward, the rage became infectious. The dwarven berserk is a deadly thing and rare. All the more awe inspiring to behold as it became a wave that consumed the Stormtroops one by one as they all began to go just a little mad. Soon the magically crazed goblins began to yield to the equally enraged dwarves.

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Re:The queen is angered From: ZYXOS

::: ZYXOS bowed as the Queen gave her commands.... even had she not mentioned the name or the relationship to St11eto there would have been little doubt in ZYXOS's mind whom she was referring to:::

::: thinking to himself::: "... ahhh... Jabbuk... it has been awhile since I have seen you, but you haven't changed I see.... <g>". ::: ZYXOS remembered the metal link between Zorak and his sister and wondered if even now he was aware of what was going on and the impending arrival of ZYXOS::::



"As you command, my Valsharess.....", ZYXOS replied as he completed his bow.

::: backing from the room and then turning on his heel, ZYXOS hurried from the Royal Fortress and into the still, dark, warmth of the Underdark ::::

"Well, Jabbuk, let's see what I can do to assist you and follow the Queen's commands as well..."

If anyone had noticed his passing, they might have been surprised to see that ZYXOS was not heading towards the normal passages to the Surface from Rilauven... but rather was heading into side tunnels.... tunnels from which he had most recently emerged carrying his notes and his maps.

Then again... anyone who really knew the Jabbuk Faern had long since stopped being surprised at whatever his actions might be.....

ZYXOS Rilynt'tar Dark One of the Drow Jabbuk Faern Rilynt'tar

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Fightin' From: DIAMOND 2

Diamond could see Morad and his troops move forward, with relief. Although this battle had been fought for only a hour, it seemed like days to her tiring arms. Seeing the Storm troops making ground heartened her and she began to fight with renewed vigor. The hammer troops were the most persistent goblins she had ever encountered, but she had noticed Nystramo's nod at the shaman and gathered that he was the reason for the goblin's lack of fear.

The fight between the huge goblin leader and her taerin was impressive and, given other circumstances, she would have enjoyed watching. But this was no sparring contest, no seats to sit and watch and make wagers, this was the real thing, life and death. With everything in her she fought at Nystramo's side and protected him from any of the other attacking goblins. He had his hands full with the leader. She shouted words of encouragement to the other ten and a order or two when she felt it necessary. They were a tight group and needed little in the way of orders once the battle had begun.

The fighting grew more and more intense. The battle song that

had rung through the halls had faltered a little as the dwarfs were concentrating more and more on the swings of the tiring arms. Refusing to give in to the fatigue that wanted to overcome her, Diamond took a deep breath and started bellowing forth a new battle hymn with renewed strength startling the hammer fighter before her. She quickly took advantage of the off guard monster and impaled it with her sword. The others in the ten followed her example and once again a song of battle and praise filled the under halls of the Lonely Mount.

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The Battle From: Nystramo

The goblin chieftan was huge. Nystramo had seen him from a distance, but seeing him up close in personal combat was another thing entirely. He smiled grimly and thought, "Sure'n it's nae the firs' time I done battle wi' a big enemy, eh?" Indeed, the dwarven chief, like most of his kin, had found his small stature to be to his advantage in most fights. The big folk just weren't used to fighting someone who's head didn't reach above their chests, while dwarves were constantly fighting opponents that towered over them. He rebalanced his axe and grunted, "Lets see wha' ya gots o'er den a fancy blade, eh gobbo?"

The goblin leered and replied, "I will drink your soul, Chief of Axepeak." Nystramo barely had time to think that this was a highly unusual thing for a goblin of any size to say when the white, flaming sword flew towards his skull. He quickly dodged to the side, deftly bringing Rorn Norogh up to counter and deflect the goblins sword. "Lots quicker'n I 'spected," he thought.

Both combatants traded minor attacks, feeling out each other's defenses. Nystramo was surprised by the goblin's speed and skill with the blade; he knew most goblins preferred spears and clubs, weapons that required little training to use properly. The goblin chieftan (Gunklob, judging by the shouts of the surrounding goblins) handled the sword like a master bladesman, however; as skillfully as he had seen some tree huggers fight with them. He frowned a let loose a flurry of slices and cuts that would have left most opponents dazzled. Gunklob parried them all effortlessly; without, it seemed, thinking.

Nystramo hung back a bit then, allowing Gunklob to go on the offensive. The chieftan leered again and lunged forward. Nystramo parried it easily. Another attack, another simple

parry. The goblin's attacks were quick and strong, but not especially skillful. He realized he had been taken aback by his seemingly miraculous parries; he hadn't had a chance to note that the goblin's attacks were mediocre at best. He frowned and backed off a bit more, deciding to change tactics.

Suddenly, Nystramo charged forward, axe held high for a downward cut. Predictably, Gunklob held his sword higher for the expected parry. At the last second Nys tucked and rolled, sweeping his axe toward the goblin's knees. He grinned, thinking how many of his taller enemies had fallen for this rather simple, if difficult to execute, maneuver. So, it was understandable when the dwarven chief was momentarily stunned as the flashing white blade easily parried his attack, leaving him in a very vulnerable position.

Fortunately, Gunklob was equally surprised by the incredible parry. Nystramo had time to regain his feet, but not enough to prepare his defense properly. The expected counter attack came, and he was barely able to deflect the blade from his chest. The sword slid along the flat of the axeblade, slicing a gash in Nystramo's left side. He screamed as the fire seared his skin and coursed through his veins.

Around him, he just barely sensed a faltering in The Ten as they heard their chief's agony. Unfortunately for the goblin Hammer Warriors, this faltering was quickly followed by a renewed fury. Diamond, in particular, fought as one possessed by a demon, driving the goblin she was engaged with to assume a more defensive stance than he liked.

Nystramo grimaced, eyeing the blade. The fire in his blood abated, but the dull throbbing at his side continued. He once again relaxed his aggressive stance, allowing Gunklob to take the initiative again. Once again the attacks were easily deflected. Nys made a few experimental attacks himself, eyeing the goblin's defense more carefully. He noted that when Gunklob parried, he didn't shift his posture to compensate as any trained warrior does. The only part of his body involved in the parries was his sword arm. His stance remained aggressive, almost as his arm was doing all the thinking when the need for defense arose. His arm... or his sword.

"Magix," Nys muttered, and spit.

He grimaced as pain shot through his side once again, the wound

bleeding freely. "Gots ta finish thi' soon," he thought. He wasn't yet weakened by the wound, but soon he would be. He needed to get through that sword somehow, and quickly.

He made a few more quick attacks, each one easily countered by the magical blade. Gunklob's grin widened as the blood flowed from the dwarven chief. Soon, he thought, he would finish the pesky stuntie. Then he could take the sparkly golden axe all for himself. The chieftan laughed, thinking that even Gaglug couldn't stand in his way after today.

Nystramo became more cautious, now that he was fully aware of the nature of his enemy. Clearly the blade was magicked to parry any attack against its wielder. He was certain that no matter how skillfully he tried to evade the blade with his axe, he would not be able to wound the goblin. "Hrmph, lets be seein' 'ow tha gobbo blade 'andles two attacks a' once, eh?"

What most dwarven enemies fail to realize when battling the stout kuldar was that all dwarves carry with them two formidable weapons at all times; their feet. Dwarven shoes are traditionally shod with iron to withstand the rigors of constant mining deep in the bowels of the earth. Thus, they are very heavy. Another consequence of this is that dwarven legs are incredibly strong. Anyone who has ever been kicked by a dwarf learns to respect dwarven feet.

So it was that Gunklob and his mystical weapon did not recognize the Nystramo's feet as a threat. When Rorn Norogh sliced the air on the way to Gunklob's chest, the sword quickly interposed itself. What it could not do, no matter what magic had been instilled in it, was get in the way of Nystramo's iron shod foot as it simultaneously connected with Gunklob's knee. Gunklob's scream was gratifying, to say the least.

Nystramo had been hoping to shatter the knee, effectively ending the fight. What he had not counted on was Gunklob's magical armor. The goblin's knee had been badly hurt, but not shattered. Still, Gunklob was slowed now, limping. Nystramo had found his weakness.

Gunklob growled viciously, wisely holding his ground. He knew he couldn't bring the attack to the dwarven chief now. He was too slow and clumsily with his wounded knee. He needed to stay on the defensive. If he knew anything about dwarves, and he knew a thing or two, he knew that the chief would not settle for a

stalemate. He would go for the kill. Besides, the dwarf was bleeding even more now. He couldn't stay conscious forever in this condition. So, Gunklob would let the sword protect him from the dwarf's axe, while he kept an eye on everything else. Especially the feet.

Nys moved back as well, gauging Gunklob's stance. The goblin was more careful now, wary for another trick. Experimentally, Nys grabbed a handful of spines from his pouch and threw them at Gunklob. The sword cut them all from the air effortlessly. "Hrmph. So mu' fer tha' idea." Still, the need to end this fight was becoming more and more pressing. Nys could feel the blood pooling inside his armor, and he was beginning to feel weak.

Summoning every ounce of strength, he went for a last, desperate attempt. He charged forward, his shield before him, bellowing "DEATH FROM BELOW!" Gunklob, realizing what the dwarf was hoping for, and that his magical sword probably couldn't help him if a furious, charging dwarf slammed into him shield first, tried desperately to scurry out of the way. His knee betrayed him, however, and he stumbled and fell over in the attempt. Ironically, this was probably the best move he could have made.

Nystramo's momentum was too great to stop. He saw, too late, that there was not a solid wall of goblin in front of him, but a large lump of goblin instead. He stumbled over the prone goblin just as Gunklob was attempting to regain his feet. Nystramo could still have recovered more quickly and gained the advantage, since he had two intact knees, except for the rock that managed to connect with his head as he went down.

Nys's helmet and thick skull absorbed most of the impact, but not enough to keep him from being dazed. His grip on Rorn Norogh weakened, and the axe slipped from his fingers. He had no idea where his shield had gotten to. He was defenseless. Even his feet were in no position to help him.

He rolled over weakly, and looked up at the blurry image of Gunklob, probably leering but he couldn't tell for sure. The sword however, wicked, white and cruel, was impossible to miss.

"Now, dwarf, you will feel the pain of my fire in your gut. Your screams will echo in your halls, and you kin will be slaughtered one by one. Die knowing you failed miserably." The laugh was loud and booming, and echoed inside of Nystramo's skull. He growled and spit, not replying in any other way,

waiting for the sword to fall.

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Answered Prayer From: Splendarr

Splendarr ran towards the casting drow, praying with every step. Half way through its spell, its concentration broke and it began to back away from the charging dwarf. Not wanting to leave her post, Splendarr stopped her charge as the drow quickly faded into the shadows of the hall beyond her.

Breathing hard, she thanked Moradin for saving her hide and went back into the alcove to have herself healed a bit, while she kept a wary eye on the small caverns entrance. She could see that the battle line was moving back her way, as Morad and his troops had whipped themselves into a frenzy and were slicing through the goblins. She knew that more goblins would try to hide in the healing alcove so she found a recently healed soldier and they stood guard over the entrance, easily cutting down the random terrorized fleeing goblin.

The battle looked to be going well, but in the back of her mind she still wondered about the drow, and if it had reinforcements. She hoped that there weren't too many of those vile creatures loose in the mount.

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Gaglug strikes! From: Gaglug

Gunklob raised H'rathn'gon high, preparing to end Nystramo's life. Suddenly, a fiery blast of magic struck Gunklob squarely in the back, blasting a large hole clear through the goblin chieftan. The huge goblin swayed for a moment, and then crumpled in a heap. An unearthly shriek emanated from the demonsword as it fell to the ground, powerless without a wielder. "ME!!! I BE DA CHIEF NOW!!!" crowed Gaglug after the successful assassination of his chieftan. Bringing out a small glowing sphere, he continued, "I holds da sparkly and soon I holds da glowysword!". Gaglug advanced to where H'rathn'gon lay lifeless upon the stone. Before he could reach the sword, he was seized yet again by a uncontrollable gout of magic. Light and smoke emanated from the shaman's eyes as the wild magic sought release. Gaglug trembled and shrieked as the channeled energy burst from his body. Unfortunately, the magical discharge struck Gaglug's "sparkly", knocking it from his hand. The effect was immediate. A thunderous explosion shook the

caverns as the drow artifact activated. A large section of floor disappeared suddenly, dropping dwarf and goblin alike into the murky depths of the pit. Smoke and fire billowed out of the pit, and a foul blackness seemed to flow from the evil place. Strangely, all fighting stopped for a moment as all the combatants turned to see what was happening. The unearthly quiet was broken when a huge clawed hand reached out of the pit and slammed into the stone floor. The massive claw gripped the stone as if it was mere clay. In that instant, all semblance of order disappeared as terrified drow, dwarves, and goblins attempted to flee from the emerging demon.

Mighty Gaglug, Dwarf-Ripper and Troll-Eater Shaman of the Goblins

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The danger to us all.... From: Zorak

"She is mad!" thought Zor'ak as he witnessed the opening of the pit, "This will destroy us all!". The drow wizard stood strangely impassive as all those around him, friend and foe alike, fled from the emerging demon. Several other smaller forms emerged from the pit, and began to look around while the huge monster finally pulled itself into this plane. "Tanar'ri" thought the drow wizard, as he subconsciously began to classify the monsters by species and subspecies. Zor'ak cursed under his breath. "Damn Jhaelryna and her insane schemes! To open a gate to the abyss is madness!" Zor'ak knew that the gate could not be easily controlled. Oh yes, it would indeed wipe out the dwarves eventually. They would not be able to hold back the tide of demons forever. But what then? The foul creatures would expand from the gate in ever-widening circles. Soon the entire surface realm could be threatened...and eventually the drow city itself would feel the effects of this gateway to the lower planes. The pit rumbled, then increased in diameter by several feet. Concerned, Zor'ak examined the gateway with his magical senses. As the wizard examined the gate, his eyes filled with horror. It was unstable! That fool shaman was to blame! His wild magic had made the entire gate extremely unstable! It was not a gateway as much as it was a rift. And the rift was widening! It would continue to widen, sucking everything off of this plane, and depositing it in the abyss. All their lives were in danger! A disaster of this magnitude could potentially destroy all of Neverwinter. The dwarves would be the first to die, but all the other races would soon follow. The realms as they existed would just disappear. "DAMN YOU

VALSHARESS!!!!" screamed Zor'ak as he ran towards the rift. The Tanar'ri at the pit sensed the powerful wizard's approach, and turned to face him. As the faern closed the distance, his mind worked feverishly on his options. He knew what he had to do. It was all up to him. Few in the realms had the knowledge and the experience to do what he was attempting. The other drow with him were useless. Mere fighters. It requires wizardly skill to attempt to seal an interdimensional rift....

Zor'ak Alur Faern

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Re:The danger to us all.... From: KAGIS

I finished my roll across the ground near a crevasse in the rock wall. Gathering myself quickly I launched forward and turned so I'd hidden myself in the crevasse watching patiently for the battle to settle down around me. It was chaos, the drow warriors fought dwarves and goblins alike. Goblins ran in all directions some attempting to flee, some attempting to... well, I'm not certain what most of them were trying.

I watched Moradin's troop restore some semblance of order to the scene before me and quickly turned my attention back at my chief. Nystramo fought like I've never seen anyone fight before. Pride swelled within my bones and I couldn't hold back a laugh when Nys's feet caught the goblin chieftan by surprise. I still carried Fulcrum in my strong arm and had a few scrolls left, but it was too chaotic to risk casting fireballs in the melee. Suddenly things went back to the previous state of chaos. The goblin shaman had killed the goblin chieftan, Nys lay wounded and dazed on the ground and some sort of magical portal began opening.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the drow Jabbak moving toward the portal. By the look in his eye I could tell he meant to close it. That was good considering I started seeing very strange creatures stepping from the portal. "Ahhh Sandstone, nae more meanies! When dis gonna stop?" I watched the creatures and new they were pure evil. Suddenly I felt a presense... somewhere... I looked down. Fulcrum, the Axe was vibrating in my hand. "Wha' be dis?" I watched one of the creatures reach forward with long taloned arm and crush a goblin in one hand while the talons of it's other hand sliced clean through a dwarven warrior. "Moradin's blood! Nae silly lookin' freak o' nature's gone be hurtin' me kin!" I raced forward slicing my way through any



goblins foolish enough to get in my way. Fulcrum's vibrations became stronger as I neared the creature. "I guess dis be wha' ye were men' ta do," I wispered to my axe.

The tall creature launched one arm almost lazily at me, Fulcrum cut deeply into before it got close. As Fulcrum cleaved the creature's arm it began to glow. "So, ya's can 'urt jus' like da res' o' us." I taunted. The monster roared out in pain. And then the attacks came so fast I could barely see them. My arms stung with pain as I moved to block each blow; the attacks vibrating my very bones with their ferocity. "Maybe dis wasn' suc' a goot' idea afterall."

Kagis Undermount Scout

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Re:Gaglug strikes! From: Tigguhr

HAR DEE uh oh.....

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Demon, drow, and an evil weapon From: Niord

Niord slowly regained his senses. His body spasmed from the sudden realization of agonizing pain. Slowly he reached into his pouch, and pulled out a flask. He sipped the bitter contents slowly, feeling a little better with each swallow. Tossing aside the empty, he withdrew another flask and downed it all in one gulp. His arm was still of no use, but the pain was deadened, and the blood no longer flowed from wounds.

He slowly stood up, and almost fell over as his head pounded. Throwing the flask at a drow, and missing by a mile, he picked up his axe and started wandering aimlessly. Cutting down a few goblins with wildly swung blows, he continued to stumble forward, almost tripping over a dazed dwarf on the ground. Niord stared at him, and in a few seconds his vision cleared enough to notice the chief. He instinctively ducked as a bolt of lightning hit the wall beside him. I whirled around, and there stood a crazed goblin, with currents coursing the entirety of it's body. It looked at me, and then at a glowing sword on the floor. The goblin charged for the sword, and without thinking, I did so also. I swung my axe in a staggered arc, aiming at the goblin. As I charged, a rock snagged my foot...uh oh. My swing missed the startled goblin by mere inches, and instead hit the sword on the floor, sending it through the air. The goblin

was running before I hit the floor.

I lay in agony, watching the blade on it's violent flight through the air. Then I noticed the crevace, the demon, and the drow charging both. This was truely a sight to see. The sword, seemingly of it's own will, was trying to stop in mid air, like it was afraid of the hole in the ground. The drow was casting magix on the demon, with seemingly no effect. The little minnions all around were tearing goblins, drow, and kin apart. I got up and ran to where I saw a scout despiratly defending himself from one of the demons, the thought that we were all going to die today passing through my mind again and gain.....

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Savin' The Chief From: D1AMOND 2

Diamond saw Nystramo fall in his battle with the goblin chief and her heart stopped. Relief washed over her as her taerin's closest threat, the goblin chief, was slain by one of his own. Her heart started beating again twice as fast as her warriors instinct took over. She ordered the ten to surround their chief and quickly bent to check his health. He was unconscious, but she had seen him take that shot to his side and saw the blood leaking from his armor.

She ordered the ten to make a path from the battle as she and Baldar Hmr carried the chief. As they were about to pull away, there was a loud flash of magic, followed by cries of terror. Not far behind them, a large pit had opened in the floor and dwarf and goblins alike plummeted to their death.

The ten had only the protection of the chief on their minds so they continued to slowly fight their way from the battle and, gladly, away from the nasty looking dark hole forming in the ground. Once the large dark creature clawed its way from the pit, the battle was all but forgotten as the goblins ran in every direction. Some dwarves lost heart as well, but many had the presence of mind to stand and fight, easily slaying the fleeing monsters. This made the tens progress faster, as they didn't have to fight as hard to get their chief to safety.

They made their way safely from the battle area and was ushered to a healing area by the quiet, but concerned Splendarr. The ten secured the area as Diamond and Baldar laid Nystramo down for the healers to attend to.

The healers looked grim as they worked on their injured chief, and Diamond sat beside Nystramo, holding his hand and speaking softly. The battle outside was forgotten as Nystramo's health was seen to.

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The Tiger Emerges From: HiuFang Li

"At long last...!!"

Gellkirk the farmer snapped his head up nervously at the sound of the voice, which seemed to come from the very earth which he worked. Eyes trained upon a large clump of bushes not lying far from where he stood, the farmer gripped the large scythe he held, sensing danger. Who in Faerun would come to his little plot of land on the outskirts of Neverwinter? the farmer thought worriedly.

"Quick! Drop me, you stupid dwarf, let me go! I must get home as swiftly as possible.."

Gellkirk jumped at this new voice, which was much more high-strung and rapid than the first one. Losing his fear slightly, he stepped lightly toward the clump, more in curiosity than anything else.

Suddenly, a violent rustling shook the branches of growth, and a funny little man was unceremoniously hurled from the concealing leaves. "'Tis well, 'tis well.. you have done your work. Go, go back to your home," a deeper, richer voice rumbled from within the bushes. The farmer could not help cracking a smile at the sight of the little man, who, judging from the crumpled, pointed hat on his head, the bent and cracked spectacles on his nose, and the dirt-stained rumpled beard falling from his chin, was a very bedraggled and dirty gnome.

Scrambling to his feet in a frenzied fashion, the gnome, hardly noticing the human who stood half-gawking, half-smiling at him, quickly took off in the direction of Neverwinter, muttering expletives as he went along. At this moment, more movement shook the nearby bushes, and another figure emerged from the leaves. His jaw dropping, Gellkirk saw an even stranger sight before him.

It was obviously a dwarf, the cascading beard and stunted, yet

well-muscled frame telling of his race. However, that was not what surprised the farmer. The strangest thing of all was the dwarf's appearance: a subtle smile painted on the little warrior's lips, he dusted off his very queerly-dressed body. Swathed tightly in raven-black cloth which matched the color of his beard, various little knots and tight folds marked the strange garb; however, one could see the effects of the wear-and-tear of hard travels on the clothing, as holes and alarmingly large tears lay wide open all over the cloth. A few blood-tinted bandages also lay wrapped about some of the dwarf's limbs, and a short, black scabbard housing a sword could barely be seen bound to the warrior's back.

With little more than a furtive wink, the dwarf turned away from the farmer's gaze, and sped off in the direction of Neverwinter, the duskiness of twilight painting wierd figures on the dwarf's quickly-disappearing form. He was soon gone without a sound.

Finally daring to blink, Gellkirk the farmer shook his head hard, as if trying to wake up from a dream. Ambling over to the clump of bushes from which the two emerged from, he parted the foliage in curiosity, trying to deduce from where the two had materialized. He received his answer after some moments of searching, as he stared into the pitch-blackness of the small entrance to a cavern. Stagnant drafts of wind, eerily warm, drifted from the yawning mouth, hinting at what might be lurking within....

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Final blow..... From: KAGIS

My arms burn with pain and exhaustion. The creature's clawed hands move with near blinding speed; snapping tight attacks off in rapid succession. I can tell that even the enchantment of Fulcrum will not hold the creature back for long.

Suddenly five goblins ran screaming smack into the creature. The goblins were looking the other way over their shoulders at the troop of dwarves charging them. The unfortunate goblins didn't have time to realize their horrible fate until the monsters claws clamped around two of the goblins; crushing the life from their bodies and leaving terrible mangled corpses where 5 goblins had just stood moments before.

I didn't waste my chance. Pulling out one of the few scrolls I

had left, I quickly called out the mystical symbols needed to complete the spell. I felt its effect immediately... Fulcrum felt lighter in my hands, and everything around me seemed to be moving much slower. As the monster gored the last goblin I gulped the contents of one of two potions I carried on my belt in a speedy movement. I immediately felt my muscles bulge and tighten. I smiled knowing that I now possessed the strength of one of my kin's most hated foes, a Stone Giant. My smile was grim however, because I knew that this only gave me a slightly better chance of living long enough for the drow to complete his spells or whatever it was he was doing. I hope it's something big enough to stop this and the other monsters that have already stepped through the growing portal.

With that last hope and muttered prayer to Moradin for strength I turned back to face off with the monster again. Its evil malevolent eyes fixed on me and there was a glimmer of amused recognition in their black depths. I gulped down my fear and tried to move at the speed I had been moving at earlier. If I can trick the monster into thinking I was still on the defensive and then surprise it I might land a few lucky blows....

The attacks came fast. I intentionally countered slowly, blocking each attack at the absolute last moment. Using my enhanced speed allowed me to watch my opponent more closely. Its attacks were blindingly fast and cunning, but it made no attempt at all to defend itself. The creature obviously thought its tough hide and chitinous plating was impervious to our weapons. It stood three times my own height and most of its attacks were simple downward slashes and hammers, trying to pound me into the ground. I suppressed a shudder that ran through my spine when I envisioned what the outcome of a successful hammering or slashing would do to me.

Fulcrum practically hums in my hands, the closer I get to the monster the more the axe vibrates. I already know the axe would harm the creature, so arming myself with knowledge of the monster's strengths and weaknesses I switched battle tactics.

Instead of trying to stop each blow, I began stepping slightly to one side and angling Fulcrum so the attack would hit Fulcrum's flat side and then slide off to the side. The attacks were coming so fast that the monster didn't even realize I'd changed my defense until it had already gouged massive chunks in the rock floor. Still the monster rained blow after blow down, succeeding only in digging massive furrows to either side

of me. If anything the attacks were coming faster now. A thought occurred to me, "Dis fella only payin' attenschion ta smashin' me...." If I could just move fast enough and time it right. I got down on one knee, holding Fulcrum over my head as if I was tiring. Gathering my legs underneath me, I readied for the right moment. The attacks came on "slash... gouge... hammer... gouge...slash...gouge..... hammer...boom!" The last attack land right on top of where I stood, leaving a tremendous crater in the ground.

Only I no longer stood there. The monster's arm was so large that it couldn't see around it to watch my movements as I sprang forward. I'd used the monster's own arm to cancel my mad spring forward landing in a roll underneath the monster's very feet. Leaping to my feet I turned and brought Fulcrum around in a mighty swing. There was a sickening popping noise as Fulcrum connected with the monster's upper thigh. The swing seemed to slow down as Fulcrum cut through muscle and tendon, but I only bunched my tired muscles and gritted my teeth, putting everything I had into that swing. Suddenly Fulcrum burst through the monster's leg cutting it clean in two and continued on to the other leg. The other leg gave more easily and the monster toppled over on it's face... claws flailing to each side as it roared in pain.

I dizily crawled onto it's back and marched along it's odd spine to the base of it's neck. Hefting Fulcrum in both hands I spat at the monster, "Dis'll teach ya ta come play in our backyard." Down came Fulcrum.

There was a loud crack followed by a tremendous roar. Light blinded my eyes as I felt Fulcrum leave my hands. There was a sense of floating... and it sounded like a little waterfall was nearby. As my eyes cleared I realized with a sinking feeling that I was actually flying through the air. Resisting the urge to wave to my kin along the ground looking up at me in bewilderment I focused my attention of the ground where the monster had fallen. Not much was left, just some smoldering bits and pieces of fetid gore. Among the gore lay Fulcrum, now dull and lustless. A crack ran along the blade of the axe forever ruining the mighty weapon. "Tis a shame," I mumbled and then I hit the ground. "crash!" I thought every bone in my body must be broken, the pain was almost unbearable. My last thoughts before darkness fell over me was, 'how amazing it is to fly the entire length of the cavern back to where MoradinSon's troop were busily killing goblins... wonder if anyone will find

me?' And then darkness fell down around me choaking off my thoughts.

### Kagis Undermount Scout

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Into the Valley of Death.... From: ZYXOS

::: ZYXOS made his way back thourgh the tunnels of the underdark... avoiding anyone or thing that might slow his return  
::: he had his orders from the queen... but it was his Jabbuk he was going to relieve of his command... what had Zorak gotten himself into this time ::::

::: his physical being seemed to thin and passed through the small crevice in the wall... and upon rematerializing ZYXOS found himself once again beside the natural hot springs in the underhalls of Lonely Mount :::

::: with the cloak of darkness about him ZYXOS began to make his way to the main halls where already he could hear the sounds of battle, the howls of the goblins, the singing of the dwarves, the screams of the dying, and..... :::RUMBLE:::::

::: for a moment ZYXOS almost lost his footing as the mountain itself seemed to shake :::

::: ZYXOS stretched forth his senses to locate his Jabbuk... but the Faern's magical probing discovered something much bigger... and much worse :::: finally arriving behind the dwarven lines ZYXOS pulled up short and stared with a mixture of horror and amazement..... a portal to the Abyss.... and ....  
"Tanar'ri!!".... ZYXOS muttered in amazement... and then he saw Zorak....

::: the Alur Faern was charging the portal by himself... but then ZYXOS realized... the others were only fighters... only he was there to support his Jabbuk as a Faern ::::

:::Dwarves and Goblins alike were startled as the Fireballs began to land among them.. killing all in the way.... exploding in firey, burning infernos... leaving none standing that were near ::::

::: ZYXOS dim doored himself as close to his Jabbuk as he dared... not wanting to interfere with whatever Zorak had

planned or might be starting... but beginning his own spells to support Zorak ::::

::: the Drow Sargtlin were startled to see another Jabbuk Faern appear in their midsts... and noting the look in ZYXOS' eyes they redoubled their efforts to keep the dwarves and goblins alike away from Zorak ::::

::: Zorak noted the approaching Dwarves but had to concentrate on his spells against the demon and the portal ::: for only the briefest of moments he was startled as he sensed the presence first... then the barrage of Magic Missiles and Fireballs flew past him and scattered the approaching group of Dwarves to ashes ::::

::: chuckling without looking back the Alur Faern established metal contact with his one time apprentice :::: "Welcome, ZYXOS... about time you decided to get out and earn your keep, young one..."

::: ZYXOS could only laugh aloud.... once again hearing the humor of his Jabbuk ::: the laughter resounded throughout the Halls.... and the two Jabbuk Faerns of the Drow began their assault on the Demon and Rift, leaving the boring hand to hand fighting to the Drow Warriors now surrounding them ::::

ZYXOS Rilynt'tar Dark One of the Drow Jabbuk Faern Rilynt'tar

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The fight at the pit From: Zorak

More demons were clawing their way from the pits with every passing minute. But now that the major Tanar'ri was "distracted" by the insane leaping dwarf, and now that Zyxos stood beside him, Zor'ak actually began to feel as if events might actually be in hand. "I must stop more Tanar'ri from crossing" mumbled the drow. He raised his arms, and began the arcane incantations that would give him power over the portal. "Yoth nul huy'nar al'hrrythbar!" he shouted over the din of battle. The pit rumbled, and a eerie moan issued from its depths as the drow fought for dominion over the pit. Zyxos and the other drow soldiers formed a protective semicircle around Zor'ak, as the ancient wizard stood on the very precipice of hell itself. Flashing blades and sizzling magic kept dwarf, goblin, and demon alike away from the Faern's task.



Storm spotted the contingent of drow in front of the pit. Looking closely, he saw the darkrobed drow wizard gesticulating wildly. What was he doing? Of course! He was summoning another great demon! "By Moradin's beard I has had enow fingerwagglin fer one day. I wont stands fer more!" he spat, and he led his soldiers directly towards the drow. Another dwarven veteren piped up "We has gots ta stop dem darkun elfies from callin up anoder demon! Have at 'em, lads! Show 'em a taste o' dwarven steel!".

Spotting the group of dwarves on an intercept course (how could they move so quickly, he wondered), Zyxos barked out commands to his men. The drow soldiers deployed to stop the mad charge of the dwarves.

Zor'ak finally gained some measure of control over the rift. He had managed to disconnect the other end of the portal, so no further demons could pass through. Now all he had to do was seal off this end...

Dwarf and drow crashed together in a swirl of blades. Moradinson charged the leader of the drow, ready to skewer the elf with his trident. Zyxos, seeing the dwarf coming, had a unpleasant surprise ready. A gout of flame shot from the drow's hands and struck Morad fully in the chest. Howling in pain, Storm rolled to the side, his beard smoking and burning. Another dwarf stepped up to Zyxos and engaged him in hand to hand combat. Storm shook his head to clear his thoughts, and looked around. There was his opportunity! Zyxos had been distracted by the other dwarf's attacks, and there was a break in the drow line. Quick as lightning, Morad was on his feet and diving through the line of drow. "Enow fingerwagglin, darklin!" he cried as he cast his net over Zor'ak.

"Almost...almost..." thought Zor'ak. The pit rumbled and belched, and had by now stopped gouting fire and steam. Then his spellcasting was rudely broken by the casting of the dwarven net. "Noooooooo" screamed Zor'ak, "Noooooooooooo!!!!!!" He felt his control over the rift weaken, then fail. The rift became completely unstable, connecting up randomly with the outer planes. Instead of fighting his assailant, Zor'ak put the last of his energy in a vain attempt to seal this end of the rift...

Storm stabbed the entrapped drow viciously with his trident. The drow buckled and fell to his knees, but still persisted in his spellcasting. "I duz ye a favor now Ye old

festerin boil ta me kin! Ye likes Demons do ye? Go Joins um!" shouted Moradinson as he used the leverage granted by the trident and the net to attempt to toss the drow into the pit. The wizard shouted something in Common at the dwarf, but Morad heard none of it. Morad gave one last effort "Off ye goes!", and put his full force into the blow. Morad's momentum was unstoppable. Both the drow and the dwarf pitched over into the rumbling pit, and disappeared from sight in its depths. The rift shook and rumbled, then began to close slowly.

Zor'ak Alur Faern

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The Bounce That Roared From: Tigguhr

With Dwyvrn missing D1 was in charge of the ten, which made Tigguhr second. Now the bouncer would be the last to question D1's fortitude or command of a situation, but protecting the chief took on an entirely different meaning when it was your betrothed. She has the look of the momma tiger, thought Tigguhr. The jungle dwarf guessed that it would be the place of a number two to suggest a couple of things.

"Whi respec' Lass, I sugges' a outer an inner perimeter ta guards tha chief, I takes tha outer, ye takes tha inner, puttin tha bes' nearest 'im until he waked up." D1 assented, "Haves at it lad, bu' nae too far away. Stays whar I cin sees ya." Tigguhr then suggested further, "We sets up a tha doorway, soes ye cin see us, an tha kin can sees us too." The tiger eyed lass nodded.

Tigguhr motioned for two of the remaining ten to join him. Setting up within view of the battle and D1, he realized that the last thing the kin saw was a fallen leader being carted off. Now, the very denizens of hell were in the mount. There was total mayhem and then Moradinson and a vile drow plummeted into a huge rift. Commanded to go no further, Tigguhr non-the-less saw that the kin needed rallying. He needed to let the kin know that the chief was alive and would fight again!

He had to get their attention by calling to them, but how to make them hear above the din of the battle? How could he get them to pay attention just for the briefest moment to hear a rallying cry? He could think of only one way. Tigguhr called upon an old jungle skill of his forefathers, one that he hoped to never use for fear that it might make him seem strange to the others in his adopted clan.

Tigguhr cleared his throat, sucked in a huge volume of air and bellowed out a huge, "RRROOOAAAAAARRRRRR!", like that of the great jungle cats. "Kin! Be knowin' tha yer chief nae fallin ta any darklin er gobbo this or any day! Fights on ta clears tha mount o this scum!"

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Nae So Fas' Thar Stormy! From: Emmrald

Stuck during most of the battle tending to the little ones, Emmrald heard like everyone else the splitting stone that shook the Mount and heralded the arrival of the demons. Even this didn't sway her from her duty to protect the tiniest of the kin. But then she felt an overpowering feeling that something was terribly, terribly wrong, and her Taerin was involved. "Time ta stop bein' tha nursemaid! Sandstone! I shou' be next ta tha lad!"

Running from the nursery, axe in hand, she barrelled through the back of the dwarven ranks and through a few unlucky goblins. She got as close to the rift as possible, grabbed the nearest kin and said, "Did he go down thar?" The battered and bloodied dwarf had a resigned look on his face, "Aye lass, afraid so."

Emmy hollered down the hole, "Ya nae gittin ou' a the weddin tha way lad!" She then called for a rope, which she tied to the heaviest kin she could find. She then tossed the other end of the rope down the hole. "Gits up here lad and dinna drop me ring!"

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I misses anythin'? From: Nystramo

He was back in the stone cavern of many months ago, where Mysalla first told him of his destiny. "Hrmph!" he muttered. "Nae agin. I thots I done me bit, eh?"

"Har! Nae likely, lad!" he heard behind him. Without bothering to turn he barked, "Blast ye, Mysalla, ya alas gots ta sneaks up on me!?"

His long dead grandmother hopped off of her boulder and approached him. He turned, just in time to see her wink. "Heh. Comes wi' tha territory, lad. We nae gots mu' time, so I makes it quick. Yer kin be in dire need o' ye. Tha darklin's ha' summoned a whole mess o' trouble in yer mount, an' they needs ya

ta inspires 'em. So wakes up and an' gits goin' wi' tha inspirin'!"

Before he could respond, the cave was already fading away.....

\*\*\*\*\* Dimly, he heard the crack of stone, the din of battle, the... roar of a jungle cat? Shaking his head, Nystramo awoke to the face of D1 amond at his side, watching him with concern. He managed a smile and whispered, "Heh, seems we be reversed now, eh taerin?" He added a wink for good measure. D1 grinned back and kissed his forehead, saying "Hrmph! Enou' o' yer lollygaggin' abouts, lad. Fixes me some dinner!"

A loud "HAR!" escaped the chief before he could stop it, causing his side to flair up in pain. The nearby cleric clucked over him, casting another healing spell. "Enou' o' that, chief. Ya nae be in any condition ta be merry!"

Nys chuckled and propped himself up against the stone wall. The Ten that were standing nearby all sighed in relief to see their chief awake and alert, if not exactly bursting with energy. Nystramo nodded to the cleric, "Aye, lad, I dinna thin' I be battlin' anymore giant gobbos fer another few minutes, a' leas'. Now, tells me whats I missed."

Suddenly, everybody was looking grim. D1 summed it up for him as well as she was able. "Tha darklin's ha' summoned a demon throu' a 'uge crack. Kagis wa' battlin' it, an' puttin' up a heroic struggle, bu' now he be down. Storm went af'er it too, an' he tumbled down inta tha hole wi' it. I'm sure'n some o' tha kin be thinkin' ya dead. Lad, it be chaos ou' there."

Grimly, Nys propped himself up. Leaning on Rorn Norogh for support, he went to the mouth of the alcove and looked out. He managed a grin for The Ten gaurding the outer perimeter, but only a quick one. D1's summary had been an understatement. Tiny wars raged all over the cavern. Kin were battling drow, goblins, and minor demons everywhere. All coordination had been lost with the release of the major demon and the seeming loss of their chief and Rrin Kuld. Mysalla was right. They needed a rallying point. Unfortunately, Nys barely had the strength to stand. How could he bring order to this mass of confusion?

Turning back, he saw everyone looking to him for an answer. He had none. The best he could manage was a whispered, "Gordul."

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Desperate situations From: Niord

As I run forward, many things happen at once. Stupid goblins, I fell three of them, barely breaking stride. Well, the undermount scout had the demon, don't ask how, and I could see the smile on his face as he flew through the air, before he connected with the cave wall. Luckily, there was a nice pile of goblin bodies under it, so at least the fall wasn't too bad. But I knew that the wall was less than forgiving, and now another Kin was down for the duration.

I saw ol' Storm charge forward with his band. A good fight with the drow they had, and I smiled as Storm got the better of the drow that was opening the pit. Then they fell in, and I felt a scream rip my throat as I saw him tumble into that hole. The dwarves with Storm faltered, and the drow managed to drive them back.

Then a roar. A loud roar. I looked back, and there was Tigg. I kinda stared at him for a sec, then looked up. Uh oh.... "LOOKS OOT KIN!!!" Yes, Tigguhr got our attention, more so than needed. He started a partial cave in. I was busy dodging for my life, rage when I saw a kin get crushed under a huge boulder. Glee when a stalagmite impaled a demon. Drow, Goblin, and Dwarf ran for the tunnels and caverns for safety. I saw Emmy and another dwarf charge forward to the hole, with Emmy going into it?!?!?! The sudden dropping chunks did not cause nearly as much damage as the fire from the pit did, but it broke the remaining resolve in all out there, save for one Drow, who was still waggling his fingers.

I ran at him, ready to skewer him, but I noticed his concentration, and also the hole in the ground was closing. Could the darkie actually be trying to CLOSE the hole they made??? I will probably never forgive myself for what I did next, but a huge rock was falling, would have landed right on his head, but I finished my charge, and with a mighty swing, my axe connected with the rock over Zyxos's head, the shrieking of steel and stone meeting, and the stone finally gave away, half of it falling to either side of the drow. My ears rang, but I was slightly amused at the look the drow gave me before continuing his spells.

A howl cut short. I looked at the pit. The demons either had

retreated down the hole or were smashed by falling rocks. That is when I saw the dwarf crushed under the rock, the one that was holding Emmy. I ran forward, the rope was breaking, falling down the hole! I dropped my axe, needing my only good arm to grab the rope. I dove for it, seeming like an eternity. Got it! >SNAP< It broke, and I found myself sliding towards the hole! Quick, had to think quick. I rolled forward, letting the rope wrap around me. Tying it tight around my waist, just as I reached the edge. Nothing to grab hold of....I started falling into the hole. By Morad, massive root in the ground. I grabbed it desperately, wrapping my arm around it, gritting my teeth, and prying to Morad for all the strength I would need. That is when I saw the sword finally fall down the hole.....and what I thought was the faint echo of a scream from down below a few seconds later.....

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Mom always said-Nae in tha house From: Tigguhr

Tigguhr was shocked at the effect of his roar. "Ya dun gone an' caused trouble agin, lad," he thought. "Nae wonders mamma nae let's me practice roarin' inside!" The bouncer grew very concerned at kin being hurt by the falling rock. It appeared that a few had been crushed. Hopefully things weren't as bad as they appeared. Regardless, he stuck to his post. No one was getting to the chief.

Tigguhr glanced over his shoulder at Nystramo, looking for a new inspiration. He was standing! But he sure wasn't saying much....

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Har...!ow I gits 'ere From: Niord

Morad's trap, spells flying everywhere, hellfire and quakes, no wonder the dang roof was falling. And how the heck did I get here? I found a ledge to get footing on, so now I was anchoring the rope. Still got my arm wrapped on the root. I am a mere foot from the opening, not far at all. Oh boy. Now what? Someone has to go down and find out what is happening. The rocks have stopped falling.....

Well, I did the only logical thing...."Sumun gits o'er 'ere an 'elps!"

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The Darkness Withdraws From: ZYXOS

::: Grappling with the accursed dwarf had taken just long enough to allow the breach in the lines ::: slamming his hammer upon the shield of the dwarf was enough of a distraction that the magic missile from ZYXOS' incantation tore into the chest of the dwarf and threw him back into his comrades ::: spinning back to the Rift, ZYXOS was horrified to see that Zorak had not only been impaled on the trident of a charging dwarf but they were both pitching into the rift and disappearing from sight ::::

ZYXOS received a last mental link with Zorak instructing him to start closing the rift from the surface for he was disconnecting the rift from below... Zorak and the dwarf would be trapped on another plane... but no further demons would be able to escape the Abyss as the surface rift was sealed.

The battle had degenerated into many small skirmishes, individuals doing whatever they could to protect themselves... attack the nearest enemy... or figure out what was going on. ::: casting the spells Zorak had advised him of, ZYXOS began to feel a give in the rift... and it slowly began to close ::: he tried to ignore the female dwarf yelling down the hole.. .another roaring like a wounded Hookhorror in the Underdark.... still another yelling about something called a Nystramo :::

::: his primary concern became the dwarf now running at him with axe held high... but he could not stop his casting now... Zorak might have given his life to allow this one opportunity to save the Material Plane from the disaster now awaiting to befall it :::

::: the rift continued to close as the remaining Drow Sargtlin did what they could to keep the dwarves and goblins alike away from their one remaining Faern, but that one dwarf had gotten through ::::

\*\*\*\*\* C R A C K\*\*\*\*\*

::: suddenly stones fell to either side of ZYXOS and he glanced at the dwarf staring at him with half surprise and half uncertainty :::: he had saved ZYXOS from a falling stone :::: the blood red eyes narrowed questioningly... wondering if the Dwarves actually were smart enough to have seen what he was doing ::: but quickly going back to his concentration on the rift ::::

::: the Dwarf then hurtled past him... running for the female yelling down the rift, but now in danger of falling in herself  
::: and the rift continued to close ::: the dwarf almost reached her when when the ropes began to give way.. now both were in danger of plummeting into the rift... but the rift continued to close :::

::: it seemed that the sounds of battle began to fade..... the dwarves were beginning to rush to assist those that were in danger of going into the rift ::: the goblins were still trying to fight but without leadership were denerating into a mindless mass of fear and pain ::: a few though were trying to stop the rift from closing.. wanting to retrieve the sword ::: the Drow Warriors were quickly killing any goblin that tried to reach ZYXOS as he continued his incantations... and the rift continued to close :::

::: the dwarf had secured a hold on a massive root.... and was desperately trying to reach the female ::: THE ROOT GAVE WAY!!  
::: the two of them started tumbling toward the rift.... \*\*\*\*\*  
CARRRUMMMPPPPPP \*\*\*\*\* ::: the rift closed and the two dwarves went rolling over the now sealed and secured stone :::::

::: ZYXOS fell to his knees in exhaustion ::: the infuriated goblins rushed towards him ::: a flurry of deadly handheld poisoned cross bow bolts from the Drow Warriors cut them down  
::: one Sargtlin rushed to ZYXOS and assisted him to his feet.... there were dead Dwarves, Drow, and Goblins strewn about the cavern... but it was obvious the remaining Drow were now greatly outnumbered, discovered, and exhausted :::::

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::: with the few heal spells still remaining, ZYXOS quickly brought the remaining Drow back to the point they could defend themselves and begin their withdrawl :::

:::Globes of darkness suddenly fell over the Dwarven Troops



cutting off the goblin army from the few remaining Hammer Corps.... another fell over the opening to the small alcove where the Dwarven Chief had appeared... and a final one fell over the path of retreat back to the Hot Spring Cavern deep in the Dwarven underhalls ::::

::: taking their commands from the Jabbuk Faern in the intricate Drow sign language, the Drow warriors began an ordrely move through the globe of darkness ::: there were a few Dwarves and many goblins trying to block their way... but most were avoided and a few descimated by the magic and weapons of the Drow now intent upon returning for their report to the Queen :::: Zorak had greatly underestimated the resourcefulness of the Dwarves... but he had saved the Underdark from the potential threat of the InterPlanier Rift::::

::: the move was steady... and finally the Drow found themselves in the open tunnels of the Dwarven Underhalls and quickly made their way to the Hot Springs ::: without hesitating the warriors made for the crack in the stone wall.. and as each approached ZYXOS' magic moved them through the crack and into the Underdark ::::

::: finally on their home ground... the Drow formed up and began the journey back to Rilauven..... but ahead was seen a messenger.... specifically seeking the Jabbuk ZYXOS:.....

<signed for the final time as> ZYXOS Rilynt'tar Dark One of the Drow Jabbuk Faern Rilynt'tar

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What the 'Ell? From: DoozerVee

Duzerentin Vendemir - late of the city/mountain Andamon and the Dragonspine Mountains - trudged endlessly through the UnderDark, as he had for the last three months. His keen darkvision swept continuously along the walls and ceilings of the passage he was currently transiting, noting every shadowed crevice, ledge and overhang. His mind was operating on two levels - only a small alert portion was on the dark, silent world about him. The majority of his cosciousness continued a months-old diatribe directed at his father. "Aye, ye c'n call me younglin all ye wish, but ye canna forget that th' Sovereign was makin' tracks on th' Glory Road when he were but a bare-chinned tyke o' 44! I

be as doughty and able as he e'er were, an' more years under me belt te boot! I'll be showin' th' folk back home, mark me words! Soon's I reach Waterdeep, I'll be hitchin' a ride on th' first 'jammer off'n Toril, an' then stand by, fer th' Spheres'll be fearin' th' name DoozerVee, an' no mistake!! Why, when I makes me fortune I'll - " DoozerVee's internal dialogue was rudely interrupted by a quaking in the tunnel around him. Chunks of the elemental rock which composed the halls of the UnderDark fell about him as he struggled to keep his feet. The tremor passed as quickly as it had come, but the young dwarf's hackles raised in its wake as a sudden gust of air brought a hint of a scent which chilled him to the bone. "What the 'EII? Me nose's tellin' me Daemonkin're about! " His heart began pounding.

DoozerVee tried to calm his racing heart and quell the memories of the Devilqueen Tiamat's attack on Andamon two years before. He forced himself to confront the problem at hand. Now the sounds of battle could be discerned from several of the black tunnels surrounding him. Unearthly cries, screams and the unmistakable sound of dwarven-forged steel echoed about him. Dwarf-kin! "If'n Dwarves be battlin' Daemonkin, then they'll be needin' every blade they c'n muster!" Without another thought he charged toward the mouth of a tunnel from which issued the loudest clangor. He had been running for only a few moments when a terrible roar again shook the very bones of the earth around him. Almost immediately the first Unhumans tore up the passage toward him. With a thrill of fear and excitement he took his stance and readied his axe. The goblins however took no more notice of him than they would a stalagmite in the center of the tunnel, parting around him like a river of stinking flesh. DoozerVee was astounded, but if they were going to ignore him, he was going to get on to the REAL battle - with the demons! Gripping the axe he had "borrowed" from his tyrant Paater, he forged ahead.

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BANZAI!!! From: DoozerVee

The sight that greeted the young dwarf's eyes was a scene from the lowest pits of Hell; bodies of dwarves were interspersed with those of goblins and creatures he recognized instantly as drow elves. Shattered rock still fell intermittently from above in the cavern, which was lit with a pulsing red glow. Knots of fighting were scattered about, and the stench of Daemonkind hung heavy in the heated air. As

DoozerVee watched, the glow diminished and the cavern shook once more as the deep crunch of grinding rock echoed. For a moment, it seemed as if everything stopped, and an eerie silence fell; then, the hue and cry of battle rung out once more. Duzerentin cast about for a place to throw himself into the fray, or some beleaguered dwarf in need of help. Suddenly, a hand grasped his shoulder and a voice rang in his ear, speaking Dwarven with a peculiar accent. "Fash, boy, dinna stand there like a gawky-eyed chile! Picks yersel' some goblins er darklins an' lay en out! Th' chief's nae dead, an' we has te clear out these halls ere they become like rats an' vanish in tha woodwark!" The armored dwarf didn't wait for a reply, but waded gleefully into a melee with three terrified goblins. DoozerVee shrugged and followed, firmly gripping his axe.

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Gaglug's retreat From: Gaglug

The goblin army had completely disintegrated. There were still pockets of fighting goblins, but all order had been lost. Gaglug vainly waved his arms, attempting to use his powers. Unfortunately for the shaman, the psychic energy that was feeding him had disappeared. The energy came from the united minds of the goblin horde. Now that the horde had been dissolved, so had the shaman's powers. Realizing that all was lost, Gaglug took to his heels along with the rest of his comrades. The crazed shaman disappeared back into the deep tunnels. Mumbling and talking to himself, he began his plotting. He would rebuild the goblin army, oh yes. He would once again wield the mighty power. It was rightfully his. He would be back. And next time, he would be better prepared.

Mighty Gaglug, Dwarf-Ripper and Troll-Eater Shaman of the Goblins

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...falling... From: Zorak

Time seemed to stretch out into an indeterminate blur. As he fell, Zor'ak sensed that Zyxos was indeed finishing his work. The rift would be closed. The threat to the Underdark had been removed. The drow and the dwarf continued their falling. The ancient wizard could only wonder where they would end up. In the confusion, Zor'ak had re-aligned the rift. But to where? In his haste, the wounded drow had attempted to connect the interplanar rift with another world on the Prime Material...but

had he succeeded? They would soon find out....

Zor'ak Alur Faern

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Tired! Nae! From: Tigguhr

Tigguhr looked around the battle field, drow retreating, kin toppled over, gobbo heads rollin' around loose.

It got very quiet (for a change!) "Ya all be tuckered ou' after tha battle so's ya nae got anythin ta says?? Suren ya dinna wants tha bouncer ta be fillin' tha gap do ya know? Thar only be trouble! Ya dinna wants me comin up whi a new plot twist do ya?"

(can't help it-two days without a post? Oh well, we all gotta recharge sometime!)

Tigguhr 3rd o' tha 10 Jungle Dwarf Gap Filler

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The Fog of Battle Lifts... From: DoozerVee

The young dwarf gazed about the cavern at the carnage and felt a sense of bitter disappointment, mixed with a dash of relief. It appeared that the battle was over; goblins were still scurrying into the shadows, but the only Dark elves left were dead ones, and there were no signs of the Daemonkin that had surely been here only moments ago. A hand gripped his shoulder and turned him about. A grizzled dwarven face peered at him through the disordered red locks hanging in its eyes. "Well, lad, yer not from tha Peak, then, are ya?" A hint of suspicion crept into his face and he gripped his axe tighter. "Ye'd best be splainin yersel', or by th beard o th' Forger, I'll be cleavin' yer from crown ta toes!"

DoozerVee spoke hastily, hands up in a sign of peace. "Beggin' yer pardon, lordship but I was travellin th' Darkways an' heard the sound o' battle, an' could hear th' ring o steel forged by th' People, so I bethought meself te throw in wi' ye, fer good or ill. I means no harm, an' crave only yer patience wi' me, who is but a stranger t'yer lands."

The warrior relaxed a bit, then spoke softly. "Aye, laddie, enow o' me brethren lie still as stone in this here Doomcave,

so's I be right glad ta welcome ya t' the Lonely Peak. I be Tigguhr, Kuldmorndin o' Clan Axepeak, an' temp'rary Warchief, as well, it seems. Would 'twere more peaceable circumstance I could greet ya in, but ye takes what ye gets I guess. Come wi' me laddie, an' watch me back whilst I makes da rounds o' the wounded. We ken observe formal stuff later." Heart beating hard, DoozerVee followed the grizzled, weary veteran as he began the sad task of tallying the grim results of the day's carnage.

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The End of The Beginning From: Nystramo

Nystramo stood watching it all. The drow forces withdrawing and making their escape, the last remnants of the goblin force being cut down as they ran, the rest of the minor demons either being destroyed or disappearing into the shadows for the time being. Amazingly, it was all coming to an end.

Every now and then, it seemed, Tigguhr would look his way for direction. Oddly enough, though, Nys saw that there was nothing to direct. Everything was being taken care of. His kin understood mopping up very well indeed. And it was a good thing, too. Nys was in no condition to lead right now.

His side still ached from his battle with the goblin chieftan, and his mind reeled from what he had seen. He still had trouble accepting it. Moradinson, plunging into the gaping hole with the drow.... and the hole closing behind him. Storm was gone.

Storm was gone. And Dwyvyrn was still missing. And HiuFang Li had not returned from his mission into the Underdark, and nothing had been heard from him either. And Starkadh had left the mount ages ago, and nobody had any idea where he had gone (but it certainly wasn't where Nys had asked him to go, it seemed). And Patroclus was off on yet another mysterious journey. And Heese simply wasn't herself when the Scowler was away.

"Gordul," he muttered as he surveyed the cavern. Dead kin lay everywhere, and the count of the wounded was staggering. Shattered stonework littered the floor, and he was certain that most of the mount would need to be repaired in one way or another. (Baldar Hmr, it seemed, was going to be leaving his apprenticeship earlier than he had expected, with Moradinson gone.) Victory notwithstanding, Clan Axepeak had met with a disaster of tremendous proportions. Rebuilding would not be an

easy task.

"An' I be alone ta see over it," he said. A hand touched his shoulder, then. He turned to see Diamond looking at him with a serious expression. "Ya nae be alone, lad. Ya has ne'er been alone, an' ya ne'er will be."

He looked from his taerin, to the remainder of The Ten standing around him (not quite ten now, he thought grimly), to the faces of all of his kin already hard at work to repair what had been damaged. No, he thought, he wasn't alone. Nobody was alone in Lonely Mountain. Ever.

"Gordul," he swore again. But this time he said it with a touch of wonder.

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The pains of war... From: KAGIS

A tough thick hand seems to materialize out from underneath a pile of rubble. After several moments of clearing away debris, Kagis stumbles from the pile.

"Har!" Clutching my side in pain I realize that several ribs, and at least my left arm are broken. "Durn beast done deals som' nasty blows." I manage to walk over to the spot where the beast fell, and retrieved Fulcrum. A long rent flawed its once shiny blade. I pick up the axe in my right hand, and whisper to it, "Ya done well Fulcrum." Thinking that perhaps the blade might one day be reforged I stumbled back over toward the fore of the cavern where Nys stands with Di at his side.

Nys raises an eyebrow at my staggering approach, "Lad... shoul' ye be up an' 'bout?"

Di just clucked at me as she shook her head.

"It's nae pro'lem chief..." I wince as the pain in my side throbs. Lifting up my left hand in my right, I nod toward the ring still wrapped warmly around my finger. "Me Axe been torn, and me family armor's nae more. But I still gots me papy's ring o' re'gen'ration. Give me a few days ta racoop... recooop... err.. rest, an' I'll be back ta me old self."

Nys smiles, "Take yer time lad, there'll be plenty of work for ya when yer ready and fit."

Through the pain, I stand tall, nod my head to Di and then salute Nys, my chief. Then turning I stagger back to my room to rest and wait for the ring to finish my healing.

Kagis Undermount Scout

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Time for a breath From: Niord

Niord lay there on the ground where the crevace was only moments before. He was so intent on maintaining a hold on the rope he didn't notice Emmrald come back up it. She lay there, out of breath, and the pain of losing Storm clearly evident. There is nothing I can do for her ;(

I survey the cavern. It is enough to make a grown dwarf want to cry. Dead goblins, drow, and kin lay all over. Some places, the bodies are two and three high. The number of wounded is staggering, and even the proudest of us have suffered their losses. After everything else...it is too much to bear. I silently lay back and let the comforting darkness of unconsciousness overtake me...

Niord Thunderstrike

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Pellera?? Pel????!! From: Kheldoar

::: there had been nothing heroic in his actions....there were no great stories to be told.... he was but a warrior and had done a warrior's duty :::

Kheldoar was battered and bruised.... there was blood on his armor... whether his or drow or goblin, no one could be sure....the ebony shield of his Pap had been battered and dented, but it had done it's job and he was still alive.

Anyone watching him would see that he seemed to wander aimlessly... but his eyes were scanning every crevice and nook in the great hall.... he used his fork to move the dead bodies where they were piled on top of each other... occasionally a wounded kin was found and a healer was summoned.

There was no spring to his step as one normally saw... he could have been bleeding beneath his armor.. but there was no sign of

it as Kheldoar continued what seemed to be an endless quest and searching in the great hall and surrounding caverns.

Finally he moved past D1 and Nys close enough that they could see a vacant look in Khel's eyes as he wandered.... and he was mumbling ..... a lost and lonely mumble....

Upon seeing the female form standing beside his chief... Khel hesitated only slightly to look at the female Dwarf there... and there was only a moment of hope in his eyes.....

"Pel ?" ..... ::but it was his Chief's lass... and she cared for him and he was holding her:::

D1 and Nys looked at Kheldoar.... and understood as only a female and male in love, and caring for each other could understand..... and they saw the vacant look return to Kheldoar's eyes as he turned to continue his lost and lonely search ::::: "Pellera?" was the plaintive cry they heard coming from his lips.....

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Aftermath From: DIAMOND 2

Diamond stood with Nystramo as the battle came to an end. Kin were busy uncovering bodies and tending to the wounded. The dead were quietly carried to a small cavern off to the side of the battle site and moans and cries of grief could be heard echoing from that direction. The occasional scream of terror could be heard when the search party rooted out another hiding goblin and did away with it.

With each passing minute, Nystramo leaned heavier and heavier on D1's supporting arm. Seeing that all of the real threats were gone, she quietly whispered to her taerin, "If'n ye'll nae lay down an' rest, at least ye cin sit down."

Too tired to speak, Nys nodded. D1 asked a passing lad to bring the chief a chair to sit in. The lad quickly brought back a chair and D1 helped Nys sit, and made sure he was comfortable. Handing him an ale, she squatted down in front of the chair and asked, "Ye ok fer now me lad?" ::nod:: "I has ta go an' find me sis. Ye understands if'n I nae stands by yer side fer a bit?"



"I understands, me lass, yer sister be needin' ye rite now too."

Giving him a quick kiss, D1 stood again and charged the ten that still stood nearby to take care of him. She scanned the room and saw that Emmy was still standing in the same spot, staring at the ground. D1 made her way over to her grieving sister and wrapped her arm around her shoulder.

Emmrald was muttering and apparantly in shock. "Gettin' married next week. Had ta gets yerself burried." D1 tried to pull her away from the spot where the rift had closed, but Emmrald stubbornly refused to be moved and continued to talk to the ground.

D1 grabbed each side of Emmy's face and turned it so that Em was looking into her eyes. "Ye needs ta rest, sis. Don't be thin'in tha' a large rift inta tha abyss itself'll put a stop ta yer taerin. He too stubborn ta die tha' easy."

Emmrald's haunted eyes looked back at her sister's. D1 amond pulled her sister into her arms and gave her a long gentle hug, then slowly guided her back across the room.

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Aftermath From: DoozerVee

Duzerentin felt a horrible chill run down his spine. The sense of deja vu was so overwhelming he almost fell to his knees: The devastation was almost exactly what had happened to his homeland, the glorious mountain/city Andamon; the only thing missing was the bodies of human and elven defenders mixed in with those of the dwarves, and the signs of dragon attacks. Even the grief of the two females nearby staring at the ground where the chasm had been was dreadfully familiar. His father had gazed at the pile of rubble which had taken his mother in just such a manner. He knew that at least a few of the warriors of this clan had vanished into the maw of the earth which had been open here so short a while before - much the same as Captain Mistknell's fiancee had been kidnapped from the Great Library by the minions of Tiamat. His hatred of Daemonkin grew by leaps and bounds as he gazed once more on the havoc the denizens of the Lower Planes were wont to wreak on the hapless citizens this one. Suddenly a howl built up and exploded from his lips, ringing stridently from the walls of the cavern. "BY THE BEARDS OF THOR AND REORX, I'LL NOT SUFFER DAEMONKIN T'BREATHE TH' AIR O' MY HOME PLANE NO MORE!! IF'N E'ER YE COME

NEAR ME, SPAWN O' HELL, I'LL BE HANDIN' YE YER HEADS AS MEMENTOS O' YER MEETIN' WI' ME!!" Shaking with emotion, DoozerVee sank to his knees as the dwarves nearby gazed at him in shock. Overcome by grief - old and new, owned and shared - he was past caring.

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More aftermath From: Emmrald

As D1amond slowly, gently guided her sister across the cavern, she felt Emmrald suddenly turn and break out of her comforting embrace. Sobbing, Emmy beat her axe against the stone floor where the chasm had opened.

"Open up, ye filthy demons! I wants me Taerin! Ye cin nae keeps me frum him!", she screamed, striking again and again until sparks and chips of stone flew around her. She continued chopping at the stone and yelling until she dropped to her knees exhausted. When her rage subsided (and her axe lost most of its edge), D1amond put a hand on Emmrald's shoulder. Emmy looked up at her sister with tear-filled green eyes. "I gots ta git me Taerin back, Sis, I gots ta.."

D1amond sighed heavily as she put her arm around her sister and guided her once more back to their kin. "Ye will, Emmy, ye will" she whispered, "It wou' take more'n a pack o' demons ta keeps tha' stubborn lad down thar."

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Subj: Standin Firm (sorta) Date: 95-04-11 22:04:00 EDT From: Tigguhr

There were no more foes to fell, so tha bouncer stopped still. Looking left and then right he saw far fewer than ten and not many officers left. Still, he had his duty. Looking over to where the rift had been, he saw the two sisters grieving and consoling each other. He saw the chief slumped in his chair, but with a grim, determined, almost heartened look in his eyes.

Tigguhr hauled himself over to stand next to the chair that Nys sat in. He took up his post once again. With honor and dignity, he guarded his chief.

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The Lost Patrol Returns From: Dwyvyrn

(Subtitled: Jeb Stuart arrives at Gettysburg)

Gilgina glanced sidelong at Dwyvyrn as the two dwarves raced along with the young fighter Nalvor toward a large cavern where they knew their kin must be battling the goblin army. Her eyes narrowed slightly as she considered the change that had come over Dwyvyrn recently. After the fight with the goblin chieftan, their subsequent rescue by Niord, and the collapse of the tunnels beneath the Mount, Dwyvyrn had seemed in a daze. Since then had led them on a wandering ramble through the now somewhat random series of tunnels that led back to the halls of the clan. Frequently he had turned in the wrong direction, only to mutter, "Hmmm..rite ye is lass," when Gilgina pointed out the correct path to him.

That had all changed now. As the stench of the goblin armies increased, so too did Dwyvyrn's energy. He began to increase their pace, and decide more quickly and positively as to the correct route to take in pursuit of the goblin armies. His return to form was complete the moment they saw the first goblin running down the corridor toward them. Dwyvyrn's axe was out in a heartbeat and he charged the foul creature, cutting it cleanly in two before it even had a chance to scream. They had been running at a full sprint ever since, pausing only momentarily to slay any goblins who had the bad fortune of choosing this tunnel to flee from the epic battle with Clan Axepeak in the cavern ahead.

Dwyvyrn and his companions ran untiringly, possessed by the urge to get into the fray alongside the members of their clan. So possessed were they that they failed to notice the slippery goblin shaman who ducked silently into the shadows of a small alcove as the battle-hungry dwarves lumbered by.

At last they rounded a bend and the entrance to the cavern came into view. The shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying assaulted their ears, and the putrid odor of something not of this plane assaulted their noses, but nothing could possibly have prepared them for the sight that assaulted their eyes as they came to the small ledge where the passage opened up into the cavern.

The battle was over, that much was clear. However, the carnage that remained was almost unfathomable. Dwyvyrn skidded to a stop as he looked out over the cavern. Everywhere he turned, the floor of the vast underground cave was covered by

bodies--goblin bodies, dwarven bodies, drow bodies, even the bodies of otherworldly creatures littered the stone bottom of the cavern. The whole surface seemed to writhe as the many dwarves and goblins who were down but not quite dead struggled to find help or perhaps to just get clear of the battle. Amidst this squirming mass walked several small groups of dwarves, tending to the wounded kin and finishing off any goblins who still breathed.

Dwyvyrn recovered from his initial shock as an armed group of five dwarves clambered up toward the tunnel behind him, obviously intending to chase down any fleeing goblins. "This tunnel be clear lads, heads o'er dat way," Dwyvyrn said as he waved the kin toward the next passage branching off from the cavern. He then turned to his two kin, who were still gaping at the scene before them, and said, "Let's heads down dere an' see wots we can does, kin."

The three dwarves began carefully picking their way down toward the area where the main battle had taken place. They paused momentarily as they heard a rasping voice choke out, "Dwy, be dat ye lad?" Turning, they saw a dwarf tucked into a crevice high along the cavern wall.

"Thorug!" Dwyvyrn called, immediately recognizing the battlerager he had fought beside so many times. He scrambled up to get beside his kin, with Gilgina and Nalvor following close behind. They immediately saw the grave condition the battlerager was in. His left leg was completely severed, and the rest of his body was twisted oddly and wedged into the niche in the cavern wall. Gilgina set to work right away tending the wounds, and Dwyvyrn reached down to carefully remove the battlerager's helmet.

"Wots happened to ye, kin?" a shocked Nalvor asked, only to be silenced by a withering scowl from Dwyvyrn.

Thorug managed a weak "Har!" before a coughing fit overtook him.

Once that passed, he began to quietly recount the events that brought him to this spot. "I charged one o' dem foul demonspawn, bu' da critter scooped me up wi' its mangy paws. Da jargh thin' bit me leg off!" The dwarf paused for a moment and chuckled, then continued. " I s'pose da creature nae liked da way me tasted, cuz'n he threw da res' o' me up 'ere."

Dwyvyrn looked down at his samman and forced a smile onto his

face. He clasped a hand on Thorug's shoulder (since it was about the only part of the battlerager's body that seemed relatively unscathed) and said, "Well'n kin, dinnae werries yeself. Gilgina 'ere wi' has ye up an' fitin' agin' in nae time." He hoped to Moradin that his words sounded more confident than he felt.

"Nae kin," Thorug responded, "I nae thinks so. Me hears Clangeddin callin' an' he be tellin' me I has fought me las' battle." Here Thorug's features took on a calmer set, and despite the obvious pain he was in the smile that came to his lips was sincere as he looked up into Dwyvyrn's eyes. "Bu' wots a battle it were, Dwy! Me wishes ye cou' ha'e seen it. Goblins, dark elfies, an' e'en dem creatures from da bowels of'n odder planes! A gran' battle indeed, wots wi' be sung of fer ages to come. Aye, a fine battle....Ye shou' ha'e been dere...." Here Thorug's voice trailed off, and the ragged heaving of his chest turned to stilled silence.

"Nae speaks li' dat, kin!" Dwyvyrn urged, shaking the battlerager's shoulder gently in a futile attempt to revive him. Dwyvyrn began shaking more violently, but then felt Gilgina's hand close over his to stop him. He looked up at the priestess, but she only shook her head and looked down dejectedly. As Gilgina removed her hand from Dwyvyrn's to close Thorug's eyes for the last time, Dwyvyrn rose and slowly started walking away. Gilgina and Nalvor busied themselves removing Thorug's body from the crevice and so did not notice Dwyvyrn as he wandered off onto the battlefield.

Dwyvyrn trudged along as if in a daze, his eyes unfocused as he picked his way among the dead and dying. Several kin called out as they recognized him, but he took no notice as he continued to make slow progress toward the far side of the cavern and passages which led to the clan halls. His ears were filled with the dying words of his kin:

"Ye shou' ha'e been dere..... Ye shou' ha'e been dere.....  
Ye shou' ha'e been dere..... Ye shou' ha'e been dere....."

Dwyvyrn Clan Axepeak

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Aftermath: Baldar's POV.. From: Baldar Hmr

Baldar looked about the area with a mixture of shock and suprise

on his face. Never had the young dwarven warrior been in such a fierce battle. Bodies were stacked like cordwood and blood ran like rivers in the dwarven Hall. As he surveyed the carnage, the enormity of the situation threatened to overwhelm him, and he simply sat down on the floor with a dull 'thud'. This had been no jovial outing with his kin, laughing and singing, whilst slaying whatever dark denizens they came across in the realms. This had been WAR, a WAR TO THE DEATH, and both sides had paid the price. Only half of the Ten still breathed, as far as Baldar could see; and scores of dwarven regulars lay still on the battlefield. He glanced over to one side and saw Emmrald, grief-stricken, clawing at the spot where Storm had vanished into the rift with the Drow wizard. Diamond, her sister, was comforting her as best she could, but even she had a faraway, vacant stare in her eyes. Baldar's heart was gladdened thou, to see Nystramo sitting in a chair near the edge of the main battlefield. 'At least I did me job, and helped keep tha Chief alive', thought the young warrior. 'Wot tha 'ell I gunna do now?', thought Baldar, as he mused on the fact that his mentor, Storm Moradinson, was missing. Baldar gave a silent prayer to Moradin to keep watch over the Dwarven Hero, wherever he wound up. Looking up from his thoughts, Baldar spied Dwyvryn entering the main chambers and rose to meet with the First Axe and ask for his orders...

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Get's ta Bed! From: DIAMOND 2

Diamond consoled her grieving sister as they made their way from the battle site. DI knew her sister needed some clerical tending, so she took her to the small alcove tha' was now almost filled with wounded. She noticed Splendarr helping one of the clerics and called out to her.

"Splendar lass, cin ye comes an' give me a hand wit me sis. She be in shock and sick wit grief. Mayhap we cin find her a blanket and some ale."

Splendarr looked at Emmrald with compassion, "Alright lass, we have a room set up further back for the recoverin'. I'll takes your sister back there and sits with her if'n ye like?" The question was directed at Emmrald.

The thought of an ale or twenty got Emmy's attention and she agreed to let Splendarr help her to the recover'n cavern.

With here sister taken care of for now, D1 went back out to where Nys was sitting, to find Dwyvyrn talking quietly to his chief. Ignoring that the two were having a conversation, she grabbed Dwyvyrn and gave him a big hug. To which, of course, he said, "Ach! Nae lass!" and started squirming, but with a grin on his face.

"It be so good ta see's ye alive lad," D1amond said with a grin, thrilled tha one less of her kin was dead. She held him and arms length and looked him over. "How ye holdin' up lad?"

His grin fell from his face, "Fisically, I be fit enuff, but me heart be sick ta nae have bin here fer tha battle and ta see's such lose."

D1amond looked grim and quickly wiped a tear from her eye. She looked over at Tigguhr, who was standing near by and yelled, "Don't just stand there lad! Can't ye see tha' these two nae has any ale?!" Tigguhr jumped at D1's words, then bounced off to get some ale.

D1 looked from Nystramo to Dwyvyrn, then to Nys again. "It seems, me lad, ye has two choices here." Both of the lads looked confused, so D1 continued to explain, "Ye cin let's Dwyvyrn takes command o thing fer a bit, whilst we git ye ta yer bed fer some restin' and recoverin'. Er, Dwy cin still takes charge o' thin's and I cin stands here an' wait fer ye ta pass out from injury an' exhaustion. Then has ye dragged back ta yer bed. Whut'll it be me taerin?"

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Even kings must sleep From: Nystramo

Nys was overjoyed when Dwyvyrn approached him, alive and well. Finally, a bright spot in this darkest of days! After a warm and enthusiastic reunion, they fell to talking. After a few moments, Nys understood the haunted look in the eyes of one of his oldest friends.

"I shou' ha been 'ere, Nys," he growled. "I shou' ha' been battlin' a' yer side!"

"Ye did wha' ye could, Dwy. Nae one cou' ha' done more, an' it seems ya did yer share o' damage ta 'em afore they gots ta us. Tha' may ha' made tha diffrence 'tween victr'y an' defeat." The words were sincere, but he knew they were scant comfort to the

First of The Ten. His role was to battle at his chief's side, and he was not able to do that when the time came. Nys knew it could not have been avoided; even Dwyvyrn knew it could not have been avoided, he was sure. Unfortunately, knowledge was a weak defense against a gnawing conscience.

A voice interrupted them. "Chief! It be Dorgan." Nys and Dwy turned to see the body of the newest of The Ten being carried respectfully by several kin. His armor was shredded in places, and his morning star broken at the haft. Nys remembered the grimly efficient warrior as he cut his way through goblins and stood his ground firmly in battle with the Hammer Warriors. Nys could scarcely believe he was dead. "Fell ta a demon, Olor Kuld," one kuldar informed him. "Tha beast wa' tryin' ta get ta ya, I thinks. Dorgan took 'em down ta saves ya, bu' gave 'imself ta does it."

Another kin added, "Aye chief. He done Tha Ten proud."

Dwyvern's head snapped up at that. "Tha Ten? When di' Dorgan becomes one o' Tha Ten?" he demanded.

Nys paused a moment, but knew he had to tell Dwyvyrn the truth. He respected his friend too much to do otherwise. "He wa' takin' yer place, lad," he replied quietly. Never before had he had such difficulty answering a question.

Dwyvyrn seemed about to say something, but then Diamond appeared from nowhere and buried the First Axe in a powerful hug. When she suggested that Nys take a break for a bit and put Dwyvyrn in charge, he felt the weariness overcome him and agreed.

"Aye lass. There nae be any I'd be trustin' more wi' me kin than Dwy."

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In Thanks From: Nystramo

The End.... for now \*\*\* OOC

I'd like to thank everyone who jumped in and got involved with the story of the war between The Temple of Lolth and Clan Axepeak. It clearly isn't over yet (you don't think Moradinson is going to STAY down there, do you? ;D), but it is the end of



the beginning. Call it an overture. ;)

First of, my sincerest thanks to Jhaelryna for agreeing to help out with the story. Clearly, this could never have happened without her participation. Also, thanks to Zyxos and Zorak, a creative pair of drow if ever I met any.

Thanks to Dwyvyrn, Moradinson, D1amond 2, Emmrald, Tigguhr, Baldar Hmr, Niord and KAGIS for their excellent additions to the story as it unfolded. There were many other authors, of course, but these were the most regular contributors (even if Dwy did contribute himself right out of it. ;D)

Finally, thanks to all of the other authors. I can't name all of you (since there were so many), but every one of you added to the story as a whole.

Congratulations, also, to all involved for one of the best stories ever to grace the boards of NWN. Now, who's going to volunteer to compile it into one file? ;)

Nystramo Axepeak Olor Kuld Rorn Gor (GM) Clan Axepeak

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Subj: Thanks Date: 95-04-11 23:03:02 EDT From: Jhaelryna

OOC - I thank Nys and Clan Axepeak for inviting me to participate in the RP. The story grew and changed quite a bit (at the outset, noone expected a war), and it's been a fun ride ever since, to say the least!!

The TOL's mission is written in our charter. We are here to enhance the roleplay in the realms. I hope that our involvement in your story added to the excitement and the interest of the epic tale. Hopefully, the loose ends and thread from this story will flourish and grow, and spark even more great stories. Moradinson fell in the rift with Zorak, Gaglug is still creeping around, Hiufang's return is upcoming (and he bears secrets!!!), demons are now skulking about in the depths of the Mountain, heroes have come forth from the ranks of the Clan, and a multitude of other storylines exist as well.

Best wishes and congratulations to all who participated, and all who have dutifully read the volumes of writing! It's been a BIG story, to say the least.

Next time, you dwarves can come and visit us in the TOL folder. Deal?;>

Valsharess Jhaelryna GM, TOL

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