



*HERE BE WRIT  
THE ADVENTURES OF*

*NAVERO*

*PRIEST OF THE CORRECT  
AND UNALTERABLE WAY*

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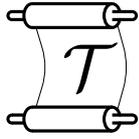
## Prologue

Role-playing games are a very peculiar hobby. You cannot learn to play all by yourself; as the game is an approximation of reality, there are no strict rules or reliable strategies, like in tennis or chess. To learn how to play, new players must sit in on sessions and figure it out by themselves. But as it is still only a game, with rules, many people play like they would with any other game of rules, especially if that's all their teachers know. Some memorize the system, manipulating the rules to their best advantage, and make sure they have all the elements needed to be a "successful" character (I recall a young Champions player who insisted that all his characters have Telekinesis, and wouldn't play without. A very tiring breed, in my humble opinion.) Others go into wild power trips, completely violating the spirit of fair play; the less said about them, the better.

There is no one way to play correctly, of course; if there were, you could look in the book and find it. Playing styles are personal, and should be; yet, few people over the age of 16 like gaming with munchkins. High-quality gaming depends on role-playing. Role-playing is important, but difficult to talk about. Usually, you end up on a soapbox saying, "This is the right way, and no other." If you want to talk about How To Play (as opposed to How To Use The Rules or Which System Is Best, about which there's too much pointless bickering already), you cannot sit and preach; you must use examples, either short anecdotes to show one point, or long campaign recapitulations to illustrate an idea or style. Campaign recaps are hard to do well, but nothing else will do the job. With this in mind, I would like to tell you about a 3-year campaign I played in while I was in college; the campaign developed a chaotic and individualist style, which made it very fast, frantic and enormous fun. It totally changed my playing style, most especially my concept of what a successful gaming is. My character was a young cleric named Navero, an adherent of the Correct and Unalterable Way. He wasn't powerful, or wise, or strong; nonetheless, he was the most cherished character I've ever had, and the one I remember with the most affection; despite his persistently bad luck, he was always a welcome member of our group (well, almost always.)



# I



HE story began when Navero, as a little first level clericling, was asked to leave his monastery by his superiors to carry the faith out into the world. Navero was a foundling, discovered on the steps of the Monastery of St. Glajmir as a baby, and was raised in the Order with the idea of eventually becoming a Defender (a warrior priest). The Order, as one might guess from the title, is quite Lawful Good, and on the whole peaceful, but it recognizes the value of acting as a shield for the people, countering the forces of evil directly. Navero did not take to his training quite so well as the other aspirants did.

Priest: "...ours is the way of life, of peace with our brothers and sisters, a shield of peace from the enemies of goodness."

Navero: "Father Angor? Why are some people enemies?"

Angor: "It is because they will not listen to the wisdom of the Lords. We follow the Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way, and must spread their light through the world, and bring peace and harmony to all who will listen. I've gone over this before."

Navero: "But Father Inditio says that some people are evil because they follow evil gods."

Angor: "You are correct, o persistently obstinate one. Their gods hold them in their power, and mislead them into unhealthy ways."

Navero: "But the Lords are correct, so why don't the other Gods listen to the Lords? I mean, if they were foolish or short-sighted, they wouldn't be very good gods, and no one would follow them, but if they're not foolish, they would listen to Lords. Why?"

Angor: "Oh, sit down."

Anyway, it eventually became clear that Navero probably wouldn't make a very good Defender, but it was decided that he should go out into the world anyway, so he could experience all it had to offer for himself, and give his superiors some peace. Perhaps experience, and a few hearty clouts to the head, would teach him what his teachers could not. And so, our hero was sent on his way—he was given a horse, a mace of the Order, a pack of supplies, and a travelling companion. A small half-elven mage named Dania had stopped at the monastery to buy some holy water; she had been unable to afford it, and was asked, in lieu of payment, to accompany Navero for a ways to make sure he didn't get lost. Always willing to save money, she agreed. It may not have been the wisest thing for her to do.

Navero: "What are they doing over there?"

Dania: "Hitching an ox to a plow."

Navero: "Does it like that? It's not moving. Aren't bulls real angry all the time? It says, 'Do not admire the bull his strength, or the wolf his speed, for both are coupled to rage at all things.' Isn't the bull supposed to pull it? Why hasn't it started yet?"

Dania: "Cause the plowman's not steering the plow yet."

Navero: "How does it know? Does he tell it? How does it know which way? Hey, there's a bunch of wagons coming up the road over there! Who are those people?"

Dania: "Buncha merchants. What's with you, anyway?"

Navero: "Huh?"

Dania: "When's the last time you were out here?"

Naverro: “Last time? Uh... I haven’t been. Can we go look at the wagons?”

Dania: “You’ve been in that monastery your whole fucking life?”

Naverro: “Uh... yes. Why do they have all those bright colors painted all over the wagons? Are they trying to decorate them?”

Dania: \*Sigh\* “It’s so people will notice them. No more questions, ok? I’m not here to answer all your stupid questions.”

Naverro: “Oh. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend. I’m sorry.”

Dania: “Yeah, sure.”

Naverro: “Uh... can I ask one more question?”

Dania: “What?”

Naverro: “Where are we going?”

Dania: “An inn. A place where people stay at night.”

Naverro: “But it isn’t night.”

Dania: “Will be when we get there.”

Naverro: “Oh! I’ve never been to an inn. What are they like?”

Dania: “Never mind. You’ll see.”

By nightfall, they arrived at the inn. This inn served as the main social center for the area, and was quite crowded. They stabled their horses, and Naverro tried to ask Dania about stables, but she was striding very purposefully towards the tavern, so he followed her to see what she was doing. She knew everything about these places, and Naverro was sure he could ask her more questions, if he just was more polite. She wasn’t as patient as the fathers of the Order, although she didn’t look heavenward and mumble like they did sometimes. Naverro walked into the inn, and received the shock of his young life. Here it was nearly dusk, and here were all kinds of people sitting around, not finishing the days work! And there were women there, and some of them were in indecent clothing! And there were colors and smells and everyone was drinking stuff that Naverro realized must be spirituous liquors, and people wearing swords and armor and things, and singing impious songs, and shouting and laughing and slapping women on the... This must be one of those dens of iniquity, filth and sin that Father Gulucios had preached about! This must be stopped!

Naverro stood up on a table and began to preach. He wasn’t nearly as good as Father Gulucios—a big man with a beard and a scar on his face knocked Naverro down, and then some other people started tossing him around the room, and everyone was laughing at him. Then he landed on a VERY big man, who grabbed the man with the scar and struck him in the face with his fist. A big fight began; it swirled around the room with Naverro in the middle of it; he tried to tell them of the eternal damnation of their souls that these actions would no doubt assure, but no one would listen to him. Finally, a small man in a suit of plate grabbed Naverro and threw him out into the street.

Cavalier: “You stay out here, my good holy man... er, choir boy, er... No matter—I and my companions shall sort out this lot of unruly peasants.”

The little knight went back inside the inn; there commenced much sound and fury, signifying nothing. Bottles and chairs and tables and people went sailing off into the night, propelled out by the vigorous activities of those within. Somewhere in the middle of this, Dania stumbled out, looking very disheveled, and told Naverro in no uncertain terms never to do anything like that again.

Dania: “WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING?!? This is not a <censored> church, you <censored> idiot!”

Navero: “But I must! If I do not, I will have failed my duty to my faith. ‘One must strike whenever opportunity demands it.’ My duty is sacred, and I must not shy from it. It is my duty to bring the light to the world, and save those who are lost.”

Dania: “You almost lost your <censored> HEAD!! And mine, and that really <censored> <censored> you <censored>I ought to...”

By now, the tavern brawl had pretty much lost its momentum. Two figures came out of the tavern, dragging the knight between them. One looked like a disreputable mercenary, and the other was a mysteriously cloaked figure. The small knight looked a bit woozy, but straightened out once he remembered that he was out in public. There was a dent in his helmet, but he did not try to explain it.

Cavalier: “Well, that was entertaining. You there, young priest! Do you know any sorts of healing arts?”

Navero: “Uh... Well, I trained under Father Angor, who once...”

Cavalier: “Very good! I am Rourk Ravensbane, knight errant, questing through this uncivilized land for high adventure and great deeds worthy of my name. My companions here are a mercenary and this other person. We will have the need of a healer, as we are going north to seek an Orc lair that needs to be emptied. It shan’t be much trouble, but your presence would be appreciated, as one of the others may have a need of you. There will be riches and glory for all involved. Your little friend there can come along too, if she likes.”

And so, the party formed and we went out on our first adventure. First, we had to get to there, it was a couple of days travel to the north; but what could possibly happen in a couple of days?

*“But please tell me: What’s an Orc?”*

## II

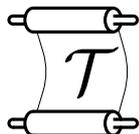
**Naverro**, male human cleric, 1st level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 1st level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 1st level

**Rizudo**, male human fighter, 1st level

**“Dark and Deadly”**, female drow assassin, 1st level



THE party had been formed, so we decided to go north and clean out an Orc lair near a small keep in the area. They were raiding and despoiling the area; besides, no one had any better ideas. The DM let us all have horses, so we set out bright and early the next morning for the keep. From the very first, everyone hit it off like Nitro and Glycerin. Everyone in the party had a strong enough ego (everyone but Naverro was chaotically aligned) that personality conflicts were not only abundant, but were all brought right out in the open. No one would defer for the good of the group, nor would anyone else try to impress or intimidate them. Fortunately, most of the fighting was on a verbal level, so damage was minimal.

Rourk: “. . .my noble lineage, which extends back 87 generations to the creation of the world, is feared from one end of the earth to the other, beneath and above. The Lord of this keep will naturally extend every hospitality.”

Naverro: “But what if he doesn’t know you?”

Rourk: “An absurd notion. The name Kuirt’yhiasdall is famous.”

Dania: “What?”

Rizudo: “The man with the iron head here sneezed. Hey helmet-head, you know you will have to show him yer darkie face.”

Naverro: “What’s a darkie?”

Rourk: “He means a dark elf, priest.”

Naverro: “Oh.”

Dania: “I say we just forget the stupid lord and get the <censored> Orcs. We can deal with him later.”

Naverro: “What’s a dark elf?”

Rizudo: “The guy offered a reward. We gotta be workin’ for him to get it, so we deal with him.”

Dania: “Hmph.”

Naverro: “Could someone tell me what a dark elf is?”

Rourk: “Never mind. Keep a sharp lookout.”

Naverro: “What for?”

Rourk: “Anything which might threaten us. Little mage, you must be very naive to suggest we go onto a Lord’s land without informing him of it. Though he is my inferior, it would be extremely indecorous. Courtesies must be made; it’s a sign of good breeding, so I suppose you may be excused.”

Dania: “God, you’re lucky I don’t hate dark elves.”

Naverro: “What is a dark elf?”

Dania: "Never mind."

Navero: "And why are you all arguing so much? 'One must beware anger; none may antagonize and persuade with one breath.' Wouldn't it be better if..."

Rourk: "I do not argue, young priest. I educate those around me by virtue of my superior insight. And this discussion is over."

Rizudo: "Over hill, over dale, we kick Rourk's iron tail..."

Dania: "Oh, shut up."

The road passed through a very small, very poor hamlet. The locals, seeing that we were obviously brave and capable sword-swingers, told us of a ravenous beast that would periodically descend from the sky onto them, would kill and eat their sheep, and even carry off children. This was the reason for their great poverty, and asked if there was anything we could do about it. They described the monster as a large, blackish-brown creature with great wings and claws, a long neck and a whip-like tail. It occasionally dropped scales, and they showed us one.

Rourk: "A DRAGON! It must be! At last, a foe worthy of my attention! We must leave at once; these pitiful people's livelihood depends upon the aid we can give them. Their Lord would be most grateful to us if this annoying creature were disposed of. The beast must be slain, and its treasure looted."

Rizudo: "Helmet-head, I kinda doubt these idiots could pay us enough."

Navero: "Well, we should help them. Do you think we can convince it not to eat the villagers? I read that dragons can talk. That would be a much better way to take care of the problem, and then it could go eat fish or something and everyone would be much happier."

<Short pause>

Rizudo: "I don't know about this, kids. Dragons are dangerous. Why don't we all just keep going and let them sort it out?"

Dania: "Because dragons have lots of money."

Rizudo: "Well, I guess that settles it. Lets get goin'. Hey, babe, we should get to know each other better. You're a chick after my own heart."

Assassin: "With a large knife..."

And so our heroes bravely rode forth to do battle. Of course, they first had to find their opponent, which proved somewhat difficult as we were in a big swamp. We looked all up and down, dodging quicksand and snakes. Time passed, and evening came, and Rourk waxed sorely pissed.

Rourk: "Where is the beast? One might almost think it afraid of me."

Rizudo: "Maybe it's female. Women run away from you, ya know."

But then, we heard a great flapping of wings, and looked up at the evening sky; it was blotted out by an enormous leathery shape. It was a dragon, or something closely akin; it had only two legs, and was lumpy about the head. Whatever it was, Navero was quite horrified. His arms felt weak, his nerve failed, and he began uttering prayers to the Lords. It was an instinctive reaction, one born of years of cloistered life, and of course he made his prayers as long and as loud as he could.

Dania: "NAVERO, SHUT UP!! IT'LL HEAR YOU... oh shit!"

One beady red eye cocked in our direction. Calmly, with ancient grace, the thing swung in midair, and came screeching into the middle of the party like a bat out of hell. Rourk charged forward with his lance lowered to meet it; Rizudo ran away; Dania cast a Magic Missile and ran away; the assassin was long gone. Navero remained; his horse had thrown him and run, leaving him on his butt in a mud-puddle staring at the monster

coming right at him. He remembered that today was St. Kalgur's Day, and he had forgotten to say the proper prayers that morning.

The great Beast slammed to the ground, by some miracle not landing on anyone, its leathery wings covering the road in smelly shadow. With a mighty shout, Rourk charged with his lance; it broke. A crossbow bolt whizzed out of the bushes, and hit it in the flank; it annoyed the thing slightly. Realizing that the beast was the implacable embodiment of all evil in the world, Navero roused himself and took out his mace of the Order, and aimed such a mighty blow at its horny back that it bounced off and hit Navero square in the face for 1 point of damage. The beast tried to bite the Cavalier, but missed; its tail strike did not miss, but broke both of his horse's legs and stunned him. The monster then looked around at Navero.

Rizudo: "We can't let it kill the medic! Wizard-bitch! Zap it again! And you, what's-her-face, do something or get your ass out of here!"

Dania: "Fuck you, asshole. Get in there and do something with that sword."

Rizudo: "You want to see my sword in action? Now is hardly the time, but I'll take you up on it later. What do you use that staff for, anyway?"

The Assassin: *<Considers killing Rizudo, decides against it>*

Rourk roused himself, and again took valiantly to the fray. He struck twice, with two longswords; miraculously both of them found soft spots in the thing's scarred scales, cutting it deeply. Navero struck again, this time hitting the ground beside the monster. The beast then tried to bite Navero; it succeeded beyond its wildest dreams, inflicting 13 points of damage to the otherwise inoffensive young cleric. Navero dropped with a thump and heard no more of the mighty battle. He woke several hours later, to the sweet voices of his comrades in arms.

Rizudo: "Look, kid, don't ever go charging in like that again. You're supposed to be healing US. Or do you have a thing about swinging your stick around?"

Dania: "Yeah. Leave the fights to the experts."

Rourk: "Good advice under any circumstances. While your presence may have served as a possibly useful distraction, I did not require your aid to defeat the dragon. After my first strokes, the fight seemed to leave it, so powerful was my thrust."

Rizudo: "Sure, Rourk. There's that poisoned dart we found in its mouth, too."

Rourk: "Tut. Dragons are immune to poison."

Our "dragon" was actually an old Wyvern, that had lost an eye and its poison tail barb in past fights. It had been preying on the village because it was too decrepit to hunt anywhere else. But to a first level party, such beasts seem as mighty dragons indeed. Navero was the only one seriously hurt in the encounter; he Cured Light Wounds on Rourk, as his religion forbade him doing so on himself while another was hurt. We found no treasure, which upset Dania a great deal, and soon were on our merry way once again. The biggest problem was Rourk's horse, which had died, leaving our mini-tank on foot. He had to share with Dania, the lightest person in the party, which irked him no end; but then, he was easily irked. The remainder of our trip to the keep was almost without incident. The only discovery of note was the fact that Rizudo was a heavy sleeper.

Rizudo: \*Snore\*

Rourk: *<Dumps a bucket of water on Rizudo>*

Rizudo: \*Glub!\* "Huhh? Whaza fuckes goin on?"

Rourk: "A very small raincloud. It has passed now."

And so, after two days travel, our Heroes arrived at the keep in the swamp, called Swamp Keep. We were greeted with all the fanfare and pomp to which we were to quickly grow accustomed.

Guard 1: “Gor, wha’ a scruffy-looking lot this is, comin’ u’ tha road.”

Rourk: “Hail, lowly peons! Now, run and tell your Lord and Master that we have arrived, to rid your land of its infestation.”

Guard 2: “Oh, are you the rat-catchers?”

Rizudo: “Shut up, open the gate. We want to see your inns, your ale, and your WOMEN! After that, we wanna talk about the Orcs.”

Guard 1: “Piss off.”

Guard 3: “Why, whatever’s going on here, Neville?”

Guard 2: “Oh, nothing, Percy. Some gentlemen, and a few ladies too, are here and making a fuss about something. Don’t worry yourself.”

Guard 1: “Shut up!” <To Rourk> “Hoo are yu?”

Rourk: “For shame, lout! Do you not recognize my device? My house is known far and wide, and I am sure has been heard of even in these impoverished lands. Come, open the gates and be quick about it; you try my patience.”

Guard 3: “Oh, he’s not very nice, is he?”

Guard 1: “Look, shrimp, all I see is a miniature buffoon ridin’ with some little elf-bitch on an old horse...”

Again, there commenced much sound and fury, signifying nothing. Fortunately for our great quest, there was more sound than fury, and we were eventually able to get inside. Most of us went about practical sorts of business—Navero went to pray, and recover from his injuries. Rizudo, I believe, went to find a tavern; there was only one, and it was not open at that hour. The Assassin disappeared for a while (the player who was running her was not there that day.) Dania studied her spells. Rourk decided to go introduce himself to the Lord of the Keep. He had his armor polished and his shield device repainted (10gp well spent) and strode forth to meet Lord Eric, who was out on his croquet lawn at that moment.

Rourk: <Strides onto croquet lawn, plants his shield firmly in the sod so the device is plainly visible.> “Greetings, Lord and Master of this fine castle.”

Master: “Oh! My croquet lawn! You’ve dented it! Wahhh... ”

Courtier: “Oh, its alright, Eric, its alright. Just breathe calmly and relax. Everything will be just fine.”

Rourk: “Uh... I wish to introduce myself. I...”

Courtier: “Not now! Can’t you see what you’ve done? Get out! Just go, or I’ll put the hounds on you!”

Rourk: <Baffled by these strange humans, he leaves.>

Navero went out on the town, but with something different in mind than Rourk or Rizudo. This being his first town, he wanted to see what it was like, and so he wandered aimlessly through the market places, streets and alleyways, happily watching all the busy people going about their tasks. The local clothing was much more colorful than what he was used to, and used a bigger variety of fabrics, but somehow it seemed all right for it to be that way. It was obviously different here from how it was in the monastery, but being like this seemed alright for them. Everyone was happy, or at least not unhappy, chatting or calling out to their friends; it gladdened Navero’s heart. There were some people who were short-tempered and unhappy, but at least there weren’t any of those filthy places like Dania had gone to that one time—there was a tavern, but it was mostly locals in there, playing chess, not a bunch of boozing soldiers. (It was still too early for any drink-selling.)

When night came, most of the party retired to the tavern, which was a rather small and miserable one if you wanted to go out and have a good time. Navero did not go to the tavern; he had happened upon a townsman who

had wounded himself with an axe and nearly lamed himself; Navero cured the hurt, and the man's grateful family was only too happy to put him up for the night. He quietly discussed religious matters with them, particularly salvation and joys of life in the Correct and Unalterable way, and although they were very polite, they mostly seemed to ignore him. The only exception was their young daughter, who paid a lot of attention to him. While he was pleased at the opportunity to spread the faith, she didn't seem to pay much attention to what he said; she just looked at him strangely, and sat uncomfortably close, and took every possible opportunity to touch him, which made Navero very uncomfortable.

(As an explanation, I should note that Navero has Charisma 15, Comeliness 16. The DM rolled the young lady a Lust score of 17.)

And so night passed, and morning came.

*"Oh, you're injured! Let me take off all your clothes..."*

### III

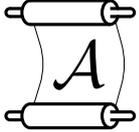
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AFTER a good night's sleep (even for Naverro) we all met at the gate to go and see the Master of the Keep, tell him of our plans, and secure his permission for our endeavor. At the door of the Council chambers, we met a pair of his elite guardsmen.

Guard 1: “Oh, it's those awful people from the gate yesterday. Send them away, please, they gave me a terrible tension headache.”

Dania: “Oh, <censored>. We are here to see the Lord and Master of this Keep, so that we can get his permission to go and kill all the Orcs in his lands.”

Rourk: “Open the doors. And do be quick about it; we haven't all day.”

Guard 2: “Orcs? Oh yah, them. You intrested in 'em, li'l lady? They'd take a real fancy to yu! <Uncouth laughter> Now bugger off.”

Dania: “Why? You don't want to loose any of your relatives?”

Guard 1: “How did you know about that?”

Naverro: “Please, please listen to me. Tales of the terrible deeds of this band of pillagers have us from far away, and our hearts truly go out to you in your plight. We have come here only with thoughts to aid you, and promise you that, by whatever means, these terrible people shall no longer trouble your community with their harassment and evil. We beg of you, please allow us to enter that we may seek the blessings of the castle Lord, and ride as your emissaries.”

Guard 1: “Oh, he's sweet.”

Rizudo: “And we'll kill 'em all. And we expect to be paid, too.”

Naverro: “Killing them should be a last resort, one to which we fall when all hope is lost.”

Rizudo: “Yeah, right. C'mon, let us in.”

Rourk: “Indeed. I am unaccustomed to being kept waiting by servants.”

Guard 2: “SHUT UP! I'm wornin' yu, be outa my sight, or I'll set tha dog on ya.”

Dania: “A dog? \*A\* dog? Oh, watch me quake with fear!”

Rizudo: “I'll watch you shake anytime. Shake and bounce and quiver with...”

Naverro: “Uh... May I please ask you to stop, uh... I mean...”

Rizudo: “Yeah, what?”

Naverro: “Uh... Never mind.”

Guard 1: “Oh, you've frightened him. That wasn't very nice. You're a brute.”

Guard 2: “SHUT UP ALL O' YU!! Right! Tha dog it is, then! Roger!! Open the dog's door.”

Guard 1: "Are you sure? You know what a time we had getting him back in there the last time you let him out..."

We heard the clanking of chains and the groan of wood, and saw that a large wooden door to the left of the guards was opening. A very low growl shook the battlements, and the guard settled back with a satisfied smirk. We all retreated rather rapidly, except for Rourk.

Rourk: "A dog? I hope I can amuse myself with it. And after that, I shall deal with another dog which lies within my view, to his great sorrow, for trying the patience of Rourk Ravensbane of..."

Rizudo chose this moment to hit him over the head with a big block of stone, rendering him unconscious; then we went into a full retreat. We never did see the dog, and I'm not even sure there ever really was one, as that guardsman certainly did laugh a lot. We had to go back to the inn to bandage Rourk's head, as he is a drow, and we did not wish to remove his helmet in public. This altercation left us with few alternatives. We probably wouldn't get in to see his Lordship. Do we go for the Orcs anyway? Do we leave the keep, and hope something better comes along? Or do we all go our separate ways? Navero, of course, pointed out that we would have to go for the Orcs, just because it was the only right thing to do. He had spoken to the family he spent the night with about the Orcs, and they seemed supportive of the idea of someone stopping them. Rizudo expressed the hope that they would have enough treasure to make it all worth it, a point on which Dania and the Assassin agreed.

Navero: "I realize that money can be useful, but it shouldn't be our only motive. Why is it that some people will risk their lives for money, but not for each other?"

Rizudo: "That's because people aren't worth shit, Nav. Someday you'll learn that. Take our insensible companion here..."

Dania: "Best description of him I've heard."

The Assassin: "Most people are useful, in one way or another, but pass away after only a short time. Truly lasting monuments cannot be built on weak flesh, but must be dedicated to something more lasting."

Navero: "But..."

Rourk: "Owww... What struck me? Was it another dragon?"

Rizudo: "Nope. A very small hailstorm. But it's gone now."

Rourk: "By my troth, I think YOU hit me. You shall answer for it right now, you unworthy..."

Dania: "Please, lie down. I saw quite clearly that Rizudo didn't hit you. It was a horrible beast that moved so fast, it was but a blur. We were barely able to pull you away from it."

Rourk: "I did not see it at all."

Rizudo: "That's because you were wearing your helmet."

Rourk: "Priest! Do they speak truth? If they do not they shall pay dearly for it."

Navero: "Ummm... No... Yes... No... Rizudo never touched you. A rock did."

Rourk: "A rock?"

Navero: "A rock from the battlements."

Rourk: "I was struck down by a stone that fell from the battlements? Mage, I forgive you your lie. I am ashamed to know I was downed by such an ignoble accident. It is good that you thought to spare me the knowledge."

Dania: "Right."

Rourk: “Well, I must seek some way to redeem myself. We must go to the Orc den; there may I erase this failure with the blood of evil.”

Rizudo: “Ok.”

Naverro: “Um. . . Do we have to kill them?”

Rizudo: “Nav, Orcs are not going to sit down and parley.”

Rourk: “Yes; they are notoriously unreasonable.”

Naverro: <Looks pensive>

Our heroes secured their mounts, and rode off into the swamp in the direction the Orcs usually came from. It isn't easy to hide an entire band of Orcs, and these proved no exception. Their tracks were quite visible on the swamp paths, so we followed them back to a large cavern in a limestone rock formation. We did not enter immediately; instead, we sat, and watched, and argued some more. This we did happily for some time, until we were spotted by a patrol, who were naturally not happy to see us. There were only 2 Orcs, and we spotted them almost as soon as they saw us.

Orc 1: “Hu gudiier nouds?” (What's with you?)

Orc 2: “Sliimsuka! Jacxoffss wit.” (Elves over there! Humans too.)

Naverro: “Oh, ick! What are those things over there?”

Dania: “Orcs! Get 'em!!”

Rourk: “GLORY AND DEATH! GLORY AND DEATH!”

HackShredDestroySunderCrushSliceMaimIrkIrritateVexAnnoyBadgerInconvenience

Game Master: You succeed in wounding an Orc. The other runs away.

Dania: “Stop him! He'll tell all the others!”

Rourk: I ride off after the Orc and outdistance him. I do not spear him in the back, as that is unworthy of me. Instead, I challenge him to stand and fight like slime.

Game Master: How? Your horse is dead, remember.

Rourk: I . . .

Rizudo: I shoot him in the back with my crossbow.

Game Master: Did you have it ready? I don't remember you saying so.

Rizudo: Of course it's ready! I'm not stupid! <Big, pleading grin>

Game Master: Ok. Roll to hit.

Rizudo: Ah, I roll a 3. Shit.

Dania: “You're all incompetent.” I 'Magic Missile' it.

Game Master: Ok. <rolls dice> It stumbles, but does not fall, and is rapidly loosing itself in the trees.

Rizudo: “Don't you have a 'Hold Person' spell, priest?”

Naverro: “But I don't speak Orcish.”

The Assassin: It's out of range for dart throwing, isn't it?

Game Master: Uh, yes. Anything else? Oh, <rolls dice> you notice the wounded Orc is trying to crawl off into the bushes.

Naverro: I jump on it and stop it!

Game Master: It tries to hit you. <rolls dice> It does. Take 5 hit points.

Naverro: "Ouch!"

Rizudo: I kill it. "Guess it's up to me to clean up after yon Knight's incompetence."

Rourk: "I shall ignore that. Consider yourself fortunate."

Dania: "Did the other one get away? Shit! They'll be all over the place pretty soon. We better get out of here."

Rourk: "I will not run from a bunch of Orcs! You can, but I refuse."

Naverro: "What about all the damage they would do if we don't stop them?"

Dania: "Naverro, come on. We can't take all of them. . ."

Rourk: "The devil you say! I move that we take them by surprise, right now, while they are still trying to organize themselves."

Rizudo: "Now listen, kids. Our position here isn't exactly ideal. Why don't we go tell the guys in the keep that we saw the Orcs coming? Then we'll get a bunch of men-at-arms together to kill them."

Rourk: "I refuse to rely on an unruly bunch of peasants swinging farm implements."

Naverro: "'Why stir up many men, when one voice is equal to the task?'"

The Assassin: "It's getting dark. They will soon be about. We'd better go."

Dania: "Yea. C'mon, guys."

Rourk: "You are taking all the horses? Ah, I suppose a retreat to consider strategy would be in order. But we are not running."

Dania: "Right."

With our horses, we were easily able to outdistance the Orcs, and reach the keep. We saw them behind us in the marsh, and counted over 20 of them. They did not follow us all the way back to the keep, but threw javelins and insults at us as we fled back to relative safety. None hit. Once we reached the keep, we were accosted by the gate guards, who had heard the shouting, and were taken in to see a high official.

Official: "YOU WHAT!?! You rode out to spy on the Orcs, and stirred them up?"

Rizudo: "Yep, they're coming this way, and they stink. We need a few of your guards and the militia, then we go out and clean 'em up."

Dania: "Yeah."

Official: <Bug eyed stare> "You. . . They haven't been raiding for nearly a month. . . which means they won't be here for another month. . . and you. . . people. . . went out and deliberately antagonized them!?"

Rourk: "You should never bear evil so lightly."

Official: "WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!"

Naverro: "Uh. . . have we interfered with some other plans of yours?"

Official: <Sudden, indignant look> "Do you have any idea what this means?"

Rourk: "Freedom and Glory."

Dania: "Oh, shut up."

Rourk: "I will not for the likes of you."

Official: "Oh, be quiet, both of you!" <To a servant> "Boy, go fetch the barbarian. Now, perhaps we can salvage something out of this mess. How would you like to go back there and clean out those caverns right now? We have a man here, the survivor of the last group who tried it. He has been inside their cave, and may know enough to help you. He is supposedly a capable fighter and bowman. I believe he comes from the northern regions."

With this, a very large man stomped into the room. You might say that he did not believe in personal hygiene. You might also say that he needed no announcement; you knew he was coming well before he entered the room. He was over 6 feet tall, with a huge sword over his shoulder, and a long bow on his back.

Official: "Kortul, you had expressed a desire to have another try at the Orcs once your wounds healed. Well, I would like to ask you to serve as a guide to this group, which has the same purpose in mind. Will you do it?"

Kortul: <Looks group over; Sneers> \*Grunt\*

Official: "Very good. Well, I wish you luck. The reward still holds; and it is per head, with a bonus for their chief. And if you fail, don't come back. After this, if they don't kill you, some here may wish to do so themselves."

With that cheery thought, we spent the night and rose early to go out and finish the job. At some point, the Assassin disappeared into the night. Apparently, she had quite enough of us, and went elsewhere to seek greener pastures. (Actually, the player dropped out of the group, as he had too much work to do. But that's not as much fun.)

*"I heard of the great unwashed, but I never expected to see one."*

## IV

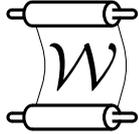
**Naverro**, male human cleric, 1st level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 1st level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 1st level

**Rizudo**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 1st level



WE went riding off into the marshes early in the morning; we expected to reach the Orc cavern by that afternoon. The trek through the swamp was largely uneventful, except for a big bunch of 6-armed squirrel-like monkeys who would stare at us from the trees and throw things. Rizudo once tried to shoot one, but they were impossibly fast. As we neared the cave, we left our horses tethered and snuck up on foot; within the cave, a number of eyes peered out, but they did not seem to see us.

Rizudo: “Well, kids, what do we do with 'em?”

Rourk: “We will take them now. Pardon me while I prepare myself.”

Dania: “What did the caves look like, Kortul?”

Kortul: “Dark, damp. Deadfall at entrance; killed three, Orcs finished rest.”

Rourk: “And you ran.”

Kortul: “Quiet, munchkin.”

Naverro: “Maybe if we can get them out of the cave into daylight...”

Rizudo: “Yeah! Good idea! We smoke them out, then kill them as they come running from the cave.”

Naverro: “Uh...”

Rourk: “A poor strategy. The cave is probably ventilated.”

Dania: “Right. They must have another entrance anyway.”

Naverro: “Uh...”

Rizudo: “Look, these are Orcs, remember? Shit-for-brains? How much of a problem do you think they'll be to fake out?”

Kortul: “Stupid.” *<Disgusted look at Rizudo>*

Naverro: “Uh...”

Rizudo: “Are you saying it won't work, o your buffness?”

Kortul: “Hmm...”

Rizudo: “Well then, lets go get a bunch of wood!”

Naverro: “Uh...”

Dania: “Only dead wood, now.” (She is half-wood elf, and feels somewhat protective of trees.)

Rourk: “Dead wood will not make enough smoke. It must be big, green logs.”

Naverro: “Uh...”

Dania: "I'd rather you not chop down trees, dear. Besides, you wouldn't want to dishonor your blades with mere wood."

Rourk: "Kortul, I perceive, has a hand axe. And we can use his blade if necessary. One so large and unwieldy is of little use otherwise."

Kortul: \*Snarl\*

And so, the three warriors began uprooting saplings and chopping down small trees. Dania ran around for a bit, pleading or threatening or smacking them with her staff, but they ignored her and soon assembled a large pile of green wood. Navero, having no great feelings about trees, tried to comfort Dania with the knowledge that it seemed the best way to get them out without hurting them, but she ignored him. By then, it was late in the afternoon. We gathered the wood into a large pile on a hill in front of the cave mouth; we could feel eyes on us, but we were out of range of any but powerful longbows, which we were sure Orcs did not possess. We doused the pile with lantern oil, lit it, and when it was burning nice and smoky, we sent it all rolling down into the cave.

We were lucky; most of it went in, but not far enough in that we couldn't see it. Then we sat up on the hill to watch; any Orc who tried to put the fire out was shot. They tried throwing water on from further back in the cave, but that didn't do much good. The wood smoked merrily for a long time, but as evening approached, no Orcs came fleeing out. It obviously wasn't working.

Dania: <Much grumbling and swearing> "Murderers."

Rizudo: "Oh, shut up. You're getting on our nerves. Why don't you go play with yourself or something? Put that staff to good use."

Dania: "Go fuck yourself, asshole. Whatcha gonna do now? Throw in some squirrel-monkeys?"

Rourk: "Perhaps if we offered them a magic-user."

Navero: "No!"

Party: <Stare at Navero>

Navero: "I mean..."

Dania: "The sun's setting. Any more bright ideas?"

No one did. Instead, we sat on the hilltop and argued about what to do until we were interrupted by the sound of wings flapping. BIG wings. Big, leathery wings that seemed right overhead. Suddenly, from over the hill the cave was in, a great shape appeared. It looked like the Wyvern, but it had four legs, was larger, and colored a great oily black. The party scattered. Everyone but Rourk ran to hide in the trees and bushes; he whistled for his dead horse, which did not appear, then took his stand in the middle of the clearing. The dragon did not attack directly, but merely soared above us, great and proud, watching us. Rourk was about to call it a coward and demand that it come down and fight, when a javelin whizzed past his helmet; he looked downwards and saw nearly 20 Orcs charging towards him.

Rourk: "Ah, they are finally coming out. I shall go get my horse." <Runs>

Dania: "That's \*my\* horse!" <Runs after him>

Navero: "Kortul, do you know the Orcish word for 'Stop'?"

Kortul: "Hudsdg. Get horses."

Dania easily outdistanced the heavily armored cavalier; she got on her horse and rode off. Navero was second to reach the horses, and went riding off after Dania, not wanting her get hurt. Rourk took Kortul's horse, Kortul remained down on foot, and Rizudo hid in a tree. At this point, things became somewhat chaotic, so I will try to take things on an individual basis.

Rizudo: Hid in a tree for almost the whole fight. He was not discovered only because all the other party members were making so much noise. After it was over he claimed to have killed 6 Orcs.

Kortul: Picked off a few with his bow from the bushes, then crept about in the dark, using his two-hander to kill more. I use the term 'crept' lightly; sneaking in banded mail is no mean feat, especially around creatures with infravision. He was on foot and alone, and so presented an ideal target; nonetheless (this being AD&D) he was able to move fast enough not to be overborne, and dispatched 8 Orcs while taking no damage himself. Eventually they ran away and left him alone.

Rourk: Got onto Kortul's big horse with some difficulty, and charged down the paths of the swamp, using his blades to great effect, until he found an individual who was obviously their Chief. He dismounted and challenged this worthy to personal combat. That worthy looked at him like he was some sort of joke, and whistled. Nothing happened for a moment, and so Rourk charged to do battle.

Rourk: "GLORY AND DEATH! GLORY AND DEATH!" <Hears wings again> "Ah ha! A foe far more worthy of my attention. I shall deal with you when I have more time to do so; do not attempt to flee." <Turns>

Dragon: <Lands on Rourk> \*Thump!\* Rourk is pinned to the marshy ground.

Orc Chief: <Gives dragon pat on the nose> "Juug bruda!" (Good boy!)

Rourk: The Orc Chief said \*WHAT\*? And it didn't kill him?! Must be a very young, stupid dragon. Are both my arms pinned?

Game Master: No, one is free.

Rourk: I stab the dragon and tell it to get off of me. <Rolls for the stab; It is a critical hit to the chest>

Dragon: "Owwie!" <Jumps up, off of Rourk, bleeding from a deep stab wound>

Orc Chief: "Aaar! Mung mang itchy andap guufbol itz!" (Hey! Do you know how valuable those things are?)

Rourk: "DIE, DRAGON!" <Rolls again; Another crit, to the chest>

Dragon: <Bleeding, it flies away into the swamp, blubbering and calling for its mother>

Orc Chief: <Runs away>

Rourk: "Damn, I'm good."

Dania and Navero: Dania went charging off into the forest, looking for a place where she could be of some use. Navero went riding off after her to protect her from the Orcs. They crossed over a run with 3 Orcs in it; Dania rode down one, but the others stayed up and took swings at Navero. Navero did 'Command—Stop' on one, using the new word he just learned, and the other fortunately missed. They rode up into the trees on the other side, hopefully to safety; then, three more Orcs jumped up in front of them, frightening the horses and bringing them both to a halt. Navero realized he would have to fight them; they were charging madly, with swords in their hands and blood in their eyes, and he had to protect his friend.

Orc 1: <Tries to grab Navero's reins>

Navero: "Yahh!" <Swings at Orc 1; Fumble—brains his own horse; "Oops," he thinks as he goes face-first into the mud>

Dania: <Smacks one with her staff for 4 hit points>

Orc 2: <Stabs Dania for 1 hit point>

Orc 3: <Misses Dania>

Navero: "I'll help you!" <Charges to the defense, and swings at Orc 2; Fumble—brains Dania's horse; Dania says something unprintable as she goes face-first into the mud>

Orcs: <Start laughing>

Dania: <Runs away, cursing violently>

Naverro: <Runs after her>

Orcs: <Chase them, snickering>

Dania: <Spins and Magic Missiles Orc 2; It dies>

Naverro: <Hits a tree for 5 points of damage>

Orcs: <Miss, somehow>

After quite a few rounds of this sort of thing, both Orcs lay dead for no adequately explained reason. I believe Naverro struck his target once during the encounter, for one point of damage. After it was all said and done, they stood there for a moment to collect themselves, Naverro staring at the ground, and Dania staring at Naverro. After she'd gotten her breath back, she began to speak to him.

Dania: "YOU GODAMN IDIOT!!! What the fuck do <censored> you think you were doing?!?! You <censored> asshole, you little <censored> I ought break your <censored> stupid head off! GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY GODAMN LIFE!!! I hate everything about you, you <censored> <censored> sorry excuse <censored> little shithead <censored> moronic... LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE, I don't ever want to see you again in my entire fucking life, you <censored> <censored>! Just keep the hell away from me! Go somewhere else! Leave, you <censored> moron!! TRY to <censored> describe your <censored>, complete, and utter STUPIDITY!! You idiot! You incompetent! You clumsy...IDIOT! Arghhh...! I HATE you!! I hate the SIGHT of you! STAY AWAY FROM ME AND NEVER COME NEAR ME AGAIN!! DO YOU UNDERSTAND!?!?!"

Naverro: <Stares for a moment in numb silence> "But... but... you're the only friend I have."

Dania: (Erk! Arg! Ack! Hatehatehate...) "You..." <Bugeyed stare> (Hateha... oh... damn) "Come on Nav, lets go get the Orcs, OK?"

She walked off into the forest, confused and angry and depressed all at the same time, pointedly ignoring the dead horses. Naverro, utterly confused but somehow kind of happy, followed after. The Lords provide.

And so, our heroes routed the band of Orcs. Those who survived, including the chief, fled into the marshes, and were not seen again. All that was left now was their cave.

*"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."*

*"It's ok. Forget it. I know you didn't. It's ok."*

## V

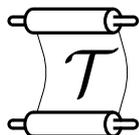
**Naverro**, male human cleric, 1st level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 1st level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 1st level

**Rizudo**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 1st level



THE party got itself reorganized; wounds were bandaged, kills boasted about, Rourk healed, and the dead horses not mentioned. We proceeded on foot into the big, spooky cave, looking for the Orc's treasure. The first thing that the party encountered was the need for some light; fortunately Naverro had brought a lantern and a plentiful supply of lamp oil. We walked past the smoking wood, and saw there was a large vent in the entrance hall ceiling; our smoke was all going right out. Further back in the cave we could see a rusty iron gate; behind it there was at least one Orc, watching us.

Rizudo: "Hey kid, you got any more lamp oil?"

Naverro: "Yes, I brought 4 flasks. Do you have a lantern too?"

Rizudo: "Nah, I'm just gonna show you something. Take the flask, stick a rag in like this, light it, and throw it at the Orcs!"

Naverro: "It'll blow up!"

Rourk: "A cowardly method of dealing with a foe. But these dishonorable slime deserve it wholeheartedly."

Game Master: *<Rolls a save for the clay pot the oil is in>* It doesn't break. An Orc picks it up and throws it back.

Party: "Ahhh! Scatter!" *<It doesn't break again; We ripped out the burning rag and watched the Orcs run away>*

Dania: "Hmph. How do we get through the gate?"

Rizudo: "Well, first we gotta get over there. You wanna lead?"

Dania: "No. Why don't you?"

Kortul: "Hmph." *<Walks across cavern to gate, stepping over a tripwire which had been placed between two rocks>* "No one."

Rourk: "You have still not demonstrated how we might get through the gate, o large and smelly one."

Kortul is a Mighty Barbarian Type. He wrenches open a gap in the bars with his bare hands. The rusty iron bends and snaps under his massive muscular force.

Naverro: "Why did you do that? The gate looks light enough to lift."

Kortul: *<Checks>* "It is so." \*Sigh\*

Rourk: "Oh, bravo! You make an excellent manservant. I shall go in first, naturally."

Kortul: "Better I go. Know caves better."

Rourk: "I recall that \*you\* didn't get much beyond the entrance."

Kortul: "You guard the rear, keep the priest and mage safe."

Rourk: "I think not."

Kortul: "Back there, munchkin. Let men go first."

Rourk: "You try my patience, barbarian. If you wish to repulse them through sheer malodorousness, I will be the first to admit that you have the advantage over me. But in the arts of combat I am the clear superior, so remove your clumsy bulk from my path!"

Dania: "Look, will someone just go in?"

Rourk: "Shut up. You may guard the rear. Perhaps you can make up for your previous failure some other time, when it is less vital to the survival of these others..."

Rizudo: "Oh, hell." *<Walks through gate>*

Kortul went after Rizudo, who was by now in a large natural cavern. It was filled with piles of straw, rags, and other bedding, sacks, and a great deal of smoked meat hanging near the south wall. Obviously, it was some sort of communal living quarters. We came from the west, and there were three other exits; one to the north, one to the south, and a big one to the east. The one to the east was very peculiar; someone had built a huge wooden barrier, with big iron spikes smeared with a gummy resin running all through it. It was angled so as to keep something from coming from the east into this cave. Something big. We decided to leave it alone, and went to check out the other caves. We decided to go south, but again, there was some argument over Who Goes First, solved by Navero wandering down the tunnel.

Navero: "Hello?"

Orcs: "GURTTIO!! KILLIT UNGOWA GITCHE GUMEE!!"

Navero: "Eeep!"

He wandered back very quickly, with about 15 Orcs on his heels. Fortunately, these were all women and children, not warriors, and so we had little difficulty against them. Kortul was hit in the face with a soup ladle, and Rourk suffered badly knawed-on ankles.

Game Master: You slay all the women and children. Truly, a heroic effort.

Kortul, by virtue of being closer to the southern entrance, took the lead and we headed south. The passage branched into two tunnels; we took the western one. The hallway went south-west until it widened out into a chamber; the western wall was partially open to the outside, and the corridor continued on to the south. Within the chamber, there were great quantities of plants and fungi, growing in the spongy earth that had washed into the cave from the marshes; many small green pigs moved about in the room, lazily eating the plants. They were too slippery to catch, and nothing else turned up in the room, so we continued on.

The next room was a storage room, with lots of Orcish weapons and equipment. Most of it was in poor repair, but a small alcove in the south wall turned up some better stuff. Most of what we had was still superior, so except to replenish supplies of arrows, we didn't take anything. The passage continued to the north-east; Rourk took the lead this time. The passage went north to a 4-way intersection; northwards, it went back to the great hall. To the west was a small chamber with charred walls and a chimney in the roof; we suspected that this was where meat was smoked. The eastern passage went east, then divided into two more passages, east and south.

The southern passage led to a nearly circular chamber with many markings on the floor; they seemed to represent some sort of cyclical system, with a huge eye at center and spears radiating outwards to other things in the circles - mostly unpleasant things. Navero felt very bad about the room, so we left fairly quickly and went to explore the east branch. This led into a room that seemed to have been occupied by a priest or sub-chief; the furnishings were relatively rich, although we couldn't find any valuables. Some grumbling commenced as we returned to the great hall.

We went up north from the hall. After some searching through some small, dingy and uninteresting rooms, we hit a trap. It was a big pit that opened up under the lead party member (Rizudo) dropping him fifteen feet onto a smooth floor. He was hurt a bit, but noticed something down in the pit: a lever on one wall. He went over and pulled the lever down; a large section of the ceiling crashed down. It fit neatly inside the pit, providing a convenient surface the rest of the party could walk over on, except in one spot, where it was an inch or two high. So long, Rizudo. We mourned for the required seconds, and Navero gave him the last rites, or tried to, and then went about our business. The Chief's rooms were in the northern caves, where we found a few trinkets, about 500 gp in loose change, and a dwarven prisoner, who was unconscious and remained so all the way back.

*"Orcs are very poor housekeepers."*

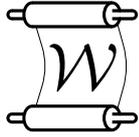
## VI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 1st level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 1st level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 1st level



E had finished exploring the orc-inhabited portions of the cave. Nothing of any interest had turned up. Somewhat disappointed in the expedition so far, we went back to the great hall and stared out over the eastern barrier; beyond, we could only see a little bit of a large dead cavern, which seemed utterly empty. However, we were not about to go over and start exploring yet; first, we had to go back to Swamp Keep, report that the Orcs were all gone, and claim the reward that we so richly deserved.

Guard 1: “Aw, it’s them again.”

Dania: “Will you PLEASE open the goddamned gate? You know who we are.”

Guard 2: “Look, yu. Yu got a mighty big fat hed there, l’il lady. Now, be nice, and maybe I’ll let ya in.”

Rourk: “We are not amused at your attempts at humor. And our patience is wearing quite thin. This ill-treatment of those who should be your honored guests speaks volumes of this pitiful place. I demand that you open the gates at once!”

Guard 1: “Oh, I’m going to get a headache again from all this, I just know it.”

Dania: “Aw, poor baby. Are there any other gates in this place?”

Guard 2: “No. Look here, li’l shrimp, shut up an’ stop orderin’ us around. We get enuf o’ that from tha captin, an’ dont havta put up with it from tha riff-raff like yu!”

Kortul: “OPEN GATE!”

Guard 2: “Say pleese.”

Kortul: <Punches Guard 2; Guard 2 drops unconscious>

Guard 1: “Oh, good. He’s been especially crass this morning. Nigel! Could you open the gate for these lovely people, and put Mungo to bed?”

Guard 3: <From above> “Is he out cold?”

Guard 1: <Checks Guard 2> “Yes, he is. Lovely, isn’t it?”

Guard 3: “Quite.”

And so our triumphant heroes returned to Swamp Keep. There were no cheering throngs to greet us, which was a disappointment to some more than others, but they were willing to be patient, for the moment. Once inside, we got ourselves healed up (we use a point-based magic system, and Naverro had just enough spell points for everyone), and went to see the official we had spoken to the previous day, to report on our success and see to our reward.

Official: “You have succeeded? Wonderful! I can’t tell you how happy I am to hear that. They came raiding every couple of months; they used to stay away from our area completely, but since the caravans started travelling on the North road, they have given us all their attention. I could never convince the council to risk the militia; I rather expect they didn’t want to loose any voters. Of course, you will receive your reward and much more besides. The Lord of the Keep will naturally wish to see you.”

Rourk: “Think nothing of it. It was child’s play.”

Official: “Ah. Well: did you bring the Chief’s head with you?”

Rourk: “The coward fled into the swamp, and so I was unable to obtain it for you. Rest assured that if we meet again, that oversight shall be corrected.”

Official: “Did you bring any heads back? Or hands, or ears. . . ?”

Naverro: “That’s. . . kind of barbaric, I mean, mutilation of the bodies?”

Official: “. . . So you have no actual proof that you ever went anywhere near the Orcs?”

<Dead silence>

Kortul: “Stupid.”

Rourk: “You doubt my word? Those who do learn not to.”

Kortul: “Real stupid.”

Official: “I, of course, believe every word you say. However, Lord Eric is a very hard man to please. He will want to be certain, and must have proof. I must say, that under these circumstances, seeing his Lordship would be out of the question. And, of course, the status of your reward money is placed somewhat in jeopardy. . . .”

Naverro: “Well, there’s the money we found in the emphow! <*Dania drives her staff into Naverro’s foot*>

Official: “What’s this?”

Dania: “My little friend here was just saying how short on cash we were. Would it please you if we were to go back and get battle tokens?”

Rourk: “We may even find a few more, if you absolutely insist upon this matter.”

Naverro: “Ow. . . .”

Official: “Yes, I believe that would be the best thing for you to do. A word, children: ‘Foresight makes all matters go to your advantage.’ Now please go finish your task.”

We did spot one other Orc out in the marshes; it was not the Chief. It tried to run away, and Kortul killed it with arrows. We collected all the right ears we could still find, even the females and children. It was an unpleasant task, and accomplished hurriedly. The total came to 32; not bad. We arrived back at the Keep that night.

Guard 1: “Oi, this lot. Fuck it, let ’em in.”

As even government officials need sleep, we decided not to bother him until morning. Kortul, Rourk, and Dania went to the tavern, where they saw a few familiar faces. The first was that of the rescued Dwarf, whom we had left at the inn; he had recovered enough to come down to the common room to eat. His name was Arlor. The second was a larcenous-looking mercenary type who strongly resembled the late and unlamented Rizudo; this worthy turned out to be his twin brother Razuli, who wished to hear of his brother’s death.

Rourk: “So, Dwarf, you were captured by the Orcs during the idiotic act stealing from them. Being naturally incompetent, you were unable to fight them off or escape.”

Arlor: “I, um, was jus’ trying to earn a livin’, yup.”

Dania: “God, that guy looks familiar. Unpleasantly so.”

Razuli: “Hi there, kids! Say, you look like those morons who were hanging around with my brother!”

Rourk: “Oh, no. . . . Please leave us at once.”

Razuli: “Not ’till you tell me what happened. Say, are you the little. . .”

Dania: “Shove it, asshole.”

Razuli: “I see you are. Well, kids, wanna have some fun?”

The remainder of their evening is best left to your imagination. Navero did not go to the tavern. While he did not approve of the others going there, he didn’t know what he could say without offending, and he desperately didn’t want to offend anyone. Especially so soon after the time in the swamp when he’d been trying to protect Dania. She had been so angry, and rightly so; he had done a lot of harm. They must think so badly of him. It was very late at night by this time. Most people were indoors asleep, like good people should be. Navero wandered through the streets for a while, but found nothing requiring aid, nothing for him to help. Once a patrol of watchmen passed by, and eyed him with obvious suspicion. Navero realized he must look like a vagrant. He went to the only temple in town, which was consecrated to a Defender goddess he did not recognize. He apologized to the goddess, as she was not of the Order and he had no right to be in her place, found a prayer alcove, and curled up and went to sleep.

*“Forgive me, Lords, for I have failed.”*

## VII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 1st level

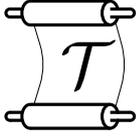
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 1st level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 1st level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



THE following morning, we all assembled in the official's office. There was a great deal of yelling and screaming, but the end result of it all was that we didn't get to see his Lordship, we didn't get any public acknowledgement, and we got only half the reward, as the Chief and the dragon were still alive. Much grumbling followed.

The GM then said that Naverro, Dania, Rourk, and Kortul had gained enough experience to go to second level, if we could find the requisite training. The warriors had it easy, as training facilities were readily available in the form of a few small self-defense schools; they usually catered to the sons of the local rich merchants, but made exceptions for anyone who could pay. The requisite training went quickly and easily, although Rourk did complain about the mercantile aspects of the schools. There wasn't a temple of the Unalterable Way in town, but the DM kindly ruled that, in this one case, Naverro could go up by praying by himself, and talking with the local priests for about a month; broadening his horizons, as it were. In time, the Lords looked down on their servant, and he grew in their sight.

However, Dania would have to find someone to supervise her studies in the arcane arts, and in a town this small, the chances of finding a mage who would apprentice her, and put up with her adventuring, seemed to be pretty dismal. Mages tended to be a bit tight with their secrets in this day and age, and often disapproved of mages who wandered around and used their power martially. First, of course, she had to find a mage who would apprentice her; perhaps if she didn't tell him she would be leaving to go adventuring, she could get what she needed and scam. With this in mind, she asked a townsman for directions.

Dania: <To Joe Townsperson> "Excuse me, is there a mage or wizard living around here, with whom I might speak?"

Joe Townsperson: "Well, there's the wizards on High street..."

Dania: "There's several of them? In a town this size?"

Joe Townsperson: "Yep, they all hang around together. Don't know why you'd want to talk to them, though. They're weird."

Dania: "I've got my reasons. Thank you and good day."

Dania walked to High street. The street was fairly ordinary, but one section caught her attention by the arresting appearance of the houses. They were very tall, yet cheerful looking, and seemed to lean back from the street. They had big glass windows, big round doors, were painted lots of bright colors, and had big gardens in front with lots of big bright colorful flowers. Violets and purples seemed to be a general favorite. Fairly certain that this must be the place, Dania went up to a random house and knocked. A tall wizardly-type man with a long white beard answered; surprisingly, he was not at all annoyed by the intrusion (as wizards often are), but seemed to positively beam good tidings from his beetling little brows. He was, by the way, dressed in a very loud purple robe, with lots of polka-dots.

Dania: "Um... Hello, master Wizard? I am Dania Couliari; I have come seeking an apprenticeship."

Wizard: "You have? Splendid!!! I love apprentices! Especially small cute ones with pointy ears! \*Poof!\* <Flowers appear in his hand> Have some flowers! Have some more! \*Poof!\* Have whole bunches of them!

\*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* \*Poof!\* Aren't flowers nice? I like this kind best. Do you like flowers, young lady?"

Dania: "Actually, I have hay fever. Good day, sorry to have troubled you..."

Wizard: "No, no! I can't have you going away like that! You aren't happy!"

Dania: "Excuse me?"

Wizard: "We cannot have unhappy people in our midst... For we are THE PURPLE POLKA-DOT WIZARDS!!! We ALL want to make the whole world HAPPY!!!"

Doors and windows up and down the street all of a sudden burst open, and about a dozen mages in loud, purple, polka-dotted clothing leap out into the street.

All PPW's: "YES!! HAPPY, HAPPY, HAPPY!!" <They all jump about and begin dancing up and down the street in joyous abandonment; Frivolous music starts up somewhere>

Dania: <Stares>

PPW 1: "We want everyone in the world to be just as happy as we are!"

All PPW's: "YES!!" <Some are doing cartwheels>

Dania: <STARES>

PPW 2: "We want the world to be a joyful place! With bright colors and flowers and singing and effervescence and glee!"

All PPW's: "YES!! ALL THAT!!" <They make a giant pyramid, which falls down, but they don't mind>

Dania: <\*STARES\*>

PPW 1: "I just love apprentices; don't you love apprentices?"

PPW 2: "How dare you grab this one up so fast! How dare you, sir! Why, I'd horsewhip you if I had a horse!"

Dania: <STARES; Jaw drops, hits ground with audible thud>

PPW 3: "Actually, I'd much rather \*she\* did that to me!"

PPW 2: "Oh? Whips and chains, dear Xinjanthropus?"

PPW 3: "Chains, you say? Your remark leaves me fit to be TIED!"

PPW 1: "Eww! We all CLASP in dismay at your tastelessness!"

PPW 2: "I am BOUND to strike you for that!"

PPW 1: "Lets have no disCORD!"

PPW 4: "Yes! WIRE we arguing?"

PPW 2: "All this over a deLINKuent!"

PPW 5: "She may KNOT be!"

PPW 3: "But she looks like a FAST 'UN!"

PPW 4: "And youth is the SPLICE of life!"

PPW 1: "You have a filthy mind! At least, not a TIE-dy one!"

PPW 5: "This LINE leaves me at the end of my rope!"

Dania: "Uh, do you do this all the time, uh, great wizards?"

<All PPW's gaze upon her, with glee in their beady little eyes>

PPW 5: "A STRAIGHT WOMAN!! SHE'S MINE!!"

PPW 2: "Restraint! He saw her first!"

PPW 1: "I'll fight you for her! Do your worst!"

PPW 5: "RIGHT! Lets have at it, then!!"

<They roach for her in a furious huff; Both get rock, then both scissors, then both paper>

PPW 1: "All right then, two out of three!"

PPW 3: "Wait a moment, she's leaving. Come back!"

PPW 1: "Don't leave! Can't you see I'm trying to tell you I love you? Because you remind me of you! Your eyes, your lips your hair. . . everything about you reminds me of you! Except you. How do you account for that?"

Dania: "Sorrygottagokidsonthestovebye!" <Flees>

PPW 4: "Rats."

PPW 5: "Do you think we sent her away unhappy?"

PPW 1: "No, not at all. Look! She seems \*much\* happier already."

(A few notes on the Purple Polka-dot Wizards: They cast Tasha's Uncontrollable Hideous Laughter as a 1st level spell, and Otto's Irresistible Dance as a 4th level spell. They are of Chaotic Good alignment, except for a few rare birds who are Chaotic Evil. The latter can be surprisingly nasty. When summoning familiars, if they get a special familiar, it will be a Faery Dragon.)

Dania went to find Joe Townsperson again.

Joe Townsperson: "Oh, hello."

Dania: "You sick little <censored> bastard. Why didn't you tell me they were all a bunch of lunatics?!"

Joe Townsperson: "Well. . . you didn't ask."

Dania: "Well, now I AM asking you: are there any wizards in this whole goddamned town who AREN'T insane?"

Joe Townsperson: "Well, one. . ."

Dania: "Where? And is there anything I should know about him?"

Joe Townsperson: "Nobody much goes near his place, ma'am. He only gets visitors late at night. It's the big dark house on Kings road, can't miss it. He isn't a very good neighbor, ma'am, but I can say he ain't any loopier than any other wizard, and less than some."

Dania: "Good. Good-day."

Dania trekked up to Kings road. The house was indeed unmistakable, in its eerie glowering eldritch hugeness, an abomination suspended in a small polite white-housed neighborhood like a cancer. All of the other dwellings shied away from its vast and improbable obesity; it dwelled in malformed solitude, prodigious and arrogant, shrouded under an ineffable weight of gloom and despair. The house had no visible doors, although many windows which seemed to gaze into your cringing soul were scattered about the walls in awful patterns that the mind refused to acknowledge. The obscene, malignant carvings decorating the cornices seemed to swim into different, even more vile shapes when the eye was not upon them.

Dania looks for a door, but a disembodied voice stops her.

Voice: "I am aware of your presence. And your desires..." <A door exists where surely one had never been before>

Voice: "Enter freely, and of your own will."

Dania entered. Beyond, there was a hallway, thin but impossibly high, whose claustrophobic walls were a uniform shade of dark grey; they seemed to be shifting slightly at the edge of vision, but never were seen to move. The hall was longer than it looked; it took a long time to reach the end; when she looked back, the door was no longer visible. She reached the end of the hall, and stepped into a small black room. An unknown force moved her to another place, seemingly beyond the limits of space itself, and there, Dania met what had to be the master of the house. Nearly seven feet tall, dressed in a loose robe like a sundered piece of space, and with huge hands which seemed to flow into many more fingers than was acceptable. His cadaverous features were a study in fascinating ugliness, riveting and commanding in their grotesquery.

Master: "An apprenticeship. How amusing. How presumptuous. I haven't dealt with an apprentice since... Ah. So your former master was Galvolin."

Dania: "Uh, yes. He kicked me out when my parents did."

Master: "For having sex with a Drow? Very close-minded people. You are well to be rid of them. I see some small potential in you, though. Interesting flares and prominences. Very well, apprentice."

Dania: "Sure, thanks. Glad to be here."

Master: "Of course you are. Your first task..." <A wild gesture; Space and time scream; They appear in a room>

Master: "Clean all this glassware. And I want to see my face in it! After that, set the dining room table. I am expecting an important guest. Put 7 forks and 12 knives at his place."

Dania: "There's enough glassware here to fill my old bedroom..."

Master: "It seems that would be rather uncomfortable to sleep on. But some might find it very interesting... To work. Now!"

Dania: "Yes! Very good, o my master! Chop, chop! Oh, uh..."

Master: "Of course. I am perfectly aware of your other career. You may continue on in your destructive little ways."

Dania: "Ok. No problems."

Master: "For your studies, you may peruse the library on the first floor. NONE of the others. And, after you finish work."

Dania managed to complete the requisite studies, and was able to rejoin us periodically for a drink. In fact, although that library was a mage's dream, she took every possible opportunity to get out of the house. If she seemed any more morbid than usual, no one noticed. The training period passed uneventfully, leaving us rested and ready to continue in our explorations in the Orc caverns.

*"Your hands look scaly. Is that from lots of washing?"*  
*"Lord, I hope so."*

## VIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 2nd level

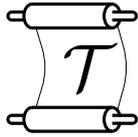
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 2nd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



HE rest of the month passed rapidly. Dania didn't turn into anything more hideous than usual, and training went relatively well for the rest of us. Rested and fit, we decided to trek back to the cavern and see what could be beyond that big barrier that made the slovenly Orcs put it up. Razuli accompanied the group, despite our assurance that his presence was not necessary, and Arlor also came along. Arlor was not treated very well, I am sad to admit; the humans regarded him with indifference at best, and both elves very obviously disliked him. (In addition to being a dwarf hanging out with elves, the player was also very quiet, and unused to our playing style, which involves lots of squabbling and pointless bickering, as you may have noticed.)

Rourk: "And another thing: you are to address me as 'Sir' at all times, unless circumstances demand the more appropriate title."

Arlor: "You mean, uh, 'madam'?"

Rourk: *<Draws sword>* "If you insult me again, I shall feed you your liver."

Arlor: "Sorry, sorry."

Naverro: "I don't think that was very nice, Rourk."

Rourk: "YOU try being nice to this hairy little... But you are correct. I am losing my temper over a nothing. I apologize for disturbing your composure, priest."

Arlor: "Thanks. Thanks lots."

Dania: "Just be quiet, will you?"

Razuli: "What are you two getting so upset about, anyway? It's OK, Arlor, they really don't mean it."

Arlor: "I think they do, yup."

Razuli: "No! They just feel that way about anyone shorter than they are. You see, Dania thinks you're gonna look up her robe, and Sir Snot-face over there once got beaten up by a rabid Chihuahua, and it left him traumatized. We all love you."

Rourk: "Mercenary, my temper is short enough as it is..."

Razuli: "And that's not the only thing."

Rourk: "You are unworthy of notice. Begone from my sight."

Dania: "And the shrimp too."

Razuli: "Who's talking about being a shrimp, little wizzerd?"

Naverro: "I wish you didn't not like him so much. It's kind of sad."

Razuli: "Kid, I've spent enough time here to know that those two are both idiots. They are pretty sad. Ignore 'em, and do what you need to."

Naverro: “But why are they both being so mean to Arlor? He hasn’t done anything to them, or said anything mean. He hasn’t done anything at all.”

Kortul: “Dragon to the left.”

There was indeed a Dragon in the misty distance. We couldn’t tell if it was the same one, and frankly didn’t want to find out. At least, most of us didn’t; Rourk had to be told that by the time he reached it, it would have flown away again. He contented himself with calling it a variety of unpleasant names for a while.

Naverro: “I wish they wouldn’t be so unkind. Especially Dania; she’s a very nice person, I don’t know why she’s behaving like this.”

Razuli: “Dania? NICE? Kid, you’re deluding yourself. She is better built than most elves, but that’s not what you mean, is it?”

Naverro: “Huh?”

Razuli: “Never mind.” \*Sigh\* “Where the hell did someone like you come from, anyway?”

Naverro: “From the Chapel of St. Glajmir of the Glow, under Master Luminont. And it’s not good to use that name. It might attract diabolical attentions, the likes of which thy soul would quake to behold.”

Razuli: “Right.” <Chuckles>

Naverro: “And you shouldn’t say such degrading things about others like you do. ‘Others will see you as you see them.’ And you shouldn’t drink of liquorous spirits. Or fraternize with the evil and the undisciplined.”

Razuli: “Naverro?”

Naverro: “And... uh, yes?”

Razuli: “Shut up. And do your job. Ok?”

Naverro: “But I must follow my faith.”

Razuli: “Fine. Do that. But you’ve been pretty fucking useless so far, you know, and shouldn’t be giving no sermons.”

Naverro: “But... I’m sorry. But...”

Razuli: “Fine. Now shut up.”

We reached the cavern in due course, and went in to the great hall. As far as we could tell, nothing had been disturbed except for the food, which had been taken. The barrier was intact, although the gummy resin on the stakes had degraded and flaked off in places. The barrier was made of large logs and branches, sharpened in places, with long spikes run through it all, and bound together with rope. Something the size of a human could scramble over it without much danger, but anything much larger than that probably wouldn’t make it. The cavern beyond to the east was quite large; there were a few interesting rock formations, most of them broken off at the base, but the cave seemed empty and dead.

Rourk: “Priest! I request of you a blessing before going in to battle the creature.”

Kortul: “Find creature first. Don’t waste time sitting around now.”

Dania: “Yea, as long as we’re in here, we should keep moving.”

Rourk: “You may explore ahead if you must. I shall be prepared.”

Naverro: “Uh, kneel, and take off your helmet.”

Rourk: “I have vowed not to show my face to others until I have proven myself worthy of it.”

Navero: “Oh. Well, uh... O Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way... The true shining path of servitude and right... Please do look down on this, thy... humble servant, and give me the right and the power to instigate thy will. *<Takes Rourk’s head between his hands>* Look down upon me, thy chosen instrument, and let your will flow through me into this, our... protector, that he may have the courage... and skill... to do thy holy works.”

Rourk: “Very good.” *<Tries to rise, but Navero continues>*

Navero: “Yea, though thy flesh-and-blood servants be weak, O Lords, I do ask that you forgive us all, each and every one, for our failures, be they of might or of will. Or both. Please, O Lords, let our small and petty differences be settled among us, and may we unite to vanquish those who would move against your will.”

Rourk: “Amen!” *<Again tries to rise, but Navero continues>*

Navero: “If one of us do drag the whole down, O Lords, inspire that one with thine own strength, that he may better serve the needs of all! Let that one smite down that which divides us! Let petty hatreds and pointless greed be ended! *<Shakes Rourk’s helmet; Rourk’s head rattles around inside>*

Rourk: “Uh, priest...”

Navero: “Please, O Lords! Forgive us all! We are weak and blind and humble before your eyes! Let us also cast aside old hates, which our own STUPIDITY drives on! Yea verily, the scars of a thousand years can be healed with one act of kindness, if kind thought can but enter the tiny, petty minds of those who hold the hate!”

*<Everyone is staring at Navero; Rourk starts to feel uncomfortable>*

Navero: “Let the fear of the FIRES and PAIN of your punishments sit with us ALL! Yea, illuminate us, and show us our follies! Though we be but as mortals, BLIND and STUPID, let it be within your infinite kindness to give us your wisdom, THAT WE MAY SEE OURSELVES!! And let this discord CEASE!”

Dania: “Navero?”

Navero: “And look DOWN and... Yes?”

Razuli: “Is your robe too tight or something?”

Rourk: “Perhaps it is.” *<Quickly jerks away and stands up>* “A good blessing. Truly, a great blessing. I thank you, priest.”

Navero: “Uh... yes. Uh...” *<Everyone continues to stare>*

Arlor: “Um...”

Navero: “Uh...”

Kortul: “Hope yelling didn’t attract monster.”

Razuli: “Oh, brother. That’s all we need. A loudspeaker for a priest.”

Kortul: “All priests loud-speakers. How they become priests.”

Rourk: “Indeed. This one can certainly make a helmet echo.”

Razuli: “Of course! It’s easy with such a big hollow space!”

Rourk: *<Fumes>* “You are beneath contempt.”

Dania: “Come on, Rourk, you walked into that one. Lets go now.”

Rourk: “I did not. I insist on that fact.”

Arlor: *<Giggles>*

Rourk: "WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT!?"

Arlor: "Nothin'."

Our brave heroes climbed over and through the barrier and down to the cavern below. There, they were met by... absolutely nothing. No hungry dragons, no maniacally screaming slime monsters from the planet Sh'rue'y\*ed, not even so much as a rabid Kobold. The cave was huge and irregular, about 60 feet across, with entrances in the north-east and the east sides. It was plain, empty, and silent.

*"I hope we meet some more interesting monsters."*

## IX

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 2nd level

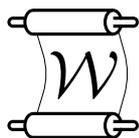
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**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



WHEN last we saw our heroes (and heroine), they were in the large cavern just beyond the staked barrier in the Orc cave. There were exits in the north-eastern and eastern walls, with the entrance to the west. The cavern was dry, dead, and uninteresting. We decided to continue north-east. We trekked a short way north-east to another cave. It had no floor; in its place was a large pit filled with molten lava. The heat was quite intense, and the sulfurous gasses were almost unbearable. The only other feature of note in the room was an entrance about fifteen feet to the left of us, on the western wall. The lava looked very dangerous and was very uncomfortable to be around, but some people felt they had to see what was on the other side anyway.

Arlor: "You want me to what?"

Razuli: "C'mon! It's simple! We just tie a rope around you, and you climb over on the wall until you reach that exit! Then, we follow you over on the rope."

Arlor: "Um... climb a smooth wall over boiling lava?"

Rourk: "Whatever is on the other side is sure to be very interesting. Else, there would not be any lava. Surely you do not believe it could have occurred naturally in these regions! Or perhaps you do. But that does not matter; I will not allow a dwarfish coward to keep me from glory and renown."

Kortul: "Too risky. Go other way."

Naverro: "I don't want Arlor to go. We should go the other way. It smells very bad."

Dania: "Right. Come on."

Rourk: "I see. As I am outvoted, I shall go along with it. Don't say I am insensitive my companions fears."

Razuli: "Why don't you go in, Rourk? Maybe it's just an illusion and you can walk right across."

Rourk: "Superior vision is an attribute common in my family. I would not be fooled by some craven spell."

Dania: "Riiiiight."

So, we went back to the entrance cave and went east. This passage was much narrower, and it seemed best to go in single file. Again, the problem of marching order was resurrected.

Rourk: "I do not believe that such a large blade would be of much use in such a small passage. This requires a delicacy and agility you obviously lack. Besides, with you guarding the rear of the group, there is less likelihood the enemy will smell us coming."

Razuli: "Kids, kids! We've been over and over this before. Can't you just go in?"

Kortul: "Elf incompetent."

Rourk: "Incompetent? You have managed to impress me; that had four syllables in it, and I had thought that such was beyond you. But then, you would be familiar with a word used so often by those around you."

Kortul: "Yes. Been around you a month."

Dania: "Oh, Christ. Will somebody get the fuck in there?"

Razuli: "Get my fuck into where?"

Dania: "Shut up."

Rourk: "I shall lead." <Strides off>

<Pause>

Dania: "Do you think we should follow him?"

Naverro: "Well, he might meet something that might try to kill him. And we should be there."

Razuli: "Yeah. Then we can all sit and laugh."

Kortul: <Grumbles>

We all went down the eastern passage after Rourk. This passage was different from the big cavern, which was hollowed out of limestone; this passage seemed to have been a crack or tunnel formed in cooling lava. A short way down the tunnel, we could see a dim glow coming from a small chamber up ahead. The glow was coming from a small pool of luminous liquid, which was in the middle of a small cave with two exits. On the ceiling above the pool, there was a cluster of luminous fungi; every so often, a drop of the glowing, gummy liquid would drip off and PLOP into the pool. The exits were in the east and south.

Rourk: "There you are! Humbled by my example?"

Kortul: "You make good scout."

Rourk: "I am the advance guard. Come here and see this discovery of mine. These mushrooms are obviously magical; what do you know of them, mage?"

Dania: "Nothing. Why should I bother with funguses?"

Naverro: "They look more like slime mold than mushrooms."

Game Master: What's a slime mold? How many hit dice?

Naverro: "Uh... I was a gardener at the monastery. They're harmless fungi. Please don't kill them."

Razuli: "Aw, you take all of Rourk's fun away."

We quickly discovered that the sticky glowing fluid would cling to most anything dipped into it, a notable exception being leather; coating a torch with it produced illumination that easily equalled the lantern. Naverro made a glow-torch, and several of the others dipped their minor weapons into the fluid; now having a better light source, we put out the lantern and continued on to the east.

The eastern passage was wide enough for two at this point, and so there was little argument about marching order. We went down the dark passage, which curved gradually northwards and became very dirty as it did so. It also began to smell strongly of mold, so we guessed we must be going upwards towards the surface. As we went on, we saw a little light up ahead, and heard a kind of croaking.

Rourk: "Frogs. I have not come here to kill frogs. Where is the great beast which I came to dispose of?"

Dania: "Just a minute." <Casts Dancing Lights, sends lights up ahead; A large lizard leaps into view and tries to swallow one; Another lizard becomes visible as well>

Naverro: "Some big lizards. They look hungry. Do we have anything to give them?"

Rourk: "We had best remove them from our path before continuing. They would otherwise be a great nuisance." <Strides forward>

Naverro: "Wait, maybe we can. . ." <Rest of party moves in>

HackSkewerCrushSliceImpaleChopStompStompStompObliterateStabDisembowel

Razuli: "Well, that was fun."

Naverro: "Did you have to do that?"

Razuli: "They had big teeth and claws. C'mon, let's go."

Game Master: Besides, think of all 26 experience points you got.

The party continued past the lizard bodies, which twitched as they lay on the floor. The light was coming from a smaller colony of the glow fungus, also on the ceiling. As we progressed northwards, the upwards incline of the tunnel became more noticeable; the smell of damp and decay was also getting stronger. Then, all of a sudden, the dirt beneath our feet burst open, and something leaped out and attacked!

Rourk: "Cleric! Keep the light up!" <Cuts, hits main body>

Naverro: "I got dirt in my eyes!"

Dania: "FuckingshitgodamnbastardwhatISit" <Casts Magic Missile>

Kortul: <Chops; Hits> \*Crunch!\*

Razuli: "A tunneler worm! I saw one in a farmer's field!"

Naverro: <Shoves glow-torch between its mandibles>

Razuli: "Keep out of its way!" <Shoves Naverro into wall>

Naverro: "OOF!"

Thing: <Sprays acid, torch dissolves>

Rourk: "GLORY AND DEATH! GLORY AND DEATH!" <Cuts into a leg>

Dania: "WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP?!"

Thing: <Dives back into the ground>

Kortul: "Not dead."

Razuli: "Quiet!"

Rourk: "I refuse. . ."

Razuli: "We can hear when it comes back!"

We waited, still and listening, but it did not come back. We never did find out what it was. We did have to go back for another torch. Further up the tunnel, we discovered a large quantity of animal bones, crocodile and boar and such. Nothing here was very interesting, so we continued on. The passage was running almost straight north at this point, and began to narrow. Kortul, in a rare moment of quickness, took the lead, and so was the first to notice the spider-webs.

Kortul: "Big spiders."

Rourk: "You are afraid of insects? Very well then; stand aside."

Razuli: "Naverro, light a torch."

Dania: "We don't need more light, Nav."

Arlor: "You wanna burn 'em?"

Razuli: "That's what you do with spiders. Roast 'em. To a nice crackly crunch."

Dania: "It would be better if we kept open flame to an absolute minimum, you know? I mean, we might hit a gas pocket, or catch somebody's clothes on fire, or something."

Razuli: "What are you so worried about? It's just a torch, wizzerd."

Dania: "Fuck you. It's too dangerous."

Razuli: "It's too dangerous to fuck you? Well, I..."

Naverro: "Please stop that."

Razuli: "Huh?"

Naverro: "Please stop saying things like that to Dania."

Razuli: "Well, EXCUSE ME!"

Dania: "You're excused. Bye."

Rourk: "Will you all stop this annoying bickering. You try my patience enough as it is. Priest! Light a torch."

Naverro: "Dania thinks we shouldn't."

Kortul: "Torch."

Dania: "But fires are dangerous! Fuck the torch..."

Razuli: "You're the only one here who can do that, Wizzerd."

Dania: "Say that again and I'll blast your face off."

Naverro: "Uh..."

Arlor: *<Appears from tunnel ahead of us>* "Um..."

Rourk: *<Jumps a bit, recovers>* "What is it?"

Arlor: "There are big spiders in there, yup. Big as me."

Dania: "Oh, that's no problem, then."

Razuli: "See anything else? Money?"

Arlor: "Um, nope. Nope."

Naverro: "Perhaps we should leave them? They're not hurting anything."

Rourk: "I agree. There is little honor in slaying bugs, particularly if they have nothing of value. Let us return, and go another way."

Dania: "Aye."

Razuli: "I what?"

Dania: "Shut up."

We all returned to the glowing fungus cave, prepared another couple of glow-torches, and set off to the south.

*"Why can't we find something simple, like a dragon?"*

## X

**Navero**, male human cleric, 2nd level

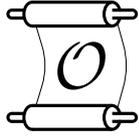
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 2nd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



UR heroes (and heroine) went south from the glow fungus cave, down a wide passage. Dania, Navero, and Razuli held the lights, glow torches obtained from the pool. Navero kept the map (I had to show the DM that he really was carrying some pens, ink, and paper; also fireplace tongs, a folding chair, 11 herbs and spices, about a gallon of holy water... ‘The Lords smile upon those who are prepared.’)

As the passage wound southward, it gradually widened out into a small cave with a dry stream bed through it. The floor was very sandy, especially in the stream bed, which ran from east to west. From the entrance, we could see no hostile entities, so we went in and examined the room. The only thing we found of interest was a giant carapace half-buried in the stream bed; it had belonged to some giant crayfish or lobster. Other bits of cracked exoskeleton lay about, but not much was left. There were entrances in the east and west, at the ends of the dry stream, and in the south. We decided to go west.

The westward entrance was in the stream bed, barely wide enough for us to enter. We walked down a small tunnel, at the end of which was a small, damp, kidney-shaped room, with a large hole in the floor. Four big ants—each about 2 foot at the shoulder—were standing around the hole, while a number of smaller ants went about the room, prying bits of fungus off the walls and ceiling and carrying them to the hole.

Rourk: “I am becoming disappointed. I am not here to exterminate insects.”

Navero: “Are they dangerous?”

Dania: “Hope not. Here they come.”

The warrior ants came over and ran their feelers over us. One took hold of Kortul’s boot in its mandibles, but he kicked it, and it left. They apparently didn’t think too much of us, as they left us alone after that and we were able to explore the room in peace. Nothing interesting turned up, so we went back to the dead crayfish room and headed east.

Eastwards, the passage narrowed considerably; Rourk took the lead by virtue of his speed of movement, and after some more breastbeating and shouting, we continued on.

Dania: “Jesus. Can’t you guys just take turns?”

The passage continued, sloping gently upwards, until it branched to the east and north. The stream bed seemed to continue in the eastward branch, so we took the northern one. It sloped sharply upwards, into a very wide passage with many small stalactites; we could see that the tunnel continued on north, barren and uninteresting.

Dania: “Fuck this. This place is boring.”

Razuli: “Fuck this? You’d have to break off one of the stalactites first, unless you’re...”

Rourk: “Shut up. I am rather upset with this entire expedition. I came here to gain glory and renown, and all I have found is dirt and cavern insects. I suggest that we waste no more time here.”

Kortul: "Floor's slimy." <A large glob of green goo could be seen on the floor far ahead>

Rourk: "Congratulations, ye great unwashed. You have discovered slime. There is not a foe worthy of me in this entire place."

Kortul: <Has moved ahead> "Gold on other side."

Razuli: "Ok! How we gonna kill it?"

Rourk: "You may fight the slime, if you wish. Although why you would kill your own relatives, I cannot comprehend."

Dania: "Just don't try burning it, ok?"

We all went up to look at the slime. It was bright greenish, and clung to the floor and walls. The air was damp around it, and the floor was muddy. It lay still, was very wet-looking, and rather odorous.

Naverro: "It looks like pond scum, or algae."

Razuli: "Probably green slime. Burn it."

Dania: "It's too wet to burn. You can't burn everything, stupid."

Razuli: "Who are you calling stupid? Say, whatever happened to your horse, anyway? Did you misplace it?"

Naverro: "Uh. . ."

Dania: "Shut up, Nav. Look here, mister: you have done more plain IDIOTIC things since this started than the rest of us COMBINED."

Razuli: "Name one!"

Arlor: "Can I say something?"

Dania & Rourk: "WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

Arlor: "Ummm. . . Forget it."

Razuli: "Look, kids: why don't we just burn out the slime, get the treasure, and go. Ok? Ok!"

Dania: "It won't burn, you idiot! And fire is dangerous!"

Kortul: <Sticks torch in slime. It comes out undamaged>

Naverro: <Examines slimed torch> "Uh. . ."

Dania: "What?"

Naverro: "This is just some kind of algae, growing in a pool."

Dania: "But theres no light down here for it to grow in."

Naverro: "Well, it's just algae. Something else must be feeding it. Maybe volcanic heat, or something."

Kortul: <Walks through algae. Does not collapse screaming, reaches pile of gold> "Looks real." <Prods with blade> "Cache."

Razuli: "See how easy that was, kids? Just leave it to the humans to figure it out, eh Rourk?"

Rourk: "Quiet." <Marches through puddle> "Let me see that."

Dania: "Is it the Orc's stuff?"

Kortul: "Not labeled."

Navero: "If it is, we must return it to the people of the keep."

<Pause>

Razuli: "Nav, we aren't working for them anymore, remember? After the way they treated us?"

Rourk: "Indeed. This would go only a little way towards repaying the injuries and insults they have given us."

Navero: "But we already received a reward. And this should go back to the people it was stolen from. The villagers are very nice people."

Dania: "I'm sure they are, Nav. But that reward was pretty small, you've got to admit. And not what we were promised."

Kortul: "Gold won, not given. Besides, is it Orcs'?"

Navero: "But they allowed us into their midst, us strangers. They are good at heart, just suspicious. I mean. . ."

Razuli: "Look, lets stow it away for now. When we get back, we can ask them if they're missing any money. If they are, we can give it back. Ok?"

Navero: "Well. . . all right. But don't forget to ask everyone."

Razuli: "Trust me."

There was nothing more in there, so we trekked back to the dead crayfish cave and went south. The passage wound southwards for a while, then abruptly opened up into a large cavern, about 80 feet across. Our torches glowed feebly in the vastness; we could dimly see two other entrances in the west and south. We heard a noise from the south side, across the cavern; a huge Orc came out of the south passage. He walked into the room serenely and confidently; he had a cunning gleam in his eye, easily visible from across the room. He was wearing boiled leather armor, had a big spiked wooden club; he also held two strange creatures on leashes. Another humanoid, about eleven feet tall and with a scary amount of muscle, came in behind him.

Rourk: "It is their chief. I recognize his stench. Why he is so much more poorly armed now, I cannot understand. His own foolishness, no doubt." <Draws swords>

Party: <We spread out, Kortul and Rourk move forward; Razuli loads his crossbow; Navero starts a Chant>

Game Master: The Orc Chief releases the leashes, and the two creatures start bounding across the room towards you, hungrily. They make for Kortul and Rourk.

Kortul: Could you describe these things, please?

Game Master: Certainly! They are 3 feet high at the shoulder, and weigh about 200 pounds each. They are rust-colored, have long antennae-like things on either side of their mouths, and long tails, with the end resembling a propeller.

<Pause>

Rourk: Jeff, are these things Rust Monsters?

Game Master: Why yes, they do look rather like them.

<Longer pause>

Kortul & Rourk: "AAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!!"

And so, the biggest, buffest dudes in the party fled in a blind panic back through the entrance. Kortul fled to the ant cave, where he tore off his armor, dropped his sword, and grabbed a piece of rock and prepared himself as the Rust Monster charged greedily after him. His first strike was a fumble. He tripped over the Monster and fell on his face beyond it. The monster ran hungrily over to the pile of armor. Kortul struck again; another fumble. He threw his rock across the room. The monster began rusting and eating his banded mail; it was all disintegrating! In a fit of true desperation, Kortul tried to lift the monster away and shove it down on a

stalagmite. Another fumble; he herniated himself, and the monster ate all his armor. Full, it wandered away with a rather bored look on its face, leaving the sword for later.

Rourk fled to the glowing fungus cave and dived in the pool. The Rust Monster following him apparently didn't like the stuff (lucky for him) and would not enter the pool. So there was Rourk, standing up to his armpits in glowing goop, with a hungry armor-eater at the edge of the pool, scampering around and trilling for him to come out. Razuli fled to the slime cave, but there wasn't a monster to follow him. Of course, you realize that this left Dania, Arlor, and Navero to deal with the Orc chief and his Ogre friend.

Dania: "Oh, shit."

Navero: "Uh... What should we do?"

Orc Chief: "I give you the option of surrender." (Heh, heh.)

Arlor: "One of the true people would never surrender!" \*Gulp\*

Orc Chief: "What will you do, then?"

Dania: "FuckingGodamnBastardsKILL!!!" <Casts Sleep on Ogre; Ogre drops>

Navero: "HUDSDG!" (Command—Stop in Orcish.)

Orc Chief: "Amusing." <Throws javelin, misses>

Razuli: <Looks in> "Are they gone?"

Dania: "Yes, oh my knight in shining armor."

Arlor: "Um, what do we do?"

Razuli: "Ah ha! I'll engage him frontally... No, Dania better do that, as she's got a better front." <Shoots crossbow, string breaks>

Navero: "He's trying to wake up the Ogre."

Dania: "Fuck YOU!" <Casts Magic Missile>

Orc Chief: "Ow! You stinkn', rottin' elf!" <Throws javelin, pierces Dania>

Navero: "NO! You, you, you..." <Cure Light Wounds on Dania>

Razuli: "Oh, I'll bet he's scared now." <Fixes crossbow, loads again>

Navero: <Charges across room, swinging mace> "YAAAAAAHHH!!!"

Razuli: "Nav, move so I can get a clear shot."

Navero: <Fumble; Trips and falls down>

Razuli: "Thanks, Nav." <Shoots chief>

Orc Chief: <Laughs, throws javelin at Rizudo; Misses>

Arlor: <Throws dagger at chief; Misses>

Dania: <Wakes up> "Owww... Whasgoion? Oh! Razuli, go get him!"

Razuli: "ME?! Oh, no no no, I really couldn't. I insist."

Arlor: <Throws second dagger; Critical, double damage> "Yeah!"

Dania: "YOU'RE ALL A BUNCH OF GUTLESS ASSHOLES!!!" <Casts Magic Missile>

Orc Chief: "You'll all die!" <Swings at Razuli, hits>

Naverro: <Comes up behind chief; Hits, does 3 hit points>

Razuli: "Oh, fucking shit. . ." <Swings, hits>

Arlor: I'll hit him from behind.

Game Master: No, Naverro's in the way.

Arlor: Ok, I go over and kill the Ogre.

Game Master: Ok. You slit it's throat, no problem.

Orc Chief: <Swings, hits Razuli again>

Razuli: "Kids, I hate to nag, but could you help me kill the thing?"

Dania: "Oh, so NOW were all supposed to pitch in, HUH?"

Naverro: <Misses>

Dania: <Hits it with her staff; Chief starts wobbling>

Razuli: "All right!" <Strikes, Chief falls> "Damn, I'm good."

Dania: "Shut up. Just shut the fuck up. SHUT YOUR FACE. Ow. . ."

We found Kortul sitting on his Rust Monster, beating its head in with a rock. It squeaked pitifully, then expired. After much sound and fury, we killed the other Rust Monster, and got Rourk out of the glowing pool. However, the sticky glowing fluid adhered to the metal of his armor as tightly as glue; we couldn't wash it off or scrape it off, and with it on, he looked like a giant tinker bell.

Rourk: "I cannot walk about looking like this. It's indecorous."

Kortul: "Get rest of you, so you match."

Rourk: "Oh, really?"

Razuli: "Looks like you'll have to go without armor." <Chuckles>

Dania: "Don't worry. It's not so bad."

Rourk: "It's undignified. I should look like a pauper."

Arlor: "You'd rather look like a big fairy?"

Razuli: <Laughs> "No problem! He's an elf, he already is!"

*"Rust Monsters work really well. I'm gonna have to remember to use them more often."*

## XI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 2nd level

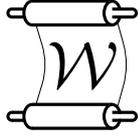
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 2nd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



WHEN last we heard from the party, they had engaged the Orc Chief, an Ogre, and two Rust Monsters in battle. In the resulting brouhaha, Dania was seriously hurt, Razuli less than seriously hurt, Kortul got his armor destroyed, and Rourk was liberally coated with brightly glowing fungus juice. (Whatever possessed him to jump in the pool is beyond me, but it dissuaded the Rust Monster.) Naverro and Arlor were unhurt.

We were badly enough off that we decided to just take the Chief's head and go back to Swamp Keep to rest, and maybe fix Rourk so he didn't look like a 5-foot spiky tinker bell. Kortul also expressed interest in some new armor. So we went back north, through the dead crayfish room, north to the glowing fungus room, and west to the great hall. We walked in calmly, expecting no trouble.

Game Master: You walk in calmly, expecting no trouble, when all of a sudden, this incredible stench surrounds you. Will everyone please make a saving throw vs. Poison?

Rourk and Arlor make it. Dania, Kortul, Naverro, and Razuli fail, and immediately lose their respective breakfasts. They all collapse to the ground and are helpless with nausea.

Game Master: You see two vaguely cat-like creatures come out from behind the rock formations and attack the party. (Witherstench, I believe)

Rourk: I engage both. I shall soon deal with these rotten things.

Arlor: I run up and backstab.

Rourk: "Coward." <Swings twice, hits twice, does damage>

Generic fight. Rourk is cut up, as they have big claws, but is not too seriously hurt. Other party members recover very slowly.

Rourk: "Barbarian, I would have thought you were better at tolerating strong odors, seeing how you constantly acclimate yourself to them. But your weakness is merely a product of your inferior background, and I do not begrudge you your lapses."

Dania: "Ooogg..."

Razuli: "Rourk, did you just cut one? Man, I never smelled anything that bad..."

Rourk: "Silence. Your ignorant, sophomoric insults do not amuse anyone but yourself. Cease insulting your clear superiors."

Arlor: <Giggles>

Rourk: "What's so funny?!"

Arlor: "Nothin'."

Naverro: "I'll get rid of these." <Gets up, grabs the Witherstench bodies and runs into the room with the lava, planning to dump them there, so they won't smell anymore>

Game Master: You do it alone? Anyone go with him?

Party: If he just runs off, he is alone.

Game Master: Navero, are you alone?

Navero: I guess I am. I didn't think to take anyone with me.

Game Master: Well, the other stinker who was hiding in that entrance attacks as you approach. I assume you make a panicked cry for help.

Navero: Uh, yes. "Help!"

Game Master: It attacks you, <rolls dice> and... Oh my...

Navero: What happened?

Game Master: <Rolls more dice> Oh, dear.

Navero: May I intrude? I have some interest in the outcome of this.

Game Master: <Rolls still more dice> Oh my. Sorry, you're dead. Critical strike to the head, skull pierced, brain scrambled, instant death.

Navero: \*Thud!\*

Game Master: Well, the rest of the party hears this shriek from out in the hall...

Razuli: "Hey, where's the priest?"

Rourk: "I believe he went to dispose of the bodies."

Party: We all go running up there.

Another generic fight. Witherstench bodies are eventually disposed of in the lava, by Arlor and Kortul. Party gathers around Navero.

Kortul: <Examines body> "Dead."

Rourk: "Are you quite certain?"

Kortul: <Examines body again; Brain is dribbling out> "Very dead."

Razuli: "Well, this is just great! Where are we gonna get another one?"

Arlor: "Shouldn't we bury him or something?"

Dania: "Maybe we can get him resurrected."

Razuli: "That costs some serious bucks, magic-user..."

Dania: "Maybe we can get a discount because he's a priest."

Razuli: "Right. Step right up to The Late J. C.'s Body and Fender shop! Special discounts to pure people."

We got out of the cave with no further incident, except for a swamp cat in the entrance hall, which meowed at us and ran away. Navero was placed over his horse, and we rode back to the keep. The ride back was rather quieter than usual; everyone seemed preoccupied, although Razuli did try to liven things up.

Razuli: "C'mon! Why the long faces? We got the chief, so maybe we can get them to resurrect Nav as our payment. I don't think we'll get any more money out of them, anyway."

Arlor: "That'd be nice. Great. Yup, I guess."

Dania: “Razuli, shut up. I’m not in the mood.”

Rourk: “Indeed. Do us all a great favor.”

Razuli: “Kortul?”

Kortul: “WHAT!?!”

Razuli: “Ok, ok! Jeez. . .”

We arrived back at the keep gate by late evening; Rourk and Kortul gave the guards one look, and they opened the gate without a word. We went to see the official we had been seeing earlier; we caught him just as he was leaving to go home.

Official: “You killed the chief, but one of your number died. I see. Oh, it was that young priest? Truly, this is a tragic loss. He will be honored, of course, in the way of his faith.”

Dania: “Actually, we were thinking of trying for a resurrection.”

Official: “Well. . . that is a bit out of my field, but I shall see what I can do. Give me the Chief’s head—thank you, keep it in the box, and don’t drip on the desk—to show to his lordship, and then. . . ah, let me see. . .”

Razuli: “If it’s too much trouble, we can get another priest.”

Dania: “Oh, please! It’s not like they grow on trees.”

Rourk: “Your attitude disgusts me, mercenary. Truly, you are beneath any sort of contempt.”

Kortul: “May get competent one.”

Official: “Hmm. Truly, he had noble comrades.” *<Hands Dania a ring>* “But take this to Brother Guilern at the temple of Kiliy. Ask of him.”

Dania: “Thank you very much, for all your help. You have been most kind.”

Guilern, as it turns out, was the high priest of the main temple in the keep. The ring got us in to see him; he remembered having spoken with Navero, whom he recalled as a well-spoken, if thick-skulled youth.

Guilern: *<Examining body>* “Well, perhaps not so thick-skulled. . .”

Rourk: “Can you do it, o mighty holy one?”

Guilern: “I must consult the goddess in this. He is not of our faith. And naturally, the price for the ritual, physically and monetarily, is very high. By the way, most gentle knight; how did you come to be covered with Shimmer Fungus?”

Rourk: “An unfortunate accident. Would you, most wise Cleric, know of any way in which the, uh, Shimmer Fungus might be cleansed from my armor?”

Guilern: “It is extremely tenacious in its adherence, but alcohol should prove quite sufficient in its removal.”

Razuli: “I think it looks great as it is.”

Rourk: “Do be quiet. And thank you, noble Priest.”

Arlor: “Go get soused, I guess. Yup.” *<Chuckles>*

Rourk: *<Irritatedly leaves>*

Navero did not reach his eternal reward; he was halted by a gentle tug. This gentle tug became a wind, unfamiliar but not unfriendly, pushing his drifting soul back to where it once had been. A strange and stoical voice said, “You are called. Go.” And with that, Navero opened his eyes, groggily sat up on the bed, looked about him in bewilderment, and threw up.

*“Navero, don’t ever do anything that stupid again, hear?”*

## XII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 2nd level

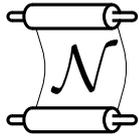
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 2nd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



NAVERO was resurrected, but needed time to recover, so the rest of the party decided this would be a good time to take a break and heal. This was not to be a leisurely break, however, as most of our money was gone. The resurrection had cost nearly all of the party's combined resources, leaving us with only enough to live on for a couple of months. We didn't have to wait that long, thankfully—Naverro recovered at a surprisingly good pace. (The money for Kortul's new armor did not come out of the party fund; we did not have a party fund except in the special case of Naverro. We all paid for our own equipment, so Kortul had to borrow from the other players. Only Razuli wanted to charge interest.)

As poor as we were, giving the townspeople their money back, as Naverro had wished to do, was entirely out of the question. Naverro still wanted to return something to them, and so was in favor of going out to get some more money, as he felt rather guilty about getting all that money spent on him.

Razuli: "Sure, we would have given them back all their money. We were going to, but you had to wander off and get yourself killed."

Naverro: "I'm sorry. You shouldn't have spent so much on me."

Dania: "Forget it. No problem."

Razuli: "It was your own stupid mistake that got us into this mess. Now, kiddy, promise me you won't ever do that again."

Naverro: "I promise, upon St. Glajmir. We will go to get more somewhere to pay the townspeople back, won't we?"

Razuli: "Sure. No problem at all. I knew you had a larcenous streak in you somewhere. Now lie still, and don't let any more of your brain fall out. You need what you've got."

Dania: "Razuli, can I talk to you outside a minute?"

Razuli: "Sure. You think she's hot for me, kid?"

Naverro: "Uh..." <They leave, go out into hall>

Dania: "If you talk to Naverro like that again, I'll fry your face off."

Razuli: "Hey, whatsa matter? Just a joke."

Dania: "You're a joke, human. Let's get out of here."

Razuli: <Mutters> "Boy, she is a witch today, isn't she?"

Rourk and Razuli spent many nights in the tavern, Razuli enriching the place with his meager supply of funds, and Rourk letting him. The little cavalier was not above a good ale, but he never had any in the common room, as he would have had to take his helmet off; instead, he and Razuli sat and insulted each other for hours on end. Rourk also stopped by the temple to ask about the Shimmer Mold.

Rourk: “Greetings! Honored Cleric, you have the pleasure of addressing Rourk Ravensbane, of the clan Kuirt’yhiasdall. I wish to partake of your knowledge, concerning a substance I have lately encountered which may be of potential use to me.”

Generic Cleric: “Oh? And how may I help you?”

Rourk: “What do you know of Shimmer Mold?”

Generic Cleric: “I know something of it. It is rare, but not so rare as to make it of great value. Its light will coat nearly anything except flesh, living or dead, and cling tightly. It can also serve as a heat insulator, but not so effectively as it does a light source. It decays rapidly, in less than a day. It is also a carcinogen.”

Rourk: “Ah. I had felt that my armor was unusually warm. Thank you for your services, gentle priest, I am eternally grateful.”

Generic Cleric: “20 gp for sage advice. Payable now.”

Kortul proved quite asocial—he spent his days and nights prowling the marshes, hunting, foraging and living off the land. Apparently, he felt the keep smelled very bad, his companions only slightly less so, and the marshes slightly less than that. He never was very friendly.

While she was in town, Dania went back to her master, so as to keep up with her studies. She didn’t like him (who would?) but he did keep a great library, and if you didn’t mind the things you had to get out of the glassware, it wasn’t bad. Usually, she avoided him if possible, and he seemed content to let her. One day, Dania was washing up after Master had supped with a guest she had been VERY careful to avoid (it was the one with 7 forks and 12 knives again) when space and time screamed, and she found herself in her master’s workroom.

Master: “I have work for you.”

Dania: “Sure!” <Big grin>

Master: <Faint smile> “I want you to go out and collect some brains.”

Dania: “Brains?”

Master: “Yes. Hominid will do, for now. You should be able to find some appropriate specimens nearby.”

Dania: “Brains?”

Master: “YES. At least three, from individuals with some variation between them. And no diseased specimens. Place them in this box, and they shall be teleported here.”

Dania: “Brains?”

Master: “You have ears, I perceive. Have you used them recently, or are they filled with dish-soap?”

Dania: “You mean, living brains?”

Master: “By the time they got here, I would be quite surprised if they were alive. But they should be reasonably fresh. Now hop to it.”

Dania: “Uh... go out, and... PROCURE, uh... brains. Cerebral matter. The grey-and-white stuff?”

Master: <Pauses> “If you insist upon not using it, as you seem to be doing, there is always your own.”

Dania: “RIGHT! Bye! I’m going now! Chop, chop!” <Scampers out>

Master: “Apprentice?” <Sounds slightly peeved>

Dania: “Huh? Oh yeah, right.” <Comes back, gets box, scampers out>

Dania went wandering down the sunny streets, the utter possibility of her errand high in her mind. Where, oh where could one find a loose brain lying around? Maybe some calves brains from the butcher? No, no, Master would never go for that. Ummm... Does this town have a morgue? She wandered distractedly about the town, when whom should she meet, but Razuli. Razuli seemed quite inebriated, but was otherwise intact.

Dania: "Raz! Fancy meeting you here!"

Razuli: \*Hic!\*

Dania: "You drunk already? Jesus. What's the occasion?"

Razuli: "Schtoopid K-nigut fled to outdink me. Me, the Mashter!"

Dania: "Out-dink you? Trust me, no one could do that. Where's Rourk?"

Razuli: "In dere. I WON ALL HIS MONEY!! Ha haaa ha hee hee hee. . ." \*SPLOT\* <Lands in a horse trough>  
<Dania goes in, finds Rourk in his room, passed out>

Dania: "Ummm... No, maybe I'd better not." <Leaves>

And so she continued down the city streets, wondering where she could find a likely candidate. They abounded—beggars and orphans and other expendable people of all kinds; but how exactly did one broach the subject? "Hi there, I'd like to get to know you better. Trust me, I'm only interested in your mind." She didn't dare go back empty-handed; things were looking grim when a leper was run down by a merchant's wagon in the street right in front of her.

Merchant: "What is that? Get rid of it before my family is infected!"

Dania: "Sure! No problem! Have a nice day!" <Drags body away. Finds empty alley, hides behind some barrels, takes out knife> "Sorry about this, guy."

Later, she got a bum who collapsed in the street and hit his head on a paving stone. Unfortunately, she got both of them back later, with a short, terse note:

Quality matters, apprentice. These are unacceptable.

Dania: "Shit. We were going back to the Orc caves tomorrow."

And so we did. The party rode through the swamp, walked into the cave, through the great hall, over the barrier, into the entrance hall, past the shimmer mold cave, over the meadows, and through the woods, to grandmother's house we... ahem. Past the crayfish cave, and into the Orc Chief's ambush cave. There were two entrances, one in the south and one in the west. All the bodies had vanished.

Naverro: "What's that box on top of your pack, Dania?"

Dania: "Never mind, Naverro."

Naverro: "I don't like it; it's... wrong. Evil."

Dania: "Nav, trust me, Ok?"

Naverro: "Well... ok."

The western entrance led to a long, narrow passage, terminating in an exit to the surface. It was reasonably well hidden with brush, and quite unnoticeable unless you knew where to look. The southern entrance (the one the Orc Chief had come from) led to a small pair of caves; one had a pile of matted vegetation, several large clubs, and a box (opened and empty, of course). The other cave had a couple of wooden cages. Some rusty bits of iron were in a sack on the wall; this was probably where the Rust Monsters had been kept. A long search turned up nothing of any value. We returned, and got as far as the Shimmer Mold cave when Rourk stopped us.

Rourk: "Gather some of this fungus extract will you? I have a plan."

Razuli: "Hoo boy. Here we go."

Rourk: "Silence in the presence of your betters, mercenary."

Dania: "Want to be painted again?"

Navero: "Here, I have some in this sack. What is your plan?"

Rourk: "Follow me, and see for yourselves."

We walked up to the cave with the boiling lava, and Rourk flicked a drop into the lava. A small portion of the lava solidified, and sank. Apparently satisfied by this, with a flourish Rourk emptied the sack onto the lava; it formed a narrow, rough bridge across to the entrance.

Rourk: "Now do you understand, my fellows? I realized this from the moment I was coated with it. Now, we may go across easily."

Razuli: "About how strong is the bridge, Rourk? Wanna walk out and test it?"

Arlor: *<Toddles out onto bridge>*

Rourk: "I will not have you. . ." *<Plants armored foot on bridge, breaks through>* "... attempt to fight anything you might find on the other side of that entrance, dwarf. Scout ahead and come back quickly." *<Examines foot; it is not too badly burned>*

Arlor: "Um. . . Ok." *<Walks to other entrance; He is gone for a short time when cracks start to appear in the bridge>*

Navero: "Please hurry, the. . ."

Arlor: *<Appears, staggering>* "Duh. . . duh. . . duhhh. . . Yeek!!"

Razuli: "Arlor, get your ass over here."

Arlor: "Droi. . . drou. . . droggy. . . DRAGON!! BIG!! RED!! SMOKY!!"

Dania: "Oh, fuck. Get back here!"

*<Party retreats all helter-skelter over the barrier>*

Kortul: "Tell what you saw."

Arlor: *<Quivering slightly>* "Dragon. Big. Red."

Rourk: "Was it asleep?"

Arlor: "Don't think so. It looked at me."

Rourk: "Ah. Perhaps we had better leave, then."

Kortul: "Yes."

Dania: "Yes!"

Rourk: "We can come back later and kill it."

Party: "ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR TINY MIND?"

Rourk: "We have a means of reaching it. And a heat insulator that will render its feared breath useless. And when it has gone to sleep, what possible threat could it represent?"

*"I think he's been getting too much sun."*

## XIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 2nd level

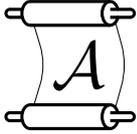
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 2nd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 2nd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 1st level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 1st level



dragon! A Red Dragon! Not some panty-waist Wyvern or a baby black, but what seemed to be, from all indications, a REAL LIVE ADULT RED DRAGON! And that stupid Cavalier wanted us to go in and kill the thing!

Dania: “Are you out of your fucking mind?”

Rourk: “Your insinuations are insulting to one of my stature. One need only think of the glory that could be won from the defeat of such a beast to realize our only course of action.”

Dania: “YOUR only course of action! Hell, I’M not going in there!”

Razuli: “Arlor, are you sure it saw you?”

Arlor: “Did my best not to let it. Might have.”

Kortul: “Came here for reputation. Get it, or die. Plan?”

Rourk: “Exactly, barbarian. You have a keen grasp of the obvious and proven facts. Dragons as large as this sleep hard, and are easily surprised in their lairs.”

Razuli: “Oh, my! Are you suggesting that we actually SNEAK UP ON IT? Not give it a fair, fighting chance?”

Rourk: “I propose only the time-honored strategy. One so uneducated as yourself would naturally see this in the incorrect manner. As I realize your obvious limitations, you can be forgiven, for now.”

Razuli: “Rourk, you’ve come to your senses. Sooner or later, I knew you’d realize that I’m always right. It just took time, that’s all. The thickest. . .” \*ahem!\* “. . . helmets are always the hardest.”

Dania: “You are all forgetting something. WE CAN’T DO IT!”

Razuli: “Think of all the treasure it will have.”

Dania: “Well. . . we can’t do it. It’ll slaughter us.”

Naverro: “If it isn’t killed, what will it do?”

Rourk: “That is plain and obvious. Orcs are naturally slovenly, and would not have constructed the barrier and maintained the poison unless it had some means of getting across the lava pit.”

Dania: “Like, maybe, swimming the backstroke. How much money do Reds usually have, anyway?”

Razuli: “Enough to keep us happy for, oh, say, several years?”

Dania: “I could buy a castle. A small one, wouldn’t have to be much. . .”

Naverro: “Red Dragons are greedy and evil, aren’t they?”

Kortul: “The worst.”

Navero: "It would probably come out and ravage the countryside, and do a lot of harm, unless someone is there to maintain the barrier and keep the dragon from destroying it and escaping."

Rourk: "I have no desire to remain as permanent guard, and the citizens of the town are obviously too cowardly to do so themselves. There is only one thing to do, and that is to kill it."

Razuli: "Right! For morality's sake!"

We returned to town, and borrowed the money we would need at the moneychangers. The sum was not great, although the 'changer charged some hefty interest. Then, we all got training to go up a level; the time we spent would hopefully give the dragon a chance to go back to sleep, assuming it did not see Arlor.

(Fortunately, this is 1st edition AD&D, before the dragons became Dragons, i.e. got nasty. We wouldn't even CONSIDER doing this now. Not with a party like this. The 2nd edition has improved some things.)

We trained hard. Practiced all our skills. Insisted that Rourk teach everyone some Drow Silent-Speech. Got fire-resistant backpacks. The works. Dania's master was not pleased with her sudden interest in fire resistance spells, seeing that she had not completed the task he had already given her. She promised him that in just a little while, she would be able to get him with something even better than expected, so he decided to wait and see. He did not take the opportunity to read her mind, as he had done earlier; perhaps he liked surprises.

Finally, the day arrived when we felt more preparation wouldn't do us the slightest bit of good. We rode to the cave at dawn, tethered our horses, and walked quietly into the entrance hall. We ran rags and threads and bits of leather strapping through our armor, so it would not make as much noise. We tied soft soles to Rourk's metal boots; everyone else's were soft enough to be quiet. Then, we went to the Shimmer Mold cave, and coated all of our armor and equipment, first liberally with the glowing liquid, then with soot to kill the shining. Everyone wore scarves over their faces, so they wouldn't be exposed. All of this was done in complete silence; no arguments broke out, no one even spoke. Even the use of silent-speech was minimal. For the first time, the party acted with complete unity of purpose.

We then practically emptied the pool of mold juice into waterproof sacks, and carried it to the lava pit. Arlor and Dania, the quietest and lightest people, carefully made a strong bridge along the wall to the other entrance, wide enough and thick enough to hold all of us, but not enough (hopefully) to support a dragons bulk. The rest of us joined them, and we all went in.

Arlor spotted a thin wire stretched across the entrance, and cut it; it led to a precariously balanced pile of old armor, tucked into a hidden alcove. The floor beyond had been coated with some slippery goo; we covered it over with more of the soot we had brought, careful not to raise a choking cloud of it. Navero cast Resist Fire on everyone.

We went down a wide passage about 20 feet, which then opened into a cave about 80 feet across. The rock formations were more numerous, but were ground down and rough. Far away, at the western end, was a pile of more coinage than most of us had ever before seen in one place. Gems and jewels, and more valuable things, glinted in the dim light the lava made. And, most important, there was the focus of all our thoughts. It wasn't a deep red, as one would have imagined, but a bright scarlet; and somehow seemed small in the quiet immensity of the cave. It was larger than it's pile of treasure, though; and that made all the difference.

Its eyes were closed.

Its breathing was very slow; maybe once a minute.

Its great wings lay flat, rustling with it's breath.

It looked deadly, even in repose. Thick dagger of a body, long graceful neck, an adze-shaped head angling down to thin jaws that could crush any of us instantly. It's claws were straight, not curved sickles, tapering to small graceful points so sharp they seemed impossible in something so large. Its essence was glory and destruction, sheer power as an end to itself.

It reeked of the death it held inside.

The columns of living rock outlined the golden alter on which it lay.

We came forward for the ceremony in silence.

It opened its eyes. . .

## XIV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 3rd level

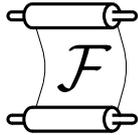
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 3rd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 3rd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 2nd level



OR a moment, everything paused. We stared into its gold-flecked eyes like they were the only thing in the world. Then, as agreed, we scattered. Kortul and Arlor ran to the right, Kortul to the fore, aiming his longbow, and Arlor about 15 feet to the rear. Rourk and Razuli went left, Rourk forward with weapons drawn and Razuli loading his crossbow. The dragon all too quickly shook off its sleep and stood, and moved its claw in a curious way. Naverro and Dania hid behind the rocks, Naverro starting a Chant which would encourage his friends, and Dania fired off 2 magic missiles. The missiles streaked out across the room, and fizzed out on an invisible barrier; a Shield. So far, except for spellcasting, not a sound had been made.

The dragon roared. The earsplitting noise echoed enormously in the cave's confines; we quickly realized it had been chosen partially for its great acoustics. The noise was so loud that Naverro was shocked out of his chant, and Arlor and Rourk were stunned. Then it breathed, a mighty gout of flame, in the direction of Rourk and Razuli, at an angle guaranteed to get both. Razuli ducked behind a lump of stone, but Rourk, stunned as he was, could not possibly get out of the way. The flames blazed around them both; a great blast of steamy residue flew off as the Shimmer mold which had coated them was seared into ash, but they were alive. Kortul fired two arrows; one bounced off the invisible shield, the other from the creature's metallic hide. Dania swore and cast a Web spell about the dragons feet.

Kortul and Rourk charged; Arlor approached more cautiously. Razuli lifted his crossbow, but discovered the string had burnt through, so he drew his own blade and moved forward. Naverro resumed the Chant. Dania cast Cause Blindness; the dragon shrugged it off. The dragon reared up and lifted the web, gold showering from it. The web tore completely away from its scales, and it then threw the sticky mass over Kortul.

Rourk charged up the pile of treasure, but never reached the dragon itself. One wing swung out, battering him away and almost throwing him into Razuli. The great tail swung out and knocked the struggling Kortul down, and then the dragon ripped into him with its claws until he lay still. Razuli ran up beside it, and threw his entire weight behind his sword, stabbing into its leg; blood hissed out and the blade snapped. Arlor threw a dagger, which skittered across the scales of it's neck. Dania moved from the rock to a column which was closer to the action, while Naverro continued his entreaties to his gods.

The dragon paused, as if considering its options, and then breathed again. This time, the fire arced across the room, and enveloped Dania and her column. Hair shriveled, and Shimmer mold boiled away. Rourk got up and swung both swords into one forelimb; he drew blood, but not nearly enough. Razuli drew his dagger, laughed at his own foolishness, and looked in the treasure pile for a decent weapon. Arlor tried to run around and get behind it. Dania dropped without a sound. Naverro ran forward to Dania, and quickly used his last spell point to Cure Light Wounds.

Kortul got up; he wasn't quite dead after all, and was able to rip away the tattered web in one motion. Rourk stabbed into the body, one blade merely scratching the steely scales, and the other not penetrating nearly as far as it should have. Arlor threw his other dagger; the dragon merely moved out of its way. Razuli saw a naked sword in the pile, gleaming in the red light of the lava, with a blackened and bony hand still around the hilt. He grabbed it without thinking. Dania was still unconscious, and Naverro began to hear something from the lava pit; a crackling sound, unfamiliar.

Rourk swung again; both blades grated across the scales. Kortul swung his great blade, and felt its weight come to a satisfyingly sudden halt in the dragon's neck. Arlor finally reached its hindquarters, and tried to pick a spot to plant his short sword. He chose the tendons of the leg. Razuli stabbed with his new sword beneath the tail, where he thought there might be SOMETHING vital; the blade sank into the steely flesh almost greedily, and the dragon actually screamed in pain. Dania was jarred awake at this, and cast another Web spell, but this time into the dragon's open mouth. The cracking sound was getting louder. The dragon's eyes blazed, possibly with pain but more likely with rage, and kicked back with both legs; Razuli was torn from crotch to throat, and hurled back into a wall.

The dragon grabbed Kortul, and threw him into Rourk; both dropped. With its other claw, it tore away most of the web in its mouth. Arlor cut at its leg, but it was like trying to cut through stone. Rourk got back up; Kortul did not. He had been thrown onto one of Rourk's swords. Razuli lay there and bled. Dania and Navero looked on in helplessness.

Arlor ran to Razuli, and grabbed the shining, bloody blade from his hand. Rourk swung twice, cutting across the deep wound Kortul had made in the dragon's neck. A good amount of blood rewarded him. The dragon looked down at him, and its left claw came streaking in out of nowhere, followed closely by the right; both hit, but the bite miraculously just grazed him, ripping his chest plate to tatters. Rourk was hurled away to the floor. Dania cast Magic Missile; it somehow snuck past the shield and made a slight wound in the dragon's side. Navero threw a rock, but it fell far too short.

The dragon looked out across the room, to where Dania and Navero were huddled behind a rock. It seemed to be at the same time insulted and horribly triumphant. Its breath roared out again. Navero grabbed Dania and threw his mold-laden cloak about them both as the flames surrounded them. The fires seemed to last minutes. When it was over, Navero almost gently dropped to the floor; Dania had been shielded by Navero's body, and was nearly unhurt. Rourk hacked at the dragon again; it seemed to finally be slowing down, although he did no significant damage with the strike. Arlor ran up behind it and chopped at its leg again. The sword was almost as long as he was, and very unwieldy, but the slash cut nearly to the bone.

The dragon slipped down the pile, its leg no longer supporting it. Rourk smashed it over the head, striking for the eyes; he missed them, but the dragon seemed to be jarred by the impact, showing that it was weakening. Arlor swung, but the heavy blade was too much for him and he missed. Dania cast her last Magic Missile; they sputtered against the shield. The dragon swung with its great wings, blowing dirt up from the floor; Rourk and Dania got it in their eyes. It kicked back with its good leg, and tore Arlor's legs out from under him. He dropped with two broken legs (critical strike) and fainted from the pain.

Rourk struck blind. He hurled himself onto the dragon's sagging neck and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed. Blood hit him in the face and burned; he ignored it. Dania cleared dirt from her eyes, and started to limp away from the column back towards the entrance. The dragon snarled weakly and shoved Rourk away, slamming him to the ground and holding him underneath one claw. It looked into his eyes, and Rourk felt it trying to take hold of his mind and Charm him, but he was one of the Dark Ones, and not to be so manipulated.

The dragon's last desperate maneuver had failed. Rourk stabbed up into the golden eye. The dragon seemed almost indignant. Then, so slowly, with a great clash of steel on stone, it fell back onto its pile, and its last breath left it.

The thing was dead.

## XV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 3rd level

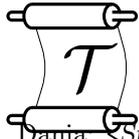
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 3rd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 3rd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 2nd level



HE dragon was dead. . . But so was nearly the entire party. Those who were not unconscious checked on their fallen comrades.

Dania: <Stares numbly at dead dragon>

Rourk: <Stares numbly at dead dragon>

Dania: <Stares numbly at dead dragon>

Rourk: <Stares numbly at dead dragon>

Dania: "Rourk?"

Rourk: <Stares numbly at dead dragon>

Dania: "Are you alive?"

Rourk: "What? Oh. . . yes, I believe so."

Dania: "Is anyone else down there?" <Starts limping forward>

Rourk: "I shall see. Are you injured, mage?"

Dania: "Yes. Ow. Nav was carrying the bandages, wasn't he?"

Rourk: "I believe so. Check him, he looks hurt."

Dania: "Everybody does. Ow. . ."

Wounds were cleaned and bandaged as quickly as could be managed, Razuli's shredded torso was tightly bound, and splints made for Arlor's legs. Rourk tried to wake Naverro for his healing spells, but Naverro was beyond his efforts. Then Dania and Rourk went to inspect the dragon and the hoard.

Dania: "Can I have the head? It's for my studies."

Rourk: "Hmm. . . It is a bit too damaged for display. I suppose that it could fall into your share of the booty."

Dania: "Great. Thanks." <Gets head, starts cutting out brain>

Rourk: "What are you doing there?"

Dania: "Dragon parts are valuable. Scales, organs, all kinds of stuff."

Rourk: "Indeed. But I am not one to dissect my dead foe. It is enough that my deeds be recognized."

Dania: "Uh-huh."

Rourk: "I shall inspect the treasure. I am Dragonslayer; my new status demands an improvement in my monetary position."

Dania: "Right."

The treasure pile was as impressive up close as it had been far away. Most of the coinage was silver and copper, but gold was present in significant quantity. There were also some interesting items; swords and rings and necklaces, a staff and a book, and an odd glass ball, that seemed to have three glowing shapes moving within it.

Rourk: *<Inspecting sword Razuli used>* "Mage, come here and look at some of these things. I wish your opinion."

Dania: *<Extracts brain>* "Just a minute."

Rourk: "Patience is a virtue of mine. Finish your task."

Dania: "Yes, Rourk. I've always admired your restraint."

Rourk: "Of course you have. Many do." *<Picks up glass ball>*

Dania: *<Stuffs brain into box>* "Alright, now... what is that thing?"

Rourk: "I have no idea. It seems to have three spirits of some kind imprisoned within it."

Dania: "Let me see."

Rourk: "Hold. I have not completed my own examination."

Dania: "Rourk, give it to me. It's magic, you shouldn't mess with it."

Rourk: "You think me incapable of understanding magic? Where I come from..."

Dania: "I don't wanna know about where you come from. Just give it here."

Rourk: "No. I expect an apology from you." *<Walks off>*

Dania: "Rourk, you asshole, that thing might be dangerous! Give it!"

Rourk: "Why? Do you think it might be especially valuable? You have given me a great insult, magic-user, and I refuse to speak to you until you have apologized for yourself."

Dania: *<Snarls>* "All right, I apologize! Now hand the fucking thing over!"

Rourk: "You seem \*somewhat\* insincere."

Dania: "Jesus CHRIST, Rourk! What the fuck do you *<censored>* want? All right, I apologize! I'm sorry I ever crossed you! I'm *<censored>* sorry I ever even MET you! Now gimme the goddamned glow-ball or I'll sock you!"

Rourk: "Oh, very well then. Catch!" *<Tosses glow ball>*

Dania: "NO, YOU IDIOT..." *<Ball slips out of her bloody hands, hits floor>*

The hollow glass ball virtually exploded into tiny fragments, each of which faded into a wisp of smoke. The wisps silently collected into three blobs, which slowly solidified into three warriors, each in full plate covered with exquisite carving, with great swords at their sides. They looked majestic, awesome, enough to take your breath away.

Paladin 1: *<Looks about>* "Right! Well, then. Thanks for killing the dragon, and all that. Harumph! Terribly sorry, but we must be going now."

Rourk: "Hail, great warriors! I am Rourk Ravensbane. You are...?"

Paladin 2: "We are The Three Who Do! Our great mission is to rid the whole wide world of everything evil!"

Dania: "Who Do what?"

Paladin 3: "Uh..."

Paladin 1: "Here now! Don't confuse him! It's impolitic!"

Paladin 2: "Look, everyone! A lady in distress!"

Paladin 3: "WHERE? I want the experience!" <Draws Chainsword; BUZZZZ!!>

Paladin 1: "A lady in distress?! Here now, can't have that!"

Paladin 2: "She's the one over there who looks distressed."

Paladin 1: "How can she be in distress? Her captor is dead and her rescuer stands right there!"

Dania: "Hey!"

Paladin 3: <Still whirling about, looking; Careless swipe of chainsword takes out a rock column>

Rourk: "I'm afraid there has been an error."

Paladin 1: "We are The Three! We are the ultimate embodiment of all that is essential to Paladinhood! We do not make errors! Only the evil and the ignorant insult us so! Do you detect evil on him?!"

Paladin 2: "No."

Paladin 1: "Pity."

Paladin 3: <Still looking; Cuts dragon in two and looks inside>

Paladin 2: "She's over there."

Paladin 3: "Oh? Ah!" <Grabs Dania and charges for the exit>

Dania: "Put me the fuck down, you <censored> <censored> <censored>!"

Paladin 1: "Here now! She's already been rescued!"

Paladin 3: "Damn! Hey, look at all those people on the floor, with negative hit points..."

Paladin 2: "Sorry. He gets carried away sometimes."

Dania: <Snarls>

Paladin 1: "Right! Well, then... Since you were good enough to let us out and all that, old chap, perhaps there's something we can do, by way of returning the favor, dontcha know."

Rourk: "If you would be so kind. My companions have been injured in the recent battle with this dragon, as you can see."

Paladin 2: "What, all these people?"

Rourk: "Yes. Do you possess any healing arts?"

Paladin 1: "All of these men for one dragon?"

Rourk: "Well, yes."

Paladin 2: "But it's such a little dragon."

Paladin 3: "Aw, these guys are wimps! Heck, I once had a character that killed 23 Bahumats!"

Paladin 1: "Nothing to brag about, old sport."

Paladin 3: "Well, that was before I got my Nuclear Chainsword +50."

Dania: "Uh, MIGHTY warriors, I am most distressed that my brave rescuers are lying in puddles on the floor."  
<Bats eyelashes>

Paladin 3: "Do we wanna spend spell points on them? I mean, they're not even in our party."

Paladin 1: "Tut! Least we can do."

\*Flash!\* <All unconscious characters now have 1 hit point>

Razuli: "Owwwwww..."

Kortul: "Is it dead?"

Rourk: "Yes, and may I introduce you to The Three Who Do?"

Paladins: <Stand upright and look majestic>

Naverro: "I got soot in my eyes."

Dania: "They aren't very healed."

Paladin 1: "Here, now! We must conserve our energies for the upcoming battle with our great nemesis!"

Rourk: "Who is...?"

Paladin 3: "Alive, but we'll do something about that!"

Paladin 2: "He imprisoned us within the globe!"

Paladin 3: "We never even got the experience for killing Asmodeus that last time!"

Razuli: "It's dead! Yippee! I killed it!" <Brandishes new sword>

Paladin 3: "With that? That's just +1, +4 vs. Reptiles. Why would you want such a wimp sword? Hah! No wonder you guys got thrashed; how long have you been playing, anyway?"

Razuli: "Plus WHAT? Playing? What are you talking about?"

Paladin 1: "Your sword's special purpose is the slaying of reptilian horrors."

Razuli: "Oh, neat."

Paladin 1: \*Harumph!\* "Well, we must go to prepare for the upcoming battle! Good luck to you, brave souls!"

\*POOF!\* <They vanish>

Dania: "Good riddance."

Rourk: "Indeed. From the looks of all of you, their healing truly was the least they could do."

Naverro: "Who were they?"

Dania: "The three morons. Now lets..."

\*POOF!\*

Paladin 1: "Yes, what is it?"

Dania: "Huh?"

Paladin 2: "The Three appear whenever The Three are called! Do not call us again unless we are needed!"  
<They look displeased>

Paladin 3: "Neat, huh? The DM said we could do that when we hit 50th level."

\*POOF!\*

Razuli: "Those looked like some very powerful idiots."

Rourk: "I'm afraid I find myself agreeing with you. This is truly a dark day."

Razuli: "Of course you agree with me! I mean, it's the only sensible thing to do. How much money did we get?"

We counted the loot; it came to a very large amount. In addition, we found three necklaces (none magical), four rings (one magical), two swords (Razuli's and a two-handed sword, both magical), the staff and book, and a lot of non-magical gems. Right then it was early afternoon; with luck we could make it back to the keep by nightfall. Placing the most valuable items in our pockets, we filled our packs with as much of the most valuable coinage as we could carry, and left. Or at least, we tried; the source of that cracking heard during the dragon battle was the bridge over the lava pit breaking up.

Kortul: "Shit."

Rourk: "This is highly annoying."

Dania: "Ok, guys, what do we do?"

Razuli: "Simple! We take the lightest person in the group, and throw her across with a rope around her waist, then..."

Dania: "Shut up, Raz."

Naverro: "I suppose we'll have to climb over. Unless there's some way out from in here."

Kortul: "Doubt it."

Arlor: "Umm... Can we look? At least?"

Dania: "Fine. Let's look."

*<Prolonged search; Prolonged mainly by Arlor; No entrances found>*

Razuli: "I wonder how the dragon got any food in here?"

Dania: "Who knows. Well, Arlor, hop to it."

Arlor: "Um... Did you look on the roof? Bet it's there, yup."

Dania: "It probably is, but we can't fly. Now get going."

Rourk: "I would expect this cowardice from a dwarf."

Arlor: "Then YOU go! I don't wanna!"

Razuli: "Arlor! If you do it, you can have first choice of magic items."

Dania: "No! He'll take the staff, and I should have that!"

Arlor: "I can't use it, ya know."

Dania: "You'll sell it. It's the most valuable thing. You know how greedy these little hairballs are."

Rourk: "I am inclined to agree. But the sword is obviously worth far more."

Arlor: "I don't like that either..."

Kortul: "Stupid. Priest! Get rope, iron spikes."

Arlor: "Umm... I still don't wanna..."

Kortul: "Yes, you do."

Arlor: "Umm..."

Rourk: "You do. Now go to it!"

Arlor: "Why do \*I\* gotta climb across! It's dangerous!"

Dania: "Because..."

Razuli: "Hey, where's Navero?"

Dania: "Oh, no."

They all ran to the lava pit. Sure enough, there was Navero, about halfway across, sliding along the southern wall, on the little bit of crumbly ledge which was all that was left of the bridge.

Kortul: "Doing pretty good."

Rourk: "I hope he doesn't get himself killed again."

Razuli: "Watch out for that next step, Nav!"

Dania: "Keep going!"

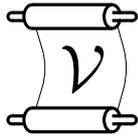
Navero: *<Reaches entrance>*

The treasure, and the party, were ferried over on ropes until all were on the safe side. Once there, we got the horses (which were still waiting for us) and rode back to town with as much speed as our ruptured bodies could take, arriving just after sunset. Navero went up to the temple, and everyone else went down to the tavern, and we all had a nice long uninterrupted sleep.

*"I hope I never see another dragon again as long as I live."*

## XVI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 3rd level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 3rd level  
**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 3rd level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 2nd level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 2nd level



VERY few mornings were more painful than the one to greet our heroes after the dragon slaying. Actually, it wasn't morning at all anymore, despite the early hour at which they had turned in. But, being awake, it now was obviously time for us to go out and exploit our new-found wealth.

Razuli: *<Calls downstairs>* "Room service! Breakfast!"

*<Short wait; Door opens>*

Maid: "You called for breakfast, sir?"

Razuli: "Yeah." *<Flips her an electrum>* "Anything else you think you can do for me this morning?" *<Looks her up and down, grins broadly>*

Maid: "I don't think so, sir. Breakfast in a few minutes."

*<Another short wait; Razuli re-strings and cleans his crossbow>*

Maid: *<Opens door; Has tray with steak, fruit juice, eggs>*

Razuli: *<Points crossbow>* "Big, isn't it? Wanna feel it?"

Maid: *<Leaves tray at door and leaves very quickly>*

First things first: we repaid the moneychanger, then went to the temple for a healing. Not being believers, and having already used their services so recently, we could only wrangle a Cure Serious Wounds for each of us; Naverro cured most of the remainder. We then asked Dania to identify the magic items; this she readily agreed to, as she was very curious about the staff and book. The magic items:

Ring of Protection, +1  
Longsword, +1, +4 vs. reptiles  
Two-handed Sword, +1  
Staff of Thunder and Lightning  
Spellbook with 17 spells, 1st - 5th level

Razuli quickly claimed the Lizard sword, as he had been the one to risk picking it up. Kortul got the two-hander, and Dania the staff and book. Arlor got the ring, over Dania's objection that she had the least protection and so should also get it. Rourk was obviously disappointed by the outcome, but didn't contest it.

We each went our separate ways, agreeing to meet sometime at the tavern to discuss plans for the future. The more sensible among us spent the time resting and replacing damaged clothing and equipment. Some, however, felt it necessary to do otherwise.

Razuli: \*Hic!\* "I'm RICH! Everbodee ges a drink onme."

Tavern Master: "Sure. That'll be 10 gold."

Rourk: "Despite the obvious fact that we are the only ones here?"

Tavern Master: "You don't like it, sir?"

Rourk: "Please, go right ahead. You may feel free to bilk my inebriated servant out of whatever you wish."

Razuli: "SERVENT?! I'll hav yu k-no I am a DRAGULSLIPPER!"

Rourk: "Mercenary, do not breathe on me again."

Razuli: "I castraded a dragon! Whoopee!"

Rourk: "Rather difficult to do with a female dragon."

Razuli: "Oh. Gess it yelled for 'nother reason. Ha ha HA ha hA!!"

Tavern Master: "Care to have a drink on it, sir? 15 gold."

Razuli: "I CANN BEET UP-PTHH ANYBLOODY IN THISH BARR!!"

Tavern Master: "Should I put him to bed, sir?"

Rourk: "No, good fellow. His antics are amusing."

Razuli: "I CUN BEET UP U!"

Rourk: "I'll wager that stag head is shaking in its mountings."

Razuli: "Bedder be. I'm a DRAGOHMSTIFFER! Tink i'll drink to dat."

Tavern Master: "Here you go. That'll be 25 gold."

Razuli: "Shanks. Yur a good fella. Do u k-no what I did?"

Rourk: "Yes. Soiled your armor."

Razuli: "Beside that. I... am a DRAGIMSPLAYER! I'm a buff dude!"

Tavern Master: "Yeah, great. You sound like you could use a drink."

Razuli: "No phanks, I'm walking! Hee hee hee HEE HeE hEe heE" \*Thud\*

Rourk: "I suppose you may put him up now. And also, remember those who do the title Dragonslayer its proper office."

Tavern Master: "I'll try, Sir. Good night."

Dania returned to her master's house after her own rest, with the idea of getting in some more study (for the next level). She went into the house, and was taken to his workroom, where she saw the brain suspended in some bubbling golden fluid, with wires attached to it.

Master: "Welcome, apprentice. You have done tolerably well."

Dania: "Thanks. I thought you might like it."

Master: "Did you, now? You presume to know my mind?"

Dania: "No! No, never, Master! It's just that these aren't, uh... common."

Master: "Hmph. Ah, well. It was good you found one within range. Was it living out in the swamps?"

Dania: "Yes, it was."

Master: "Getting one this recently dead is a rare thing. Although your excision shows you have little skill in handling a knife. In the future, you are to concentrate on improving that."

Dania: “No problem.”

Master: “You may go now. Clean the laboratory on the second floor. And have care to get under the tables.”

Dania: “Yes. Bye!” <Scampers off>

Things went on in this vein until the next day, when, with a shriek like that made by a quark being violated by a meson, Dania was suddenly drawn into the Master’s workroom. The brain still floated in it’s tank, everything seemed normal, but she could tell that Master was angry—VERY angry, but about what she didn’t know.

Master: “You, and your little friends: where exactly did you get this?”

Dania: “Uh... from a dragon. In the swamp. In a cave.”

Master: “Was it, by any SMALL chance, a Red Dragon named Lentic?”

Dania: “Uh, we weren’t, uh... introduced.”

Master: “No. You simply went up and beat on it, didn’t you, with swords and things? I see. And liberated Them through sheer clumsiness!”

Dania: “Them? You mean those idiots?”

Master: “Yes. Those idiots. Observe, prestidagitor.”

A basalt slab on one wall went misty, then cleared, and Dania saw The Three standing outside the house.

Paladin 1: “Right! Here we go, now!”

Paladin 3: “I’m gonna kill him! Dibs!”

Three swords rose up, and three swords came down, smashing the outside wall to splinters of foul-looking wood. The Three entered, and arrogantly walked down the hall outside the first floor library, and into a hall Dania had been told never to enter. After about 10 feet or so, a pit opened beneath their feet, and they fell into a pool of acid. They quickly dissolved, and the liquid was siphoned off and poured into a Sphere of Annihilation, gone forever.

Dania: “Well, that took care of it.”

Master: “Hmm...”

The swords had not dissolved, but instead sank to the bottom. As they watched, they rose up into the air, and The Three re-formed out of shining mist.

Dania: “Shit!”

Paladin 2: “Say, why don’t we try a different approach?”

Paladin 3: “Yeah, I’m sick of traps. They’re boring.”

Paladin 1: “Right, then. Lets go back, and get the heavy artillery.”

Paladin 3: “YEAH! He’ll never know what hit him!” <Cackles in a most un-Paladinish fashion>

Master: “Do you have any IDEA how much trouble it was to get them into the globe in the first place?”

Dania: “Lots?”

Master: “Apprentice, there is one thing you can do.”

Dania: “What is it, Master?”

Master: “Say, ‘Oops.’”

Dania: “Oops?”

Master: “Yes, very good. Wonderful last words.” *<Makes an arcane gesture. . . >*

**\*VADABLAM!\***

Game Master: The whole house shakes. Your Master, who never got a chance to complete his spell, is sprawled on the floor. You have been thrown conveniently near an exit.

Dania: *<Runs>*

Dania dived out of a window and landed in the street. Everywhere, there were explosions and concussions and flying bits of building. She got up to run, but ran into one of the paladins.

Paladin 2: “Hold, vile. . . wait a moment! You look slightly familiar.”

Dania: “Uh, it’s me! The damsel in distress, remember?”

Paladin 2: “Oh, a damsel in distress! You must be a maiden princess held captive by that nefarious sorcerer! Oh, how romantic! Fear not, gentle dove! I shall save you! Bring justice to your cruel oppressors! Avenge your honor! Return you to your pining family, who even now search for you everywhere! GOD, THIS IS THE LIFE!!”

Dania: “Uh, right. What’s THAT thing?”

Paladin 2: “This? But a Surface-to-Air missile launcher. But hold! My companions call to me! The evil magician is gone, having fled his chambers of power, to power to other chambers, no doubt! We must pursue him wherever he goes, for that is our destiny!”

*<The streets light up as a missile tears open a hole in a nearby house>*

Paladin 2: “Oops! Oh, well. It is nothing next to the banishing of evil.”

Dania: “Uh, thank you for rescuing me, kind sir, I believe I’ll go someplace and hide right now, bye!” *<Flees>*

*<Passes Rourk and Navero, who are coming to see what is going on>*

Dania: “JUST RUN, YOU IDIOTS!!”

*<Navero and Rourk look up the street, and see a tank rolling towards them, blasting the walls out of various buildings; They run>*

Somehow, after a great deal of running around and screaming, the party managed to assemble itself outside the tavern. We all went in; in the common room were a very familiar looking town official and about 20 town guardsmen. They were talking to the tavern master, and didn’t seem to notice us, so we decided not to disturb them, just go upstairs and get the money and stuff we left up in our rooms. . .

Official: “YOU!!!”

Party: “Us?”

Official: “GET. OVER. HERE. AND. HAVE. A. SEAT. IF. YOU. PLEASE.”

The guardsmen all look rather peeved, and didn’t seem to like us. We got over there and sat.

Official: “Would any of you just HAPPEN to know anything about THREE PALADINS who are wandering our streets committing mayhem?”

Dania: “Us? Oh, no no no.”

Razuli: “What a silly question! What have you been smoking?”

Navero: “Uh. . . \*ow!\*” *<Dania drives her staff into his foot>*

Guard 1: “Why won’t yu let ’im speak, yur li’l wizzerdship?”

Official: “Never mind. I think you know. But I realize that it probably isn’t your fault that they are here. I have heard of these Three; they are as powerful as they are stupid, and not to be swayed by any mortal’s wishes. Nothing stops them, not even common sense. Probably just an acquaintance, brief and fleeting, as I doubt you have much to do with such cosmic beings. As such, there is very little we can legally do to you.”

Guard 2: “How about, ‘illegally’, your Lordship?”

Official: “We do not do such things. Is any of what I have said true?”

Razuli: “Well. . .”

Dania: “Yes, it is. We met them in the Dragon’s cave, and we parted company immediately afterwards.”

Rourk: “We have, very easily, at least as low an opinion of them as you yourselves seem to.”

Official: “Good.” *<Brings out some papers>* “So, you are the closest living thing to a friend they have, and so can be considered next-of-kin, which of course makes you liable for any damages they do.”

Party: “WHAT?!?”

Official: “Naturally, we have already confiscated those goods of yours we found on the premises, and you will be expected to remain here and do community service work until all the damages are paid for, in full, with interest as applies. Guards?”

The conversation quickly degenerated after that. Kortul kicked the official in the groin and threw the table into the guards; Dania cast a Sleep spell into the main mass of guardsmen and dived out the window. Arlor dived out after her. Razuli decided that would be a good idea, too. Kortul went to keep them company.

Dania: “GET \*OFF\* OF ME!!”

Arlor: “Sorry.” \*Thump!\*

Kortul: *<Runs for stables>*

Razuli: “Arlor! Get a good look up her robe?”

Dania: “Fuck off, Razuli.”

Arlor: “Actually, I did. . .”

Dania: “AAHHH!!!” *<Tries to kill Arlor with her staff>*

Kortul: *<Brings out horses>* “LET’S GO!”

Dania: *<Snarls>* “When I get my hands on you. . .”

Razuli: “You’ll what, show him some more?”

Meanwhile, back inside. . .

Naverro: *<Hiding under a table>*

Rourk: “Ha! If you think that I would surrender to. . .” \*CLANG!\* *<Chair comes down on his helmet>* “. . .right. Priest! Let’s be off!”

Naverro: “Uh, I’m sorry, but I think we must be going. Your request is unjust and unreasonable.”

Official: “STOP THEM!”

Navero makes it out the door, guards right behind him. Rest of party rides around, Dania Sleeps more guards. Rourk jumps onto his horse. Navero climbs onto his horse. Guardsmen on horses arrive and start chasing the group.

Horsemen: "Halt, in the name of law and order!"

Navero: "Faster, Kumquat!"

Arlor: "You named your horse Kumquat?"

Navero: "Well... he's the right color."

Dania: "That's a mare, Nav."

Navero: "A what?"

... and so, our heroes rode off into the sunset, pursued by the local law enforcement authorities. Eventually, as the sounds of distant explosions became only a fading memory, we bravely set forth to see what the next town would be like.

*"I've never been chased by the police before! Gee, this is kind of exciting!"*

## XVII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 3rd level

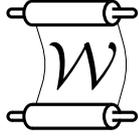
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 3rd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 3rd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 2nd level



WE continued to ride for a long time, despite the fact that the guards left us after the first couple of days, and rode back to the keep. We wished to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and the Paladins. The Three were obviously far beyond our capacity to survive, and if they considered Dania's master an enemy worthy of "heavy artillery" we didn't want to run into him either. He had seemed just a trifle annoyed at us for killing his dragon and letting Them loose. We rode on, to the north and west. On the journey, we all saw to it that Dania explained just what was going on.

Dania: "...and so anyway, I was apprenticed to the guy..."

Rourk: "You would voluntarily associate with such an individual as THAT? I wonder that he didn't send you about town, digging up graves or such ghoulish activities. And what was it that you were doing with the dragon brain, little mage? Your capacity for greedy immorality astounds me."

Razuli: "Actually, Captain Whitebread Sir, I hope you aren't forgetting all those women and children you guys killed."

Rourk: "They were Orcs and deserved no less. They are like a cancer, and must be cut away."

Dania: "Listen! Then, when the idiots showed up and attacked, the bastard tried to kill me, so I ran."

Naverro: "I would expect no less, if this individual is as you describe him. On those occasions when evil wears its own face, you should be able to recognize and avoid it."

Dania: "Yeah, Nav. It was stupid, but he was the only wizard in town. Except for a bunch of lunatics."

Razuli: "You mean the Purple Polka-Dot Magicians? We had a bunch of them in my home town. At least until we burned 'em all at the stake. That was fun."

Dania: "Oh, please. Why does everyone burn mages?"

Rourk: "Because warriors can defend themselves. Mages, being weak and vulnerable, are constantly exposed to the innate viciousness of the rabble. In this regard, you should note that all true nobility is comprised solely of warriors. No others possess the requisite strength, grace, and fortitude to rule."

Razuli: "Strange attitude for a darkie. I thought the women were tops in your place, Rourk? Women WIZZERDS and PRIESTESSES?"

Rourk: "There are, of course, exceptions."

Razuli: "Maybe the darkie women were ugly enough to scare you away, and traumatized you."

Rourk: "Bite your tongue, Human! Their grace and beauty could never be matched by your pitiful species."

Razuli: "Then why are you up here?"

Rourk: "I refuse to speak on that. Silence."

Razuli: "Admit it! You came up here looking for a good fuck, didncha?"

Dania: "Raz, shut up. You're annoying the hell out of me."

Kortul: "And everyone else. Quiet, all of you."

Rourk: "When did you have my permission to give orders? Please stand downwind of me when you open your mouth. This mercenary is a typical example of humanity: filthy, unsophisticated, incapable of even the simplest of tasks. . ."

Kortul: "Grrr. . ."

Rourk: ". . . having no regard for others, probably even mistreats members of his own family! Disrespectful of his betters. . ."

Kortul: "GRRRR. . ."

Rourk: ". . . uncouth, uneducated, insensitive and impatient. . ."

Navero: "STOP IT!! Why are you DOING this?!"

Razuli: "Oh, jeez, not again. . ."

Navero: "Will you please stop this? Why do you all hate each other so much? I don't see how you can hate each other so much, you haven't done anything BUT hate each other! WHY!?"

Rourk: "Priest, we can hardly be said to hate one another. These others simply amuse themselves with childish name-calling. Think nothing of it, for it is of no consequence."

Kortul: "Childish, yes."

Rourk: "Did you intend some insult with that, o great slab of underdone Orc fodder? Perhaps you even meant I?"

Kortul: "Meant EVERYONE. Shut up or split up."

Dania: "Nav, forget about it. We're all just stressed from having to run out of town so fast, Ok? Don't worry. It'll blow over. And we are not splitting up."

Navero: "Well. . . It just seems like. . . this is like every other time we're together, only worse. Everybody seems to be so angry. Maybe it would be better if we did separate, if being together makes everyone so mad."

Razuli: "Dania's just mad 'cause Arlor looked up her robe."

Dania: <Swings at Razuli, misses>

Razuli: "Ha! And Rourk's mad 'cause he had to run from. . ."

Rourk: "THAT will be QUITE enough! From here on, we shall travel in silence. Unless others voice objections. . .?"

Arlor: "I wanna go home."

Dania: "I'm not going with him. I'm not crawling into some smelly hole. . ."

Razuli: "I don't like smelly holes either. You should bathe more, Wizzerd. Especially after riding horses."

Dania: "Oh, fuck off, asshole."

Razuli: "Wrong hole." <Sings> "She's back in the saddle, again. . ."

Kortul: <Bashes Razuli over the head with his sheathed two-hander> "Enough. You annoy even me. Shut up."

Razuli: "Owww. . ."

The remainder of the day was mostly spent in glum silence. No one spoke much, although many angry glances were exchanged. Nothing of note occurred that day, except for a curious incident which had no direct affect on us. We heard a scream or keening from the sky, and looked up to see some sort of flying unicorn, far, far above us. It was flying eastwards very rapidly, when a bolt of blackishness shot out of the western skies and hit it, and it disappeared. About 15 minutes later a shimmer of golden particles wafted gently down, and vanished in sweet-smelling velleities when they touched the earth. We decided to alter our course northwards.

We set up camp early that evening; we all carried out our duties alone, as we found one another's prolonged presence intolerable. Navero and Arlor stayed together, but did not speak much. Dinner was rations and carefully boiled water from a stale pool. Rourk was on the first watch, when we were attacked.

First, a wild boar charged into camp, with no warning and little sound, and battered into Rourk. Borne down by 300 pounds of angry pork, he was lucky to get out a warning shout sufficient to wake the rest, as another boar and a sow charged in. Razuli stabbed the sow, and luckily killed it with one stroke. Kortul took to the second boar, while Rourk shoved his boar away.

Rourk: "Slaughtering pigs. My mood is poor enough as it is."

Kortul: "Shut up and swing."

Rourk: "You presume to... ah!" *<Watches his swords bounce off the boar; Boar almost seems to laugh and tears him with a tusk>*

Dania: "Incoming!"

Navero: *<Starts chanting>*

Kortul: "Ha!" *<Slices boar>*

Arlor: *<Hides under a blanket>*

Kortul: *<Is criticaled by boar; Drops like a rock>*

Razuli: *<Stabs Kortul's boar, does damage>* "Oink, you little bastard!"

Boar 2: "Foolis human." *<Swings tusks, misses>*

Razuli: "How now, what how? Talking piggies!"

*<Two boars charge in, one as large as the first two, the other smaller>*

Dania: "Shit! Wereboars! Use magic weapons!" *<MM's Wereboar 3>*

Wereboar 1: *<Misses Rourk>*

Wereboar 2: *<Misses Razuli>*

Wereboar 3: *<Hits Navero, who stops chanting and falls down>*

Boar: *<Tramples Arlor>*

Rourk: *<Hacking at Wereboar 1 with normal weapons>* "Die, insult to nature!"

Razuli: *<Stabs Wereboar 2, killing it>* "Yee-ha! Two little piggies!"

Dania: *<Magic missiles Wereboar 3>* "Rourk, get a magic weapon!"

Navero: *<Thumps Wereboar 3 with non-magic mace>* "Go away! You smell!"

Arlor: *<Crawls out from under blanket, stabs Boar>*

Razuli: *<Kills Wereboar 3>* "And the score, ladies and gentlemen, is: Amazing Stud 3; Pork 0!"

Dania: <Grabs Kortul's enchanted two-hander, looks comical trying to carry a sword larger than she is; Ends up dragging it through the dirt> "Rourk, you idiot!"

Rourk: <Continues hacking and slicing>

Naverro: <Bashes at Boar with mace, misses> "Oops."

Arlor: <Stabs, kills Boar>

Wereboar 1: <Misses Rourk, runs off into forest>

Dania: "Oh, great! Rourk, that was a magic beast! You couldn't kill it anyway!"

Rourk: "Oh, hush, little mage. I was belaboring quite well. I refuse to lay hands on that clumsy carving knife, especially when it has so recently been in the possession of the odorous barbarian. How is he, anyway?"

Kortul, and everyone else, was healed back to health by Naverro. The Wereboar did not come back, and we saw no sign of it again. The rest of the night actually proved quite restful. We rode on, still not talking much, but no arguments rose. Late that afternoon, we rode over a hilltop and saw before us a moderately size city; we asked a friendly roadside peasant, who revealed to us that it was Propyla, the local capital of the Empire.

(There are a string of capitals across the empire, each governing the surrounding territories, and answerable to the Grand Poobah far to the east. Propyla was third to last on the line. The next one to the west was experiencing trouble with some local monsters, we had heard. The westernmost was little more than a single castle, out in the true wilderness; very little news had come from it for some time.)

Having nothing better to do, we entered the city. We immediately encountered a problem; the gate guards.

Rourk: "Hail! We wish to enter your fair city in peace and friendship."

Guard 1: \*Snif!\* "You come, all armed, into our midst, and speak of peaceful intentions, o MOST noble knight?"

Guard 2: "Come now. One must be understanding of these provincials."

Guard 1: "Ah, yes. Well, gentlemen and lady, if you would care to follow this man, you can be processed and given your chits."

Dania: "Chits?"

Guard 2: "New policy, madam. Only instituted about 12 years ago. I see that you do not visit often."

Dania: "No. What are chits?"

Guard 1: \*Sigh\* "A chit is a token which shows that you have passed into the city through one of the gates after proper processing, and so cannot be arrested for an illegal entry. It is very convenient to have."

Razuli: "Yeah. C'mon, lets go! I wanna see what your women are like!"

We followed Guard 2 into a small room; A very bored looking official receives us, with all due pomp.

Official: "Hullo. Any valuables to declare?"

Razuli: "You can see all we got. Any problems with that?"

Guard 2: "A more respectful tone, if you please."

Official: "Right. Ten percent tax on liquid assets transported across city boundaries. Cash?"

Razuli: "Fresh out."

Official: "Sorry, we do not allow beggars to walk the street. Good day!"

Rourk: “Sir, do you insinuate that I am a pauper? You insult me. I demand an apology, or a response!”

Official: *<Looks even more bored, if possible>* “Yes, sir. Good day!”

Naverro: “Well, we do have some money. We won’t beg if it’s illegal.”

Official: “How much? And would you mind wearing this ring?”

Naverro: *<Puts on ring>* “I have 120 gold pieces, and some silver.”

Razuli: “Nav, you idiot! Why’d you have to tell them that?”

Official: “And you others?”

Naverro: “They have only pocket change, Mr. Official. I am the party treasurer.”

Official: “You trust all your money with one?”

Dania: “Oh, absolutely! We all trust ol’ Nav! He holds the party fund, until we distribute it.”

Arlor: “Yup! We spent all our money. None here.”

Official: “Oh, very well.” *<Takes ring back>* “Twelve gold as entrance tax, 6 silver chit tax, please wear the chit where it can be seen, you’ll be arrested without it. Good day!”

The Ring of Truth did not indicate any lies from Naverro, mainly because he was not lying. Naverro had very little money; he had given most of his to the people of Swamp Keep, and the temple of Kiliy. The other characters did have only pocket change; the last of the dragon money, amounting to nearly 15,000 gp. (The term “pocket change” is naturally ambiguous and open to interpretation.) And Naverro was party treasurer; it was a position he elected himself to at that moment.

Afterwards, within the city proper...

Dania: “Hey, Nav! Good going!”

Naverro: “Uh, thank you. I guess.”

Razuli: “Good goin’, kid! You’re starting to think like me, now!”

Rourk: “Perish the thought. His brain would fall out.”

Razuli: “Actually, it already did that once.”

Naverro: “Uh, yes...”

Dania: “Lets go! Maybe they have a magic shop!”

Razuli: “Maybe they have a red light district!”

Naverro: “Uh, Dania? Was that the right thing to do?”

Dania: “Huh? Sure. No prob.”

Naverro: “Well... I know the law can’t always apply... at least I think it can’t... but wouldn’t society collapse if we all just casually broke laws whenever we felt like it?”

Dania: “I don’t see it collapsing. Do you see anything collapsing?”

Rourk: “Not I. It was no more than those churlish miscreants deserved.”

Naverro: “Maybe we should go back.”

Razuli: “Are you sure they closed all the holes in your head? Kid, they’d just arrest us and torture us all for days. You wouldn’t do that to your friends, would you?”

Naverro: "Well, I thought..."

Razuli: "Don't do that. It's not your strong suit. Do you want to have all of us put away, just 'cause you wanted to show off how clever you were? That's incredibly selfish, Nav."

Naverro: "I'm sorry..."

Razuli: "Lets just go, Nav. Tell you what: pay them later, in secret, Ok? And then go confess to another priest or whatever."

Naverro: "Well..."

Razuli: "Great. C'mon, lets go!"

*"Was that stealing that I just did?"*

## XVIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 3rd level

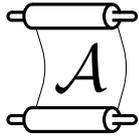
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 3rd level

**Rourk Ravensbane**, male drow cavalier, 3rd level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 2nd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 2nd level



AND so, our heroes entered the great city of Propyla for the first time. Propyla was much what you would expect of a relatively new city—mostly clean, tolerable citizenry, good yet inexpensive accommodations. There were several inns and taverns, a sizeable market, upper class district, government buildings, and a street of Learning - a small street in the rich part of town, with mages and sages selling their services; also, one magic shop. The city had several squares, as opposed to one, with message posts and public fountains—an altogether hospitable place.

The party split up fairly early on, each of us going about our own business. Rourk found an armorer capable of repairing his plate, and a limner to repaint his shield device. Naverro wandered to the religious areas, where he found a church of the Correct and Unalterable Way, and spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening there. Arlor just wandered away. Dania, Kortul, and Razuli all congregated to the magic shop, to see what sort of goodies they could find.

Dania: “Wow! Look at all this stuff!”

Kortul: \*Grunt\* <Inspects swords on one wall>

Shop Keeper: <Sneers in a whiny sort of way> “May I HELP you?”

Razuli: “Hey there! Got anything we could use?”

Shop Keeper: “I wouldn’t know, SIR. Were you looking for anything SPECIFIC?”

Dania: “What do these wands do?”

Razuli: “You wanna see a wand of fireballs, wizzerd? I got one I know you’ll like.”

Shop Keeper: “THAT is a Wand of Mineral Detection, MA’AM. 5000 gp.”

Dania: “Oh.” <Drops wand, looks at other things>

Kortul: “Not many weapons here.”

Shop Keeper: “No; there’s LITTLE demand for them here; MOST that make their way here ARE, shall we say, somewhat USED. Weapons are in the back, as are ARMORS, and certain of the commoner potions.”

Dania: “Hey, look at that mace. You think Naverro would like that?”

Shop Keeper: “That is a Mace of DISRUPTION, a very fine item and a rarity indeed. It was ONLY through great fortune that I was able to get it at all. It’s function is to destroy those of the living dead whom it hits, COMPLETELY and UTTERLY, down to the last vestiges of their souls. I am SURE your friend would love to have it.”

Razuli: “Great! Then he can take out all the undead. I can just see them, shivering in terror, as The Great Naverro appears! How much?”

Shop Keeper: “60,000 gp.”

Dania: “Gaak!”

Kortul: “Bit expensive.”

Shop Keeper: “Sorry SIR, but I cannot accept ANY less. And please do not LEAN on those carpets, you MAY stain them.”

Dania: “What’s this little statue?”

Shop Keeper: \*Sigh\* “A Figurine of Wondrous Power. 30,000 gp. I PERCEIVE that you are on a budget. Perhaps you care to look at something ELSE, more in your range?”

Dania: “Uh. . . can we see what kinds of potions you have?”

Shop Keeper: \*Sigh\* “Certainly. ANYTHING to please a customer. GEORGE?”

George: <From back room> “Yes?”

Shop Keeper: “Could you tell these WONDERFUL people what kinds of POTIONS we currently stock?”

George: “We stock: Potions of diminution, potions of growth, MegaHeals of all varieties, one philter of love (a hot item!), potions of. . .”

Dania: “What’s a MegaHeal?”

Shop Keeper: \*Sigh\* “I wonder just HOW long you have been out of town. A MegaHeal is A variety of healing potion, which I SUPPOSE would make it an attractive item to those of YOUR profession. Normally, a healing may cure LESS, or MORE, but a MegaHeal will consistently restore the SAME amount of damage. It is unaffected by the PURITY of the drinker’s body, or ANY of those other factors which make the ordinary, garden variety of healing potion so very unpredictable and undesirable.” (This means: They cure 8 hit points, not 1-8. MegaHeals come as 8, 10, 16, and 32 pointers.)

Kortul: “More expensive?”

Shop Keeper: “That USED to be the case, but the NEWER techniques have reduced the cost to a much more REASONABLE level, which may make them more ATTRACTIVE for you.”

Razuli: “How about crossbow bolts?”

Shop Keeper: “George? Do we have any CROSSBOW BOLTS in stock?”

George: “Light, or Heavy?”

Shop Keeper: “LIGHT or heavy, SIR?”

Razuli: “Light, with barbed heads.”

Shop Keeper: “George? LIGHT, with barbed HEADS.”

George: “Sorry, we do not have any quarrels or arrows in stock.”

Kortul: “Any two-handed swords?”

Shop Keeper: “GEORGE? Do we stock any TWO-Handed Swords?”

George: “We have one two-handed Claymore, which is. . . +1, +4 vs. reptiles.”

Shop Keeper: “One two- . . .”

Kortul: “Heard. Price on Lizard sword?”

Shop Keeper: \*Hmph!\* “George? What IS the list price on the LIZARD sword?”

George: “The list price is. . . 5000 gp.”

Kortul: "Trade-in?"

Shop Keeper: \*Sigh\* "Yes, we ACCEPT trade-ins. Are you speaking of THAT? Well, let me SEE. Hm. Fairly standard enchantments, nothing SPECIAL. WITH this, I BELIEVE we could settle for... 3000 gp."

Kortul: "1500."

Shop Keeper: "GEORGE? Bring the LIZARD SWORD out here that the customer may inspect it before purchase. I ASSUME you wish to do so, SIR."

*<Sword floats out of the back room, sets down on counter>*

Shop Keeper: "THANK you, George. I BELIEVE you can see that this fine item..."

*<Much haggling; They settle on 2300 gp; Kortul is pretty much cleaned out>*

Dania: "I think I'll just get a MegaHeal or so. That way, we don't have to depend so much on Nav."

Shop Keeper: "SOUND thinking, MA'AM. Would you be wanting the ECONOMY size, or one of the more EFFECTIVE ones?"

Dania: "Uh, economy."

Shop Keeper: "Fine. The shp type is... 500 gp each."

*<More haggling; Dania gets 2, Razuli gets 1>*

Razuli: "Well, I guess that's it. You got nothing much worth buyin'. How do you keep people from stealing all this junk?"

*<A beautifully made suit of full plate animates, grabs Razuli, and tosses him out the door>*

Dania: "Neat. Bye, George!"

George: "Bye, come again!"

We met again in the square nearest the gate, and went out looking for an inn to stay in. We found a very nice one; there was a common room below, with a small stage for entertainers, and the tables were all in good shape. Rooms were all upstairs, with thick walls to keep the noises of nighttime revelry out; we were mostly all tired, and did want to sleep that night. The party was mostly complete; only Rourk and Navero were missing.

Dania: "Where's... uh, whatshisname, the stupid?"

Razuli: "Which one? There are a lot of them."

Dania: "I meant helmet-head. Wasn't he gonna be here?"

Arlor: "Um, I saw him, yup. He went into a house where there was this woman."

Razuli: "OUR cavalier, chasing HUMAN tail? Or was she human?"

Arlor: "Yup. Not real nice-lookin', though. He seemed to like her."

Razuli: "No accounting for taste. Wonder what she tastes like? I'll guess I'll just have to ask him, won't I?"

Dania: "Oh, please. I don't wanna hear about it."

An elf enters and comes to our table; He is in fine red leathers, has silver hair and golden eyes, and a lute

Obnoxious Bard: "Hi there! New in town?"

Razuli: "What are you?"

Obnoxious Bard: "Sir! Do you not recognize me by my profession? I see you do not; well then: how many barbarians does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Kortul: <Glares>

Obnoxious Bard: "One, of course."

Razuli: "That's not very funny, ya know."

Obnoxious Bard: "What's funny is how many light bulbs it takes."

Razuli: "Here's one for ya: how many obnoxious bards does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Obnoxious Bard: "Depends on how big the light bulb is. But it'd have to be at least two. Speaking of which: magic-user! Are you free tonight?"

Dania: "Do you have a name, o great minstrel?"

Obnoxious Bard: "Indeed I do, oh palpitor of men's hearts! I am Kory Silvertongue, soon to be The Incredibly Famous Kory Silvertongue, known throughout the land for his incredible musical talents."

Razuli: "Dania's already known throughout the land for her incredible talents."

Kory: "Oh, really?! Well! We must get together and make beau-u-u-tiful music together sometime! How about tonight?"

Dania: "I don't know who you are, but I already know that I don't like you. Piss off."

Kory: "Say that with a smile, sweetheart! Ah, Dania! Can't you see what I'm trying to tell you?"

Dania: "Yes! You're a fucking pervert with his brains in his pants!"

Kory: "Oh, dear! My face would cave in every time I went to the bathroom!"

Arlor: "Why are those guards coming over to our table?"

<Kory quickly disappears>

Guard 1: "Who was that?"

Dania: "I don't know. I don't want to know."

Guard 2: "Well, you are all under arrest."

Razuli: "Aw, c'mon officer! We didn't know he was the governor!"

Guard 1: "What's this about the governor? We wanted to arrest you for travelling with a dark elf."

Kortul: "Joking."

Arlor: "But we wouldn't, nope. They're not nice people!"

Guard 1: "Were you in the company of a short knight when you came into our city, at gate 2 this afternoon?"

Dania: "Did we come in gate 2? I don't think so. That wasn't us."

Guard 3: "The color of your chits indicates otherwise. How long did you know this person?"

Razuli: "Oh, not long. Was he a darkie? He never took his helmet off."

Guard 4: "Details, please."

Kortul: "Met a few days ago. Travelled with us, kept apart. Left us after the gate."

Guard 1: "So you know nothing of him?"

Dania: "Nope. How'd you catch him?"

Guard 2: “We didn’t. We found his body in a drainage ditch a few hours ago. He was naked and drained of blood, through two holes in his neck. Probably also used in some other nefarious rites as well; the body had been mutilated. Not being worthy of a funeral, and not wishing to have it polluting our city, we took it out and burned it. And now, we wish you to explain his presence here.”

Arlor: “We didn’t know, no no no. News to us.”

Guard 1: “You will swear to that?”

Dania: “Sure. Right here, if you want.”

Guard 2: “Not strictly necessary. Ah, well. Good evening to you.” *<They leave>*

Dania: “Rourk’s dead? Oh, well.”

Razuli: “They probably got all his money too.”

Kortul: “Hmph. Cities more dangerous than monsters.”

Kory: *<Reappears>* “Ah, ha! So you did know this person!”

Dania: “Oh, shit. I thought they scared you off.”

Kory: “Magic-user: how could one of our kind knowingly run around with one of those filthy bastards? I find it difficult to believe, but I’ll forgive you if you sleep with me tonight.”

Dania: “What if I told you I got kicked out of home for sleeping with one of those bastards?”

Kory: “Yeesh! Then yours is a road I shall never travel! Good God, woman! You have absolutely no morals! And I’m starting to like you!”

Kortul: “Hmph.”

Kory: “You have some opinion, o great and hairy one?”

Kortul: “Light, Dark, all the same. Are all uppity, and all bleed.”

*“You speak of elves as though they were meat.”  
“Often are.”*

## XIX

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level

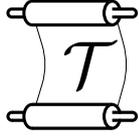
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level



RAINING this time around was no problem at all for anyone. There was a library for magic-users, a temple for Naverro, a small arena, etc. It all went very leisurely, with plenty of time to relax and unwind; it was a thoroughly hospitable city, and we had already had quite enough excitement to last us for a while. We were beginning to like the place. A pity that it didn't last...we still had plenty of money to spend.

At our tavern, just after dusk. . .

Arlor: "Nice quiet place, yup."

Kortul: "No dragons. No paladins."

Kory: "O hirsute one; would you be speaking of Those Who Are More Than Two And Less Than Four? You have my condolences. You won't be meeting them again anytime soon, I pray?"

Dania: "Not if we can help it."

Kory: "Ah, good! That gives me just one more reason to hang out with you all. The first being your beacon of spiteful loveliness, who fascinates me endlessly. The second is that you seem to somehow produce an irresistible stimulation which draw me ever closer to your cause."

(I'm still not sure how he got his S's to sound like dollar signs.)

Razuli: "Bonds of comradery and friendship are strong indeed." \*Sigh\* "Hey kids, wanna go find Naverro and take him to see the sights?"

Kory: "That cute little priest person we met earlier? Well! I know of a nice little house run by a lovely older woman that I'm sure he'd just LOVE. . ."

Dania: "She your mother?"

Kory: "Nah. But I'd get a discount if she were."

Kortul: "Some guards coming."

<Kory quickly disappears>

Dania: "I don't see any guards."

Kortul: "Don't either. How long'll he be gone?"

Razuli: "Long enough to try laying one of the barmaids. He'll be back soon."

Dania: "Please, Lord, allow me to savor one moment in peace. . ."

Kory: "That was not very nice."

Razuli: "And the 8-second wonder returns! How was she?"

Kory: "Oh, not too bad. Soon as she saw me, she just melted. . ."

Dania: "Down through the floorboards, hoping to escape, no doubt."

Kory: "You watch your tongue, young lady! If you keep this up, I may have to spank you! Then, you can spank me!"

Dania: "Ooh, sounds kinky. Can I use your sword? Trust me."

Razuli: "Hey, c'mon, I get a turn, don't I? What's one bitchy little magic user between friends?" *<Shit-eating grin>*

Kory: "More than you could ever dream of. Dania, my dear! Picture this..."

Dania: "Some elf's balls frying in butter? Mmmm, sounds tasty."

Kory: "Uhhh... Friend Kortul! Is she always like this?"

Kortul: *<Hostile stare>*

Razuli: "It's just PMS."

Dania: "Oh... fuck you all. I'm going to bed."

Razuli: "You're going to bed to fuck us all?"

Kory: "My most perverted dreams come true!! Only we need some women for the rest of you. Wait a minute, there's some over there! Wow! On second thought, Razuli can HAVE the magic user!" *<Leaves>*

Dania: "What an asshole."

Razuli: "Ah, c'mon. Lighten up. You put up with Rourk."

Dania: "Rourk could be serious. And I don't hold races against people."

Kortul: "What about Dwarves?"

Dania: *<Glares>* "That's different."

Kortul: "Hmph."

*<Many Guards approach the table>*

Razuli: "Oh, shit, not again. Kids, get ready to run."

Arlor: "Hello, officers!"

Guard 1: "Hello, me loverlies. Rememba me? Yur ol' friend come up ta see ya."

Dania: "Oh, FuckingJesusChristGoddamIt... What is it?"

Guard 1: "Wasn't nice, attacking us gards, runnin' outa town, leavin' behind such a horrible mess. Been weeks cleenin' up afta yu. And runnin' to this city, of all places, seein' that the Lord o' Swamp Keep happens to be the Guv'nors brother-in-law! You made a lot of people very upset wit yu. Took a bit o' time ta peg yu, so now maybe we all shuld talk some, right?"

Arlor: "But, sir, we didn't make any of that mess."

Guard 1: "Why didn' ya stay and help cleen up? Right un-neighborly. In fact, so un-neighborly yu all could be arrested rite here. But we all would much rather have yur willin' co-operashun. Makes tha wheels o' boorocracy run smootha that way."

Kortul: \*Grunt\*

Guard 2: (This guard bears himself more like a lieutenant.) “According to some reports from Swamp Keep, you are to be held responsible for exterminating a small Orc tribe in the area, and as a consequence are partially responsible for certain events developing thereafter.” <Glares> “I hope you understand that if YOU can clean out Orc lairs, the militia would certainly be perfectly capable of handling the same situation. If the militia does not, it is because of possible repercussions, which you apparently did not stop to consider. One cannot go waltzing into a cave and start butchering. YOU may move on, but WE have to live with the CONSEQUENCES of your actions!”

Razuli: “Look, we’re sorry, Ok? Now what’s the deal?”

Guard 2: “You be quiet. You and your kind have done quite enough.”

Guard 1: “Tell ‘em what to do, already.”

Guard 2: “I was about to, so BE QUIET, dolt!”

Guard 1: <Mutters> “Oo’ put a burr up yur ass, then?”

Guard 2: “During your activities, you disturbed a young Black Dragon, according to your own reports.”

Razuli: “That was Rourk! We didn’t do it!”

Guard 3: “Oh? So you admit to knowing him, then?”

Razuli: “Knowing who? Oh, you mean the darkie! We’re talking about a different guy here.”

Dania: “Yea, different person. What about the dragon?”

Guard 2: “Ahem! The citizens of the empire have reported that such a dragon has been seen in and near their pastures and fields, where it steals their cattle. Why it should come up here, when it was perfectly safe and happy further south where it wasn’t threatening our citizens and their holdings, I of course haven’t the slightest idea.” <Glares> “You, as I understand it, have developed a slight reputation for the slaying of dragons...”

Kortul: <Groan...>

Razuli: “Here it comes...”

Guard 2: “Surely, for such obviously COMPETENT and CAPABLE adventurers as yourselves, slaying a young rogue black would be as child’s play. In addition, you would have the thanks of the citizens of the state, who may forget about the small matter of your debt.”

Razuli: “We keep all its treasure!”

Guard 2: “Amusing. Anything stolen from the citizenry belongs to the citizenry, not to any brigandish ruffians who come along and sneak off with it. You will be expected to surrender whatever valuables you should find in the black’s hoard, and accept the reward decreed by the Governor for the dragon’s death. Any more is not in your due. Am I understood?”

Party: Yup, yes, gotcha, absolutely your priggishness Sir!

Guard 2: “And... should you try to simply cut and run, before OR after killing the black, you will find the chits you have been given, and which you now wear and cannot remove, will lead us unerringly to you and you will ALL suffer PUNISHMENT to the FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW! AM I UNDERSTOOD NOW!?”

Party: “Uh... yes. Absolutely. Can we go now, we have lots to do.”

Guard 2: “Yes. You have a lot to make up for. The black hasn’t killed anyone yet; if it had, I’d have you all locked up for murder. As it is, you get a small chance to go out and redeem yourselves. I don’t know whether I want you to succeed or fail. If I were you, and I certainly wouldn’t want to be, I’d not try to find out what would happen if you failed.”

Guard 1: "Bye, now. Hope yu hav lotsa fun. He he he!" <Guards exit>

Dania: "Let's go find Nav."

Kory: "Excuse me! Was that you who was getting screamed at?"

Razuli: "Yep. Some stuck-up cock sucker wants us to go out and kill another dragon."

Kory: "Oh, cool! Been nice knowing you all. I shall sing songs of your bravery for minutes to come. Wait a moment, did my pointed ears deceive me, or did you say ANOTHER dragon, dear fellow sentient?"

Razuli: "Yea, another dragon. Shouldn't be too much trouble. We've seen it before, and killed worse."

Kory: "Then I must accompany you! I've never been to a Dragon slaying! Oh wow, what deliciously wonderful opportunities this creates for my autobiography."

We found Navero and explained the situation to him, and then went and got a good night's sleep. In the morning, we set out, but not on horseback. The northern parts of the marsh were considerably more boggy and inhospitable than the southern areas, and so going on horse would be too difficult. We decided to take advantage of the runs which laced the swamp, draining its waters into streams and rivers; a large skiff riding high in the water would be better than walking in through the quicksand. At least, that was the idea. We very quickly discovered that no one had ever steered a skiff before, and there were more subtleties to it than you would guess. Fortunately, we didn't capsize before we got something figured out, and were soon on our way into the swamps.

*"How the hell do we get into these things?"*

## XX

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level

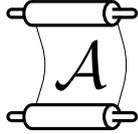
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level



S morning wore on to afternoon, we left the jeering spectators behind, and an uncomfortable silence settled down over the swamps. Fortunately it was near the beginning of winter; it was damp enough, but not hot, and so the insect density was tolerable.

Dania: “Quit splashing.”

Razuli: “Jezuz H. CHRIST, magic-user, YOU steer, then!”

Kortul: “Shut up, both of you.”

Kory: “Who elected you, bright eyes? I fail to see your qualifications for the position of courageous leader.”

Arlor: “I feel sick.”

Dania: “So dive in and cool off. There aren’t any crocodiles nearby.”

Kortul: “Over there. Leave Dwarf alone.”

Naverro: “Dania, why do you not like Arlor? I haven’t seen him do anything to make you mad at him.”

Dania: “I don’t hate him, Nav. Lighten up. It’s just this useless little geek gets on my nerves. Didn’t anyone ever tell you about Dwarves? They chop down forests to make charcoal for their damn forges and mines. Whole forests.”

Arlor: “Um. . . You only use dead wood for that.”

Dania: “Well, it’s sure as hell dead when you get through with it!”

Naverro: “I know they make some very useful and nice things, Dania.”

Dania: “Oh, sure, yeah, dead things, that decay, or just gather dust! Oh, what do you know? You’ll never live to see it, anyway.”

Arlor: “Forests don’t last either.”

Dania: “Not with you around, that’s for sure.”

Naverro: “Please, why are you angry? Maybe the Dwarves clear away deadwood, and use it to make other things, that wouldn’t exist otherwise. Making things has its place in the world.”

Dania: “Tell HIM! THEY’RE the ones who go wild and chop down trees and kill people just so they could get more GOLD, and go around killing everything beautiful in the world and. . .”

Razuli: “What’s this about going around killing people to get gold, wizzerd?”

Dania: “Oh, shut the hell up!! What do YOU know?! Just a bunch of ignorant, short-sighted. . .”

Kortul: “WIZARD!”

Dania: "WHAT?!"

Kortul: "Pointless and stupid. Wizard, steer. Razuli, take priest's pole. Priest, sit there." <Indicates between Dania and Arlor>

Kory: "No, no, let them go on. This is highly amusing."

Dania: "Why the FUCK should I listen to you?!"

Razuli: <Leaves steering oar> "Come on, take the steering. Navero, why don't you have a talk with these two?"

Dania: <Glares, grumbles, takes steering oar>

Razuli: <Aside to Kortul> "What's with you? You spoke several sentence fragments in a row. She must be finally getting to ya, huh?"

Kortul: <Glares> "Women here uppity, don't know to shut up. 'Specially elves. Talk too much. Everybody talks too much."

Razuli: "It's those pert little buns, isn't it? The heaving breasts, the fiery eyes; a woman you can't tame..."

Kortul: <Glares>

Razuli: "Ok, OK! Sheesh, you're no fun at all, ya know?"

Kory: <Laughs>

Along the way, we met a most extraordinary person. During a short lull in the conversation, we saw a small man in woodland colors, waving to us from the side of the river. We went over to investigate.

Small Man: "Hello. I could not help but hear you as you came up the river. I was wondering at your purpose, as I can see that this is not your usual mode of travel."

Razuli: "We're going to kill a dragon. Wanna come with us?"

Small Man: "How kind of you to offer. I had entered this area with the intent of scouting out such a beast, which threatens the order of this lovely green. However, with the company of such obviously capable and industrious people as yourselves, I may be able to do more to correct the unbalancing of the natural forces."

Razuli: "Huh?"

Small Man: "Yes, very capable and industrious. I am Topash Raycin; I am a member of the Green Brotherhood of the Wood."

Navero: "Don't you worship trees?"

Topash: "Hah. No; we work with the forces of nature to preserve the balance of the world. We do not worship anyone; we coexist."

Dania: "Great. Glad to have another elf on board. Come on in."

Topash: "Elves, humans, dwarves; all have their place in the balance. But before we move on, I think perhaps some advice on how to handle a skiff is in order..."

And so we went on into the swamp; The afternoon passed uneventfully...

Game Master: Damn. I expected you to walk in. You're floating past all the encounters I set up.

Party: Sorry about that. What a shame.

Game Master: I guess I'll just have to wing it...

\*SPLASH!\* <Skiff tilts, entire party goes into the drink>

Kory: \*Glub!\* “Oh no! I’ll get my instrument wet!”

Razuli: “Worry about your manhood some other time. There’s nothing around here that would want it anyway.”

Arlor: “I can’t sw...”

A huge, greenish, yucky-looking humanoid had come up under our skiff and toppled us into the river. Fortunately, it was shallow in the swamps, so only Arlor went under. More humanoids appeared from the bracken along the shore, and they rushed clumsily to the attack.

Kortul: <Draws sword, moves to Troll 1 by the skiff>

Dania: “I think it’s Trolls!” <Magic Missiles Troll 2>

Topash: <Entangles two Trolls in bracken>

Razuli: “Get a fire going! Navero, do it!”

Navero: “But my tinder and flints are all wet!”

Arlor: \*Blub\*

Kory: “I can’t play a wet lute. Take that, putrescence!” <Stabs Troll 3> “Mess with me, eh? I’ll teach you to...” \*WHAM!\* “...on de udder hand, I could always use a bit o’ education myself...”

Troll 1: “Harruuugat! Kill! Fuud!” <Much swinging of claws, etc.>

Kortul: “Ha!” <Criticals, removes Troll 1’s head; It falls in river, body begins looking for it blindly>

Navero: “Hang on, hang on...” <Staggers to shore, gets out flint and steel, starts looking for dry tinder>

Razuli: “Quit playing with your instrument, bard.” <Hits Troll 2>

Kory: “Oh, ha ha. At least I have one, human!” <Misses Troll 3> “Oh, fuck it.”

Dania: “Are you that desperate, Kory?” <Magic Missiles Troll 3>

Arlor: \*BLUB!\*

Topash: “Is this how you usually do battle, brave adventurers?” <Hits Troll 4>

Trolls: <Three Trolls still fighting; Razuli clawed twice, Kory bitten, one moves in on Navero>

Navero: “Eeep!” <Runs from Troll 4, it chases him>

Topash: “It’s good to see a group of people who can cast aside their personal differences and cooperate so well.” <Hits Troll 3>

Arlor: **BLUB!**

Razuli: “What the fuck was that?”

Kory: “I believe it is our Dwarven companion, attempting to alert us to one of the hazards associated with shortness. Go see to him, my good fellow; and do be quick about it.”

Kortul: <Takes large chunk out of Troll 3>

Dania: “Oh, let him walk ashore.” <Magic Missiles Troll 3, finishes it>

Trolls: <Two left; One bites and claws Razuli, other still chasing Navero>

Razuli: “Owww... My cue for a strategic retreat.” <Breaks away, goes to look for Arlor>

Kortul: <Comes ashore> “Priest! Quit playing!”

Naverro: "Ahhh!!" <Hits patch of very moist ground, falls; Troll 3, strangely, does not follow>

Kory: "Does anyone have a fire started yet? Children, children, do I have to take care of everything?" <Stabs Troll 2>

Dania: "Oh, shut up." <MM's Troll 2> "Kortul! We need you on this one!"

Topash: <Hits Troll 2>

Arlor: \*GASP!\* <Pulled up to air by Razuli>

Trolls: <Headless Troll has found its head; Troll 3 starts to come up out of river; Troll 4 leaves Naverro; Troll 2 claws Dania, Kory, misses with bite>

Naverro: "I'm sinking!" <Indeed, he is sinking into the damp ground>

Dania: <MM's Troll 2, it falls>

Razuli: "Nav, it's quicksand! Lie still!"

Arlor: "I'm not never goin' in a boat again, yup, that's for sure."

Dania: "Yes, you are. Now do something!"

Razuli: <Notices Troll 1 putting its head back on; Promptly knocks it off again; It tries to bite and falls into the river>

Kortul: <Criticals, cuts Troll 4 in half>

Topash: "Hmph." <Comes ashore, starts to work on fire> "Everything's wet."

Kortul: "Common enough in swamp."

Trolls: <Troll 1 resumes search; Troll 3 moves to Dania; Troll 4 squirms; Troll 2 stays on river bottom. Trolls 5 & 6 starting to break out of the Entanglement>

Kortul: <Drags Naverro out of quicksand by his vestments> "Not going well."

Topash: "Patience... Got it!" <Fire started>

Dania: "Great! Now do something with it!" <Smacks Troll 3 with her staff, it falls>

Razuli: <Puts Arlor in shallow water, goes looking for Troll 1's head>

Kory: "Ah, good! Someone besides me displays signs of competence! I am greatly encouraged; now, if only my lute weren't ruined..."

Naverro: "Ugh! The two halves are growing!"

Arlor: "They do that, yup. Disgustin' "

Trolls: <Troll 1 still looking; Troll 3 goes down, Troll 2 hasn't come up; Troll 4 still squirming, Trolls 5 & 6 break Entanglement>

Naverro: "That fire's awful small."

Topash: "The wood is quite damp."

Kortul: <Moves to Trolls 5 & 6> "Get over here!"

Dania: <Webs Trolls 5 & 6; it just misses Kortul> "Ha! Got 'em!"

Arlor: <Wades ashore> "I hate water."

Razuli: “Any luck with the fire?” *<Finds Troll 1’s head, sticks it on his sword>*

Topash: “Some. There; if anyone has any dry torches, we can begin. But be careful not to let the fire spread.”

The skiff had not been capsized, merely tipped, so our supplies were still dry. With the help of some lantern oil, Trolls 5 & 6 were soon roasting. As the other Trolls come up, they are hacked to bits and burned; some of us took damage in the fight. After a healing, everyone was moderately OK, although muddy and very wet. We realized that with this many Trolls, there would probably be a lair nearby; a few hours search reveals a likely candidate, a large cave near the water, under an overhang. We took torches and went in, Kortul at the point.

The cave went in for about 15 feet; the floor was earth packed down by huge feet; tree roots poked through the roof. At 15 feet, the tunnel took an abrupt dog-leg turn, and around the corner, waited 2 more Trolls.

Troll 1: \*SMACK!\* *<Hits Kortul with a Bastard sword, bites>*

Kortul: *<Shoves torch in it’s mouth>*

Naverro: *<Starts Chanting>*

Troll 2: *<Tosses flask of oil onto Kortul>*

Troll 1: “Gon’ burn now?! HahahAhaAhA!”

Razuli: “Oh, fuck.”

Kory: “Duy, duy, this one’s got a brain somewhere! We should remove and donate it to science!”

Dania: “Kortul, back off and let me web ’em!”

Troll 1: *<Claws, bites Kortul>*

Kortul: “RRRAAAHH!!!” *<Swings twice and criticals once; Troll 1 goes down>*

Topash: “Very impressive. Now get out and let us burn the other.”

Troll 2: *<Grabs Kortul, hugs him close, sticks tongue out at party>*

Dania: *<MM’s Troll 2>*

Arlor: *<Has snuck behind Troll 2, stabs it in the knee, distracting it>*

Kortul: *<Squirms away from Troll 2>* “Hit it!”

Topash: *<Lights the oil that rubbed off of Kortul onto Troll 2>*

After much sound and fury, the two Trolls were dead and burned. The air within the cave is quite fouled, but we explored on nonetheless. We found a lot of bones, a lot of rocks, and very little else. It being nearly nightfall by this point, we set up camp a short way up the river; any bits of Troll we had missed did not come to bother us, and the night passed uneventfully.

*“Oh, goody! My instrument seems to be in working order!”*

*“Kory, quit playing with yourself and go to sleep. You can lay Dania in the morning.”*

## XXI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

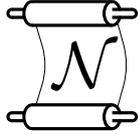
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



IGHT on the marshes passed uneventfully—nothing came to camp to eat us and the normal nocturnal sounds of the swamp were uninterrupted. Morning came foggy and dim. The morning mists were very thick and hid everything from view; feeling somewhat vulnerable, we quietly loaded the skiff and set out. Unchallenged, we moved deeper into the marshes, pausing now and then to bop an adventurous crocodile on the nose. Apart from noise we made, everything seemed subdued and quiet, as if listening for something. Thick, gnarled trees rose up from the hidden earth, with vines and moss and strangeweeds hanging from their branches.

Kory: “Oh, I LOVE what they’ve done with this place! So totally retro-primeval. I must say, this dampness suits you quite admirably, dear magic-user. The way your robe clings to you is SO evocative of the dreamy summer days of my distant youth.”

Dania: “Leave me out of your wet dreams.”

Arlor: “I wanna go home.”

Kory: “You be quiet. I’m quite happy here.”

Naverro: “I wish it weren’t so wet. This could be a nice place; those trees over there are kind of nice, I think. It would be a very pleasant forest, if everything weren’t so wet and drippy.”

Topash: “This green is perfect as it is, just the way it is; your own aesthetic opinions are not shared by Nature, and as no man can see all there is in the world, we must respect the wisdom of the earth and her choices. Look at the trees, at the fish, at that crocodile about to eat our steering oar (take care of that, will you Kortul?) They know their places in this world, and are...” \*WHAM!\* “(Thank you, Kortul) ...gifted with a complete natural understanding of nature and the balance. Envy them their ancient wisdom.”

Razuli: “And I just thought it was here to make Dania’s robe wet.”

Dania: “Shut up.”

Kory: “Ah, Dania Dania Dania. Such a lovely name. How did you get it?”

Kortul: <Starts> “Quiet.”

Kory: “What? Be QUIET? Don’t you understand? Of course you don’t. Why, I am sprung from a veritable royalty of splendidly harmonic issuance, perhaps the finest...”

Razuli: <Clamps a hand over Kory’s mouth> “Bard, ya got three choices: shut up, dive in, or start losing appendages. Your tongue won’t be the last.”

Kory: “Music haters.”

Topash: “No; there is a disturbance near here.”

Razuli: “You feel a tremor in the force, Obi-wan?”

Topash: \*Sigh\* “No; something is watching us.”

Dania: “I don’t see anything.”

Kortul: “’Course not.”

Arlor: “I really wanna go home.”

Dania: “So start swimming.”

Naverro: “Maybe it would be a good idea if we all tried to be quiet?”

Party: Yea, sure, right kiddies. <Party stays quiet maybe 2 minutes>

Kory: “Damn. I gotta go to the bathroom.”

Topash: “Why didn’t you go before we started?”

Kory: “Oh, your buffness? You too, Raz. Could I trouble you two kind gentlemen to steer us over by those reeds? Thank you kindly.”

Razuli: “Shit, Bard. But not here.”

Kory: “That’s what I’m trying to do.”

With faint but audible grumbling, we put the skiff over by the side of the river. Kory jumped out and went into the bushes. Then, we all heard a great crackling, like trees and bushes being torn up and pushed aside; a big black shape rose up out of the mists on the opposite shore, not twenty feet from us, opened its jaws, and spat. A huge glob of acid hit the skiff amidships, splattering everyone; we dove into the water to wash the vile liquid off. Everyone but Naverro, that is. He fumbled his save, and was hit full in the face with the slimy glob; without even a chance to scream, he dissolved into the bottom of the skiff. The acid ate out the bottom, and the whole thing went down like a rock.

Party: “AAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!”

	Twang!		Light! Hurl!	
Spellcast!				“Kill the *%&\$@%*&!!”
	Twang!	Smash!	<b>KABLAM!</b>	
Throw!		Ka-Thunk!	Whunk!	Twang!
	Twang!			

(Plus many of the other sounds commonly made by a badly frightened party unloading into some poor defenseless little dragonling.)

The baby Black wobbled in mid-air for a bit, then silently crashed into the stream. Being a small, shallow stream, it was only partially submerged, so we spent another couple of rounds filling it with arrows and bolts and magic until we had assured ourselves that it was dead.

Dania: “Is it dead?”

Kory: “It damn well better be!”

Razuli: “Where’s the priest?”

Kortul: “In the boat.”

Dania: “Where’s the boat?”

Kortul: “On the bottom.”

Dania: “Oh damn, not again.”

We waded into the stream and went through the skiff; our equipment was acid-seared and water-logged, but some was salvageable. Of Navero, Dania was able to find a shoe, his mace, a few teeth, and not much else. Kortul and Razuli checked out the dead dragon; careful to stay upstream of it, as the water was already becoming laden with its foul and searing blood. The thing was quite dead; sadly, the hide was too badly damaged to be of much value, and we knew of nothing else that was worth anything except its treasure. Obviously, if it had one, we were going to have to go out and find it somehow.

Kortul: <Prying out a canine> “Treasure?”

Razuli: “I got no idea where it is. Better find some to satisfy snot-face. Are we going back there?”

Dania: “Remember the chits? Forget running.”

Topash: “A monetary prize would be of some use. This ‘snot-face’ you mentioned seems unnecessarily obsessed with it, however; perhaps if he did not receive any he would realize the utter futility of concern over material wealth.”

Razuli: “Yea, yea, what he said. Let’s get rid of these things and get outa here.”

Kory: “My feelings exactly! I wish to skip merrily through the woods, free of the dismal chains of bureaucracy! Besides, this dumb little thing clashes with my tunic. Let us be done with them!”

Dania: “Right. I’ll look into it. But first we find this thing’s treasure.”

Topash: “I’ll look into that.” <Shapechanges into sparrow, flies off>

Dania: “Don’t go alone, you... oh, you idiot.”

The sparrow flew off in the direction the dragon had come from. The land in this direction was higher than usual, almost dry; following the dragons trail was not difficult. It seemed to have been trailing along beside them for some time; no doubt awoken from a gorged sleep by all the noise the others had been making. Backtracking, Topash could see that it had come out of an overgrown spot on a small, gently-sloped hill about 400 yards from the stream; that seemed the most likely spot for the lair.

Sailing on his borrowed wings, Topash flew into the trees on the hill, gliding in between their high and noble trunks. They were lovely trees, tall, leafy, and straight, which was unusual for the area; they also seemed to be further apart than was normal. On closer examination Topash saw there were faint depressions in the ground between the high trees indicated that other trees had stood there, but had been thinned out, allowing the others to grow higher. They effectively screened a large area from the air, preventing someone on the hill from being seen from above. It was amazing that a dragon which seemed so young could have done this; perhaps it was an unusually clever one, although its method of attack did not seem to indicate that.

Fluttering deeper in, the ground vegetation thinned, revealing an occasional track. Most of these were ordinary; rabbit or such. Some were the dragon’s tracks; but a couple of these were quite a bit larger than a small dragon could be expected to make. A very uncomfortable thought began to rise in Topash’s brain. He nervously flew on, to make a startling and disconcerting discovery at the top of the hill. Rather than act on his new knowledge, he elected to quietly leave and inform his new companions of this unexpected turn of events.

The sparrow shrieks into the group like a bat out of hell, changes into an elf in mid-air and crashes to the ground. Topash stands up...

Topash: “Can the boat be repaired? QUICKLY!?”

Razuli: “The boat’s a loss, elf. Ya didn’t find the treasure, huh?”

Topash: “No, I’m afraid not. Instead, I found your baby’s parents. Do you know anything about dragons? Like, they rarely have children? And that those children are valued more than the earth itself? And they get a trifle annoyed with people who kill their children?”

Arlor: “I’m going home.”

Dania: "Shit, no!"

Razuli: "Hey, God? What the fuck are you tryin' to do to me? What did I ever do to deserve this?"

Kory: "Oh, Christ! How did you people ever talk me into going on this ill-fated expedition? You told me, Dragon! The singular! I'm terribly sorry, but multiple dragons are not in my contract, and if you get me killed, I'll never speak to any of you again!"

Dania: "Godamn it all. . . We better get the fuck \*out\* of here!"

Kortul: "Useless. On foot. They're flying. Will defoliate whole swamp to find us."

Topash: "I must agree. They are going to be quite upset when they find out about this."

Razuli: "Waitamminute, waitamminute. 'WHEN they find out??' They don't know yet?"

Dania: "Yea, didn't they hear us? We made enough noise."

Topash: "Ah, no. They're asleep. Older dragons sleep more heavily."

Kory: "Oh. . . Asleep, you say, dear woodsy-type-person?"

Kortul: "Have to kill them."

Razuli: "That just might be possible, kids. Where are they?"

Topash: "Hmmm. . . There seems to be no other option, so. . . this way, please."

*"There sure are an awful lot of dragons around here."*

## XXII

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

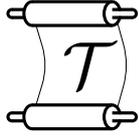
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



HE dragons probably wouldn't wake up anytime soon, so we were in no great hurry to go see them. We spent some time around the body of the baby, securing teeth or scales or whatever else might be of value, then waded to the other side and walked to the dragon's grove. We were quieter than usual—this was serious business—but dragons do sleep heavily, and until we were actually entered the grove we had no doubt they would not hear us.

Razuli: "Hey Wizzerd, I saw you pulling some bits of things out of the boat. You thinking of getting Navero resurrected again?"

Dania: "It'd be a good idea. He's reliable."

Kory: <Stifles laughter> "Yes indeed, you could sure rely on ol' Nav for some things."

Dania: "Well, we are at least going to try."

Razuli: "Whafor? Do you remember how much it cost last time? And they were being nice to us! Forget it. Not again. If he gets himself killed this much, he just ain't worth having around. Besides, we got us another healing-type person right here, and one who can do something else, too. Besides blow it, I mean; he was always good at that."

Topash: "It is only reasonable, Dania. May I call you Dania? All things are born and die, each in their own time. It is the natural way of the world, which most priestly orders disrupt for their own benefit with all these 'resurrections' they perform. Surely you appreciate that our lives and all things are only part of the endless cycles of birth and..."

Dania: "Look, we are going to try. Maybe it isn't time."

Razuli: "Wizzerd, how are you gonna resurrect a bicuspid?"

Arlor: "I dunno. It'd cost a lotta money. We're strapped, yup."

Dania: "If I wanted your..."

Kortul: "Close enough for them to hear?"

Topash: "Why, I believe so, yes."

Kortul: "Good. Quiet."

We entered the grove, noting the tracks of the Baby Black and the occasional larger track. This was more than enough to encourage silence and a light tread. After several minutes of sneaking up the hill, we came within sight of the pair. They were lying in a shallow depression under some hanging boughs, almost invisible; both were the same size, a bit smaller than the Red dragon had been. We had no idea how old this made them. They were both fast asleep, necks curled together, sleeping claw in claw.

Kory: "Awww, how sweet. I see a nice place for a fireball."

Topash: “I can call up a lightning bolt to strike the spot you point out quite nicely, and it would not be nearly so messy and destructive as the random blast of misguided magic you speak of. Besides, that way the warriors can stand near it to strike them as they awaken.”

Razuli: “Wait, wait, wait, what’s this about warriors being anywhere near those things? Don’t scare me like that; that was in very poor taste!”

Kory: “You get the one on the left. Meanwhile, li’l ol’ me will be in the tree over there, singing a song to encourage your efforts.”

Kortul: “Need sword, not cheerleader. Go with him.”

Kory: “WHAT?!”

Dania: <Smacks Kory with her staff> “Keep your voice down, you idiot!”

Kory: “I have been insulted! And assaulted! You think you’re so tough, eh? Well, I challenge you! Kazoos at 20 paces!”

Topash: “Unless you have something more constructive to say, I suggest a minimum of noise. How about this for a plan: Dania and myself in the bushes. . .”

Razuli: “Hey, why can’t I get that part?”

Topash: “Because you are inappropriately armed.”

Razuli: “How would you know?”

Dania: “Shut up. Topash over there, and call your lightning. Then, I’ll be over here to magic missile them, and you all beat on them. Kory, sing your battle song, but only after they’re awake.”

Arlor: “I’ll go with Razuli if I can get behind.”

Kortul: “Get one on left. Looks weaker.”

Razuli: “Ok, I can live with that.”

Kory: “You hope.”

We moved into our positions; Topash silently moved to the left into some bushes and began to prepare a Call Lightning spell. Kortul went slowly and carefully over to the dragon on the right, mindful not to make much noise. Arlor and Razuli, less heavily armed and armored, moved more quickly into their positions by the leftmost one. Dania stayed put, and Kory went to the right and hid in a tree. The bough-covered depression made hitting them while they were within an obviously ineffective approach; hopefully, the lightning would encourage them to quickly leave the hole. Clouds gathered slowly above; flashes of electricity began to spark; an odd smell rose and the air seemed to acquire a certain charge. . .

The lightning struck, flashing into the heads of the two sleeping dragons, making their great bodies stiffen in a paroxysm of pain. With a great snarling scream, two heads sprang up, followed by big wings and claws. Kortul took one great swing at his dragon, his huge blade biting into its forelimb. Razuli stabbed the other in the belly; Arlor stabbed nearer the base of the tail. Two magic missiles flew out, one to each beast. Kory’s song burst out, a rousing and emboldening battle hymn; also slightly off key.

Topash called on the boughs that had spread over the pit to hold the dragons down; he didn’t expect much, but maybe it would buy crucial seconds. Dania cast a web over the neck and head of Razuli’s dragon. Kortul swung twice; his first strike glanced off the dragon’s neck, but the second caught it right on the nose, making it bellow with pain. Razuli and Arlor stabbed again, Razuli drawing blood from it’s flank. The dragons exploded out of the pit together, snapping the restraining branches like they were toothpicks; one lashed out with its claw at Razuli, ripping into his arm, while tearing away the webbing with it’s other claw. The other turned to Kortul and spit; Kortul avoided the glob, but the stuff splashed and spattered him.

The two spread their great wings, and seemed about to take to the air; Topash called the humble creeping shrubbery of the swamp floor to hold them, which it did, for a time. More magic missiles streaked out of the bushes. Razuli got a lucky hit on his dragon and snapped one hollow wing bone; Arlor stabbed at it's underbelly, but the short sword did not enter. Kortul missed completely. Kortul's dragon tore its feet loose and leaped to the skies, all the while keeping its beady eyes fixed on Kortul. The other bellowed in pain and frustration and leaped full onto Razuli, clawing and biting and tearing at its tiny tormentor. Razuli was barely able to preserve his own precious hide.

The airborne dragon looked to it's mate. It knocked Arlor away with its tail, stunning him, and then tried to snatch Kortul up in its claw; it missed. The other dragon lunged for Razuli, driving him to the ground and biting at him. A Web then appeared on the airborne dragon's wings, so that it fell, and nearly on top of Kortul. Kortul smashed it twice over the head, until it lay still.

Razuli stumbled away from the dragon; it did not pursue him, but instead turned toward the tree where Kory was still loudly playing. It never got the chance to do anything, however; Kortul stabbed it in the gut from behind, and with a final hiss, it expired.

Kory: "All right! We be bad!"

Razuli: "Medic!"

Kortul: <Sneers>

Dania: "Is there any loot in that hole?"

Topash: "Yes, look. I shall see to our companion's revivification."

Arlor: "Yup. Good pile of coins and stuff. Lotsa junk, though."

Dania: "Great. Sort through it, and see if there's enough to buy Navero a resurrection."

Topash: "I thought that issue had been settled."

Kory: "By no means! Let's all sit and argue about it for a longish while. I personally favor bringing back dear ol' darling Navero. What is money if you don't have someone to make fun of? I mean, lets be reasonable here."

Razuli: "C'mon, he was practically useless. But if you really want, I guess we can try. I hope they take teeth."

Dania: "You better hope there'll be something left of you when you snuff it, the way you're talking."

Topash: "I really must oppose this. Defiance of the natural cycle runs rampant, but denying the unbreakable course of birth and death is morally indefensible. I do not favor any sort of resurrection of the body; it should return to nature, the mother of all."

Razuli: "Look, kids, I'm not gonna end my life as fertilizer."

Dania: "You already are."

Kory: "Ah... I just love lively, well-reasoned debate."

Topash: "Perhaps we can compromise on this. It can be arranged to have him reincarnated, if you really want him back."

Dania: "Yeah, right. Have him come back as a beaver."

Kory: "Well, he likes water. Look how many times he fell out of the boat!"

Dania: "Oh, shut up. What's in the pile?"

The pile contained coin, broken pottery, shards of glass, colorful pebbles, and other bright shiny refuse; a mixture of the valuable and valueless, thrown together haphazardly. We set to work separating it; piles of gold stuff, silver, some possibly-magical items, and old junk. While we were in the midst of this when, right out of nowhere, a bolt of lightning struck the earth nearby, with a tremendous flash and cloud of smoke. The earth trembled as if a God had flicked it with his smallest finger, and we were all knocked from our feet to the ground.

Truly Awesome Reptilian Voice: “HHUMMANSSSSSS!!!”

Party: *<All weapons mysteriously find their way into our hands>*

*<Smoke clears, revealing Truly Awesome Reptilian Being>*

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “I am Thor, favored of the Snake Lords Who Must Not Be Named!! You have been dissipating the Reptilian Life Force in this part of the world!! This will come to an End!!” *<Raises Truly Awesome-looking War Hammer>*

Dania: “Oh shit, we’re dead.”

*“Hey Dungeon Master, isn’t your pet iguana named Thor?”*

*“Why, yes, he is. Why do you ask?”*

## XXIII

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

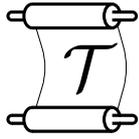
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



HE Truly Awesome Reptilian Being gazed upon us with a contemptuous eye. The other eye was full of righteous rage; together, they were more than enough to tell us that here stood one of the Great Demi-Powers of the world, against whom we stood as much chance as Kory had of performing at the Met. We tried to scatter; the Truly Awesome Reptilian Being cut us off with great flashes of lightning, and the earth trembled slightly.

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “Hold! The offense is not sufficient for my Lords to end you at this time. You must give recompense!”

Dania: “Sure! How much do you want?” *<BIG grin>*

Razuli: “No godamn way!! FUCK OFF, ASSHOLE! THAT MONEY’S MINE!” *<Attacks Truly Awesome Reptilian Being>*

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: *<Swings hammer once, bashes Razuli into next week>* “We are not interested in the gold you offer. A service is in order!”

Kory: “A service? No problem! I do weddings and funerals. Topash, start the ceremonies, and will somebody useless dig a hole for Razuli here?”

Razuli: “Fuuuccckk...”

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “Your service... is to obtain the Orb of Spheres! This you will deliver to our temple, where we shall take it.”

Arlor: “Why didn’t I go home when I could? I don’t like you, yup I sure don’t, you’re mean, and...” *<FLASH of lightning>* “...really, um, um, help.”

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “I sense reluctance. Is this so?”

Dania: “Oh, uh, thank you for your great generosity, uh, snakely one! We’ll get right on it! Immediately! I can see only one problem, oh mighty, uh... person of long teeth and scales of emeralds!”

Kortul: *<Sneers>*

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “You have a request, then? Perhaps you wish to know its location? I have not time to waste seeking it. That is for lesser beings, who may with clear conscience spend their tiny lives in the search.”

Dania: “No, no, its about a companion of ours who we miss very much and who is an important, necessary part of our group but he’s dead you know and this whole quest service thing would go a heck of a lot easier and more quickly if he were around and can you godly-type beings do anything about that maybe?”

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “Time is not an issue. I am sure most of you will be dead by the time this minor item is to be used.”

Kory: “Ok, how about this, bright eyes: without him, we simply cannot get it. It would just be TOO much for us. Us little warmblooded things are just too bloody INCOMPETENT for such a task.”

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “That is true. How, then, will having one more of you running about making messes help your assigned task?”

Razuli: “Uhhhh. . .”

Topash: \*Sigh\* “Well. . . Naverro was a member of the sect who worships The Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way. Does that mean anything to you?”

Truly Awesome Reptilian Being: “Hmmm. . .” <Mutters> “We do still owe them for that last. . .” <Notices party> “Enough! Here, and then be about your task!”

\*POOF!\*

A whole and complete Naverro appears in a cloud of smoke, accompanied by the smell of roses and summer afternoons. The Truly Awesome Reptilian Being disappears.

Topash: “Hello, Naverro. How was the afterlife?”

Naverro: “Urk. . .” <Throws up>

Razuli: “Medicccc. . .”

Dania: “Oh, shut up. He just got back. Quit being greedy.”

Kory: “Now, now. He can’t help himself.”

Razuli: “I can’t! I’m a greedy, selfish bastard! I like it that way!”

Kortul: “Someone give him a robe.”

Dania: “What? Oh! Yea, here.” <Throws robe about Naverro>

Naverro: “I don’t feel good. What happened?”

Kory: “Oh, you died. Nothing serious.”

Naverro was weak as a kitten, but he was there, and seemed to have no memory of his painful death. We gave him his pack and he got on his spare robes and spent some time praying to the Lords to thank them for their infinite mercy in giving him another try. The rest of the party returned to the treasure pile to resume the sorting.

The pile contained a decent amount on coin, and a few magic items thrown in. There was a suit of elven chain (only slightly torn), a mace, a two-handed sword, a long sword, a ring, and some potions. There were also some gems and things. Most of the hoard, however, was worthless to us; glass and pottery and colored rocks and other things, so the hoard wasn’t worth nearly as much as it had first looked to be. This upset some party members greatly; others took the news better.

Razuli: “Idiot dragons. Doesn’t somebody have a healing potion? Wait a minute, the magic-user does! Give it!”

Dania: “Sorry, must have slipped my mind. We really better save it for emergencies.”

Razuli: “Aw, come on! This is a <censored> emergency! We’re all in this together, right, kids? C’mon!”

Naverro: <Stumbles over, Cures Light Wounds on Razuli>

Razuli: “C’mon, isat all? After all the godamn shit I went through for you guys, this is the thanks I get.”

The magic items, when identified:

Elven chain mail, +1  
Mace, +1  
Longsword, +2, Luck Blade  
Two-handed Sun Sword  
Ring of Levitation  
Potion of Slipperiness  
Potion of Extra-healing  
Scroll - Protection from Fire Elementals

Kortul: "Big sword here."

Kory: "And I want that longsword."

Razuli: "Hey, I want it too, bard. Keep your grimy paws off."

Kory: "Do not refer to my fine-tuned fingers in that manner, mercenary. Why, I can play many an instrument with skill that would leave you in awe. My own is out of tune only due to the prevailing dampness. Besides, you already have a magic sword."

Razuli: "Leave your sex life out of it, bard. I'll trade ya."

Kory: "Hell with YOU. I like this sword!"

Dania: "Nav, take this."

Naverro: "But I already have a mace. With the symbol of the Order on it!"

Topash: "This one is better. Trust us."

Dania: "Take the chain mail too."

Razuli: "Hey, I wanted that! What is this!?"

Arlor: "Me too."

Dania: "Nav, here. Put the armor on."

Naverro: "Uh... how does it open? Here?"

Razuli: "Waitaminute. You don't unlace that. Haven't you worn armor before?"

Naverro: "Uh... no."

Dania: "WHAT? Nav, you idiot!"

Razuli: "Well, he doesn't wear armor. I'll take it."

Arlor: "Um..."

Dania: "Give it!" *<Throws it in his face>* "Nav, get into that."

Naverro: "But how can I preach peaceful relations among all peoples when I am going about prepared for war?"

Topash: \*Sigh\* "Preparation is one thing. But prevention is also admirable, is it not?"

Naverro: "Yes. 'The one who sees what the Lords place before him is great in the sight of all men.' But I... uh... it seems so... pessimistic, to walk about all armed."

Kory: "Little priest: we all are getting fed up with you dying. It is highly inconsiderate of you."

Razuli: "Yeah! Here you are, dying all the time. Don't you ever think about what you put us through every time you go? Sheesh, the pain and heartache and weeping just about kills me."

Naverro: "I'm sorry, but I must follow. . . I'm sorry I keep getting killed. I don't mean to, it just happens."

Dania: "Yeah, Nav. Kortul! Could you show him how to use a mace?"

Kortul: \*Sigh\* "Better." <Stomps off with Naverro>

Dania: "Fine. I want the ring."

Continue dividing. Dania gets ring, Naverro the potion of slipperiness, and Razuli the extra-healing and scroll. Arlor's player was not there to fight for his share of goodies

Kortul: <To Naverro> "Padding onto shoulders. Must find them first. Right. Buckle that. And that. Now mace: hold by this end. Good. Swing. Put legs into it; try again. \*splash!\* Not that much."

Kory: "Oh, dear little Dania: have you looked at the chits yet?"

Dania: "No. I figure we better just go back. I can't dispel the spell, and I really don't wanna fight the city guards. Besides, we'll have to find a sage in the city who can locate this Orb of Spheres thing."

Kory: "You think so? I don't think so! Have you noticed?"

Dania: "Noticed what?"

Kory: "I'm not wearing it anymore! They just come off! They're not magical at all! Ha ha, that was a great joke! I'd almost admire it if they all weren't such putzes."

<Other party members get rid of chits, look vaguely embarrassed>

Kory: "So, my dear: in exchange for so cleverly getting us out of that little trap, I will be expecting a spontaneous display of affection from you at some point in the future. Hopefully, late at night, by a dark reflective pool under the moonlight. . ."

Dania: "Where I will slit your noisy throat and toss you to the mud beasts. Kory, leave me ALONE! You are obnoxious and arrogant and fucking insane!"

Kory: "Ah, you're singing my song. How did a nice girl like you ever get to be such a rhymes-with-witch?"

Topash: "Here now, children. Differences of opinion are fine, but I think this has gone far enough. We should try and get back to that Troll cave by nightfall. With this much dead meat lying around, many things will come here in the night, and we don't want to be here to meet them all. Lets get our things together and go."

We made it back to the Troll cave by sunset. That night, the swamp seemed to come alive with night cries and rushing forms in the bushes, and ripples traveling through the river. Strange acrid smells and the sounds of animals fighting wafted down the river. Nothing came near the cave, with easier pickings elsewhere; when morning came red to the east the swamp was quiet again.

*"Betcha 50gp a dragon's guarding this Orb thing."*

## XXIV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

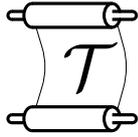
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



HE trek back through the swamps was very disagreeable. The banks of the runs were mostly clear, and we tried to follow them, but they often got so tangled we had to strike out onto explored paths; we only hit quicksand once. The sun decided to come out and warmed everything up, so all the bugs came out. There were alligators and boars and giant leeches and Morkandian Death Snails, and we all had lots of nice heavy gold in our packs. The place didn't do much for our mood, already poor due to the inconvenience of an unwanted divinely inspired mission. We were able to agree on one thing, however: we had better go get this Orb of Spheres thing, and that meant finding somebody who knew where it was. Propyla, the nearest large population center, seemed the most likely place to start looking.

We did NOT go back into Propyla itself. They would probably have people at the gates, watching for us. Instead, we went to look through the smaller buildings which were clustered around the walled city, a kind of suburban area called "low town." All the people and businesses who could not get into the main city were stuck in this area; they were either too poor, too unsavory, or both. The treasure had already been divided among us, so the group split up and we each went to take care of our own business.

Part of low town was The Avenue of Unacceptable Religions, temples of religions not considered legitimate by the governor of Propyla. Some of them were poorly off politically, either locally or in the emperors eyes; others were kept out by their inherent unsavoriness. One of the latter was an interesting group of people who worshipped Gothard. They were not destructive, or murderous, or fanatically exemplary; they were unusual in other ways.

The Priesthood of Gothard is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world today. This is because every week, every priest of Gothard has the sacred duty to go out into the world and impregnate at least one woman of human or elven blood. Male children, when born, are taken in to be raised as a new priest. To accomplish this Herculean task, the priests study very diligently, both by reading and physical exercises. Of course, exceptional efforts are rewarded in proportion.

Every priest of Gothard has a permanent charm ability; it works on elven or human females of childbearing age, save at -4, and the normal elven charm resistance does not function (apparently because the charm does not work on the mind at all, but on another part of the anatomy.) Priests of Gothard have minimum Charisma of 15, and Constitution of 16. A high wisdom also helps, but that isn't nearly as important in this religion as in others.

Priestly-type person walks up to Dania.

Priest: "Hello. I am a Priest of Gothard."

Dania: *<Seems confused for a moment; Then, eyes widen; Whole body quivers slightly, like a small tree being struck repeatedly by a very large axe; Grips staff tightly to hold herself upright>* "Uh... uhrrr... uhrrrrrrrrrrRRRRRR..."

Priest: "Would you like to step inside here?"

Dania: "Oh, yes..." *<Dania is not seen again for several hours.*

*Meanwhile, other business was being taken care of as well. . . >*

Razuli: "Put the shield on. C'mon, that's upside down."

Naverro: "I'm sorry, I don't know. Do I have to go around with this? It's heavy, and my arm's getting tired already."

Kory: "Nav, c'mere a second. Lemme EXPLAIN the situation to you: You are an adventuring priest. Right?"

Naverro: "Um. . . I guess so."

Kory: "Well, adventuring priests risk life and limb in the struggle to stave back the forces of chaos and they can't do that if they're dead! Right?"

Naverro: "Right. . . Do you mean that I am obligated to take whatever means are necessary to protect my own life?"

Kory: "RIGHT! Now, put this helmet on like a good little choir boy."

Naverro: "But that stands against the teachings of the Lords! 'Live in the way of goodness every moment; let your mind and soul and body be free of violent thought, and peace be in your eyes.' I cannot have peace in my eyes if I am looking out from under a helmet, which is blatantly a tool of war!"

Kory: "I don't think I'm getting through to him."

Razuli: "Kid?"

Naverro: "Yes?"

*<Whonks Naverro on top of the head with a club>*

Razuli: "Now WEAR THE GODAMNED HELMET!" *<Clangs it down onto Naverro's head>*

Kory: "Well put! And soundly thought out too! My congratulations."

Razuli: "What can I say?"

Kory: "Don't say anything; you'll seem much more intelligent."

Naverro: "Owww. . ."

Kortul: *<At counter of weapons shop>* "How much?" *<Puts Lizard Sword onto counter>*

Shopkeeper: "Hmmm. . . Good blade. . . Well made. . . 200 gp."

Kortul: "Magical."

Shopkeeper: "I know. 200."

Kortul: "1000."

Shopkeeper: "Ha! 300."

Kortul: "800."

Shopkeeper: "400."

Kortul: "700."

Shopkeeper: "500."

Kortul: ". . . 600."

Shopkeeper: "Done. You must be great fun at parties."

Arlor wasn't there that day (again) and so didn't do anything. We stayed in town for several days, resting, recuperating, and doing other things adventurers do when they're not out getting themselves beat up. Navero couldn't find a temple of his religion in low town; instead, he braved the city gates, and passed unrecognized; maybe the helmet helped. In the temple, he spent much of the day in thoughtful reflection on the many things he had seen and done since he left his monastery about two months before. He also sought out one of the higher-order priests for some advice on how he could better fulfill his duties to the Lords. He could see that he wasn't doing very well on his own. (This conversation did not take place in the game. I thought it up while listening to everyone else at the tavern, which is later.

Priest: "Yes, I see. Well, sounds like you've had quite a few little adventures, acolyte! I do hope you remembered all your holy day rituals—they don't get lost in all the excitement!"

Navero: "Well, I did forget St. Kalgur's day. But I remembered all the others! And went through the full rituals too, to try and make up for my disrespectfulness."

Priest: "Yes, very good. I must say, I am a little surprised at you for running away from the guardsmen of Swamp Keep like that. They were assigned to uphold the law, and you prevented them from doing so. That was not a good thing you did; but, I suppose you were caught up in all the action, and simply followed after your friends."

Navero: "Uh... yes, father. I'm afraid I did not act out of obedience to the Lords. I went contrary to their desires. And at the gate, I lied about how much money I had to deceive the officials! And I lied to get in this time, and told them my name was Fred! And..."

Priest: "Yes, yes, I understand, my son. You see how one transgression leads inevitably to others?"

Navero: "Yes, father."

Priest: "Yes. Your sins seem minor, caused entirely by your stressed state. It is quite possible that your unwashed companions may also have had something to do with it... The money you did not pay the entrance tax on—did you use it for some greedy purpose, buying of material goods?"

Navero: "No, your grace! I mean, father! I donated it to the Order."

Priest: "Well, then! Nothing selfish or sinful was done with it; although your actions were dubious, your intentions were good, and I have no doubt that the Lords have forgiven you. How much?"

Navero: "[Some amount of gp's, in the thousands]"

Priest: "No, no doubt at all! Now young man, about your penance. Have you made any effort to bring any of your companions into the fold?"

Navero: "No..."

Priest: "Well, it strikes me that their attitude towards you is one of the major threats to your standing in the faith. They are worldly, and skilled in their way of life, and this can no doubt affects how you relate to them. I see they have convinced you to wear arms. How much more have they convinced you to do and think? This cannot continue, acolyte. WE are supposed to spread the truth and light of the Unalterable Way throughout the world; WE are to appeal to OTHERS to give up their corrupt ways; we must not be turned from our path, or distracted by worldly influences or cares. We are a mote of light in a very great darkness. You are a fragment of that light, sent out alone, but you must not allow the darkness to have its way with you. Everything would be lost."

Navero: "Yes, father. I have failed in so many ways."

Priest: "Now, why are you all armed? Our message is peaceful."

Navero: "Everyone insisted strenuously that I get armor and a shield and a helmet after I was killed by a dragon."

Priest: "The resurrection was performed outside of the faith?"

Naverro: "Yes, both of them were."

Priest: "Both... hmm... Well, perhaps then wearing armor would be a good idea for you. We each must adapt to our own, er... limitations. But this dying business; I do hope you don't intend to make a habit out of it."

Naverro: "No! I didn't want to any of those times! Death hurts, and may displease the Lords too! It just... it just... I mean it just... happened. These things just happen to me, I don't know why. Do you think the Lords are displeased?"

Priest: "It could very well be, but I do not think so. I met Master Luminot once, the head of your cloister, and he mentioned you, I believe. He said something about 'misfortune follows the child everywhere. He is not especially clumsy, but many accidents I would not have thought possible seem to happen to him.' This was a few years ago, of course. Talking to you, I can begin to see what Luminot meant. But enough of that for now; it is nearly time for the sunset prayers. Will you join me in the garden?"

Naverro: "Yes, father. Thank you for your instruction. I'll try to do better."

Meanwhile, back in the low town, a few other party members found themselves drinking in the same tavern. Kory had lined up a job for the night as the entertainment.

Dania: <Sitting at a table staring dreamily into space>

Razuli: "Dania! My, you're looking spacy. I'll have what she's having!"

Kory: <Joins them> "Ah, my adoring public. They just can't get enough of me."

Razuli: "That stein didn't hit you THAT hard, did it?"

Dania: <Giggles>

Kory & Razuli: <Stare>

Dania: "Actually, it was kinda nice."

Razuli: "Cancel that order! I don't want any!"

Kory: "Dania, are you alright, little magic-userish person?"

Dania: "Oh, great, fine... just fine..." <Resumes staring>

Razuli: <Looks Kory in the eye> "What's wrong with her?"

Kory: "You got me. Dania! You're... relaxed! casual! mellow! Did someone cut out your ovaries, or did you just finally realize that you're madly in love with me?"

Dania: "Sure. Right. Yeah. Fine."

Razuli: "I don't like the looks of this. Better get her to a cleric."

Dania: <Starts giggling again>

Kory: "Did you have a wet dream about Naverro, perchance?"

Razuli: "C'mon!"

Kory: "Ok, did you have a wet dream about Razuli?"

Dania: <Breaks out into howls of laughter>

Kory: <Looks Razuli in the eye>

Dania: "You guys are funny. . ." <Resumes laughing>

Razuli: "You're right. Something is very very wrong here. Hey, little elf-bitch! Kory got into your pack and stole all your underwear! He nailed it to the message post in the square!"

Dania: "Aw, c'mon! I don't wear underwear!"

Kory: "She'd never admit that if she were normal."

Razuli: "Who says she's normal?"

Kory: "Good point. Is she drunk?"

Razuli: "I know drunk DAMN well, and that ain't it."

Dania: <Still giggling faintly>

Kory: "SO... It appears to me that we got us a little challenge here."

Dania: "Don't strain yourselves, guys. I gotta get going. I found a nice place to spend the night. Bye now."  
<Gives a sultry wink over her shoulder as she slinks out the door>

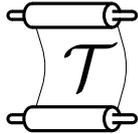
Razuli: "Oh, so that's it... Bard, have you heard of the Priests of Gothard? I almost became one myself, once..."

*"Of course, there is the SLIGHT chance of pregnancy."*

*"No! C'mon, Jeff! Lemme have a little fun!"*

## XXV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 3rd level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 3rd level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 3rd level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 2nd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



HE next day dawned bright and clear. Arlor showed up out of the limbo he had wandered into, and after much searching (and a hint from the GM) found Kory at the Bristling Bandicoot Inn. Kory, to his great surprise, got a very early start on his day.

Arlor: <Enters Kory's room> "What are we doin' today?"

Kory: "Gmmgfphh."

Arlor: "Who's she?"

Kory: "Wha...? Oh. Go 'way."

Arlor: "Should go visit a sage today, yup. Need that Orb."

Kory: "Tha only Orb ah care about iz tha one whats gonna bounce off your head in a minit'."

Nameless Female: "Mfph?"

Kory: "Good morning, my dear. Sorry to wake you."

Nameless Female: "Bet you are. 75 gp for the night, buddy."

Kory: <Suddenly very awake> "WHAT?! Why...! My honor is insulted! I had absolutely NO idea! I'm sorry young miss, but I CANNOT, in good conscience..."

\*THWACK!\*

Nameless Female: "100 gp; you bruised my knuckles."

Kory: "I fink you bwoke my chaw... Gee, you were such a nice little girl last night..."

Nameless Female: "And what am I now? 125."

Arlor: <Quietly leaves>

Kory: "Just a moment. I never did play that song for you..."

\*CRUNCH!\*

Kory: "AAHHH! Stop that this INSTANT!"

Nameless Female: "Oh, you're a real charmer, are you? Forget it. Give me 150 NOW and you can keep your arm."

And so, with the cries of roosters and larks and bards filling the air, a new day began. One high priority matter was locating the Orb of Spheres. There were a couple local sage-types, but both specialized in local affairs (I believe they would be gossip columnists here) and were unlikely to know anything about magic items. The city itself probably had more respectable fonts of information, but that was obviously a last resort unless

we could find a way to enter the city safely, which meant illegally. Doing things illegally is usually either risky or expensive. So, various party members happened to meet each other and converge on the low town information bureau.

Razuli opened door to small shop. Finds it filled with many indelicate pictures of local nobles, together with names and short descriptions. A very thin man with a long nose stares distastefully from the back.

Man: "Yes?"

Razuli: "Hi! Hurtgo the All-Knowing?"

Hurtgo: "Yes. Welcome to my humble shop, brave adventurer. Do you seek information or enlightenment?"

Razuli: "Info. What do you know about an Orb of Spheres thing?"

Hurtgo: "Hmph! I am afraid I do not do research in artifacts, or indeed, anything that would be of interest to a person such as yourself. I am a seeker after higher things, the joys of the contemplation of matters of the dialectical philosophic. You would not understand, of course."

Razuli: "What's with the pictures? Real enlightening, if ya ask me."

Hurtgo: *<Temperature in room drops 20 degrees>* "I ask you nothing. I merely support myself by following the misdeeds of those in the public eye. You may go now."

Razuli: "Right. Fuck you very much!" *<Leaves>*

Elsewhere, a very worn sign outside a small house reads:

<p>KILGURIAN the WISE Curses Removed      Fortunes Told Magiks of All types Investigated Knock, then ENTER</p>
--

Kortul knocks, enters, with Arlor following. Inside is a very crowded room, with papers old and new in a great pile on a large table. Shelves line the walls, full of scrolls and more loose papers. A bell sits on the table.

Kortul: <Rings bell>

<After a long pause, an old man comes through a door in the back wall>

Kilgurian: "Yes? What is it?"

Kortul: "Kilgurian?"

Kilgurian: "Yes? What do you want?"

Kortul: "Looking for item. Orb of Spheres. Heard you were sage."

Arlor: "Yup. It's kind of important, sir." <Tries to look pleasant; Kortul couldn't look pleasant if he tried>

Kilgurian: "Ah! Information on an artifact! I thought you were from... eh, let me see... Glorb of Tears?"

Kortul: "Orb of Spheres."

Kilgurian: "No need to shout, no need to shout... hmmm... I'm afraid I can't quite remember anything off hand about it, eh... a bit out of my specialty, I'm afraid. Did you hear the latest on Princess Fytalior?"

Arlor: "No."

Kilgurian: "It was a Lizard-man this time. Indeed, I'm really not sure why his Lordship puts up with it. She is a wilfull lass, and not at all inclined to listen to her father. So often a problem among the young these days... why, when I was a lad, I always listened to my elders, and with RESPECT! Well... we had a little harmless fun, but nothing like what they do today..."

Kortul: "Anything here?" <Indcates grand mess>

Kilgurian: "Hmm? Oh, you're still on that Orb thing. There might be, might be. I'm getting all this catalogued right now, it's not usually this much of a mess. Um... It'll take a little while to sort through... Why don't you come back tommorow, and we'll see? Eh, er, uh, 10gp fee per day, what?"

Kortul: <Gives him 2gp> "Hope for good info. Tommorow." <They leave>

Kilgurian: "Hey, what... oh, well..."

Others spent the day in other endeavors. Armor was dropped off for repair, swords sharpened, arrows replaced, and backpacks stuffed with useful items. Kory, after a buying new clothes and a hat, went into the main city to get another lute (his old one now being permanently warped out of tune) and to look for training to go up a level. Navero spent most of his time in the local temple of the Unalterable Way, praying and working; he enjoyed the time he spent there very much, but occasionally missed the party and the outside world. Topash wandered out into the wilderness to commune with the local natural forces. He was not seen again for some time.

Later in the evening, several party members again gravitated to the tavern. This meeting carried a slightly different flavor to it, though. Dania had had a day to rest and recover from the previous night, and so was not so distracted as she had been before, and Kortul had joined us. Topash was nowhere to be found, Arlor had gone to do some investigating on his own, and Navero was off somewhere being pure in his temple. This left these four alone together in a relatively unthreatened position, and so with every opportunity to murder each other in perfect safety. For whatever reason, they did not do so, but settled down for a drink and a friendly chat.

Razuli: “Wizzerd! Fancy meeting you here!”

Dania: “Hmph.”

Kory: “So, Dania, on these Priests of Gothard: I have never been a religious person, but how would one go about joining this little group?”

Dania: “Oh no, gods help us all.”

Kory: “Amen! Do they allow singing? I understand that sensitive and dextrous lips and tongue can be quite an advantage in the worship of the god.”

Razuli: “Bard, judging from your pants size, you’re not well armed enough. Ferget it.”

Kory: “Oh, so! It’s not what you have but how you use it!”

Dania: “I guess you’re short on both counts, then.”

Kory: “And how would you know? Been fantasizing? Dearest darling little Dania, when o WHEN are you going to realize you’re madly in passionate love with me?”

Kortul: \*Sigh\* (How did I ever link up with these people?)

Dania: “Kory, be quiet. Just go away. Out of my life. Leave. Desist, and begone. Slip of this mortal’s coil and rid my sight of your presence.”

Kory: “Are you trying to tell me something?”

Razuli: “Yea. She said she loves me and wants you out.”

Kory: “She did not!”

Dania: “Kory AND Razuli, get out of my life.”

Kory: “Oooh, I love it when you talk dirty to me, baby. . . .”

Dania: “Will you leave me the FUCK alone?!”

Razuli: “What’s that? You’ll leave to fuck alone if Kory doesn’t get out?”

Dania: “WILL you BOTH get your <censored> assholes off the <censored> and quit BOTHERING me?!”

Kory: “HA HA! SHE’S BACK TO NORMAL! Hooray! Ah, sweet success, hee hee. . . .”  
<To Razuli> “Many thanks, I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Razuli: “S’ok, my man. Wish I could say the same about you, though.”

Dania: “Grrr. . . .”

Kortul: “Are you drinking?”

Dania: “I am now. BARKEEP!! Get your strongest over here!”

Kory: “Aww, you aren’t mad are you?”

Razuli: “You know we all love you, doncha?”

Dania: "Keep your fantasies out of this. Godamn you both."

Kory: "Oh? Barkeep! Bring four of what she's having! Well, Dania DEAR, if you're that upset, you can at least put your money where your big fat mouth is. I propose we drink until only one of us is concious! If it's you, we'll both leave you alone. Ok?"

Dania: "That sounds JUST FINE. Prepare to die, Bard."

Kory: <To Kortul> "You in on this?"

Kortul: "Sure. First to drop pays."

Kory: "Done!"

Barkeep: "My strongest, sirs and lady; White Ice Ale. 2gp apiece, if you're interested in knowing."

Razuli: "Bring four more back quick. We're gonna have a Drinking Contest!"

Barkeep: "May not be a good idea with this sir, but have it your way."

<Round 1 \*Ding!\*>

Game Master: Ok... Everybody roll a d20 when you drink. If you get greater than your Constitution, you go down.

Dania: <Makes roll easy> "Ahhh."

Kortul: <Barely makes roll> "Urk... Rargh! Not... bad."

Kory: "Having trouble there?" <Makes roll> "Hmm... interesting."

Razuli: <Makes roll easy> "Next round!"

<Round 2 \*Ding!\*>

Game Master: Now, it's CON-4.

Kory: CON-4? "Damn, this is good stuff!"

Game Master: Truly his best. Ready?

Dania: <Rolls an unfortunate 19> "U-URP..." \*Thud\*

Razuli: "I knew she couldn't hold her liquor!"

Kory: "Oh, she can hold her liquor, but she usually holds him by the ears, which is just one more reason why elves make the best lovers!" <Flubs his roll> "Oh, my go..." \*Thud\*

Kortul: <Makes roll easy> "Go."

Razuli: "Ok, ok, don't rush me now." <Makes roll>

<Round 3 \*Ding!\*>

Game Master: Now, CON-10.

Razuli: <Approaches glass rather unsteadily> "Yu an me, yer buffness..." <Rolls an 8> "Aw, shit." \*Thud\*

Kortul: "Hmph." <Rolls a 7, barely makes it> "Very... good..."

Barkeep: "Will that be all?"

Kortul: "... Yep. Shlee's paying." <Makes DEX check to crawl outside and throw up>

*"Jeff, could you come up with some realistic rules for drinking contests?"*

*"I'll try to think up some. I'm pretty sure we'll need them. But for now, goodnight."*

## XXVI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



HILE we were in town, those who could train did so. Kory got his training at Eristophanes' Lute Emporium in downtown Propyla; he came back singing Purple Rain, for which he was severely reprimanded. We also went back to the great wise sage to see if he had any information for us.

Kortul & Dania: <Enter Kilgurian's shop>

Kilgurian: <Sitting in midst of grand mess> "Yes? What do you want?"

Kortul: "Orb of Spheres."

Kilgurian: "You can't have it! I've given your master enough of my goods! I refuse to... wait a moment. I don't have one. Ha ha! Of course you can't have it! I haven't got it! Ha HA ha ha..."

Dania: "Uh, no, old master. Yesterday, Kortul came seeking information on the location of a magic item called the Orb of Spheres?"

Kilgurian: "What? Hmm, well, let me see... A large, hairy man with a broken nose, smelled bad... I do seem to recall..."

Dania: "Yeah. He looked a lot like this guy here."

Kilgurian: "By my soul! You're the very picture of the man! Well, how unfortunate for you. Hear the latest on Princess Fytalior?"

Dania: "Yeah. Ugh. I'd think all the scales would feel creepy."

Kilgurian: "Scales? Oh, that's old news. This latest was a Clay Golem designed and built by a priestess of Aphrodite. Very interesting what some people do in their spare time. Now... Robe of Sears?"

Dania: "Orb of Spheres."

Kilgurian: "No need to shout, I can hear perfectly well. Well, so, ah. Hm. Ah! Afraid I can't help you. No information on it. Terribly sorry. You may have better luck at Paracelsus' Herbal Market, he keeps up on such things more than I do. Whatever you do, don't go to that young fool over on Adamant Way! He not only doesn't know anything useful, he is crass and disrespectful and a thief besides! I know personally! I've seen him sneaking about where he doesn't belong, always getting into this and that; no honest businessman, he! Called me a brainless old fidget, he did!"

Kortul: "Untrue. Hardly fidget."

Kilgurian: "Thank you, young man. Hmm... what is that odor? I've only just now smelled it, wonder what it could be..."

Dania: "Probably a rat. Well, we must be going."

Kilgurian: "Sorry, sorry, payment for my services is expected."

Kortul: <Throws 5 gp, leaves>

Kilgurian: “But, but...”

Dania: “Thank you!” <Quickly exits>

Kilgurian: “Oh, well...”

Dania: “Shit, now what do we do? Think we can get into the city?”

Kortul: “No. Some might, those not easily recognized.”

Dania: “Which leaves you out. Even that old fart remembered you.”

Kortul: “Orb not near, or sages would have something. Find another town. Should look west.”

Dania: “Why west?”

Kortul: “Check out weather.”

Looking to the west, great black clouds could be seen near the horizon. They looked ominous and brooding, and were obviously not natural.

Kortul: “Something magical.”

Dania: “Yuck. Something big. How long has that been there?”

Kortul: “Since yesterday.”

Dania: “It’s probably not the Orb causing it. I don’t see why that way is better than any other. In fact, we probably don’t want to go riding into THAT. That looks NASTY.”

Kortul: “Dangerous.”

Dania: “Yeah... Lots of magic, do you think?”

Kortul: “Obviously.”

Dania: “Well, we can go in that GENERAL direction. And ask along the way. Whatever’s doing it will have lots of cash and magic items.”

Kortul: “Probably.”

Dania: “Well, then...”

The great black clouds continued to build up larger and larger, but were never accompanied by rain or wind. They just spread like a shadow, blocking out the sun. In about a week (during which the aforementioned training took place) they grew to cover one quarter of the sky. Several times, grim-faced messengers rode into town from the west. They never stopped to rest, no matter what time of day or night, just rode straight into the city as if on matters of all-consuming importance. Many rumors spread: the great witch Taya Haygo had returned, and was reclaiming her lands; the world was ending; a great vampire was summoning up monstrous legions to conquer all civilization; the God of the Sunset had the worst case of indigestion in recorded history. No one was sure, but everyone was willing to speculate. After a week had passed, Topash came back to us from the woods and fields. He seemed agitated, and quickly got the entire group together for a discussion of the future. Navero was still in the main city, and so was not present.

Topash: “Well, hello again. I hope the city has treated you well.”

Razuli: “Druid, cut the crap and tell us what’s goin’ on.”

Topash: “I wish I knew. Something terrible is coming from the west.”

Razuli: “No shit, Sherlock. What’s that got to do with us?”

Kory: “Now, now, calm down and give him a minute to catch his breath. Can’t you see that public speaking doesn’t come naturally to him? Ok, you can go on now. And stop sweating.”

Topash: “Thank you oh so very much. I feel we must go and investigate the disturbance to the west, seek out its source, and do whatever is necessary to alleviate the strain to the natural forces.”

Arlor: Besides, the DM wants us to go there.

Kory: Hush. We’re not supposed to talk about that.

Topash: “Well, I suppose that settles it. Unless I hear objections?”

Razuli: “Why do we wanna go risking our necks in that mess? We can’t we just go out and hunt trolls, or kill another dragon, or something easy, and leave this to somebody else? Find a paladin or somebody stupid who’ll go charging in for nothing.”

Dania: “You’re forgetting the Orb of Spheres. It might be in there.”

Razuli: “Huh? I ain’t heard anything about that.”

Dania: “Well, the Orb of Spheres is a device allowing travel between the vibratory planes of existence, right? And use is often accompanied by strain to the local continuum, right?”

Razuli: “Huh?”

Dania: “You’d know about these things if you had any education. Suffice to say that the Orb could cause effects very much like those we now see, and the natural conclusion is obvious. Q.E.B.”

Topash: “There is no reason at all NOT to go there. It will fulfill two of our purposes at once, and leave you free to go about your own business once again.”

Razuli: “All right, all right! Jeez. Ok, we’ll go.”

Kory: “Right. I shall locate our dear lost little Navero and we shall be on our merry way once again. Oh, Dania: did I tell you I wrote a ballad?”

Dania: “Not interested.”

Kory: “Oh, but you REALLY should be! It’s called ‘Dania and the Priests of Gothard’ I put in a great deal of time and research, including lengthy interviews with many of those involved in the matter.”

Dania: “If you dare. . .”

Kory: “I must remember to sing it to you sometime. You’ll LOVE it.”

*<Dania takes a swing at Kory; He avoids it and runs away laughing>*

Kortul: “Hmph! Meet here, dawn tomorrow.”

Topash: “Agreed. Let each prepare themselves in their fashion.”

*<Group disperses>*

Topash: “Oh, Dania. . . Q.E.B.?”

Dania: “Quite Elementary Bullshit.”

Topash: “Ah. . .”

The next day, our heroes set forth to the west from the great city of Propyla. We rode on the main trade routes, but there was very little traffic going westward with us; occasionally, a man on a fast horse went by, but very little else. Traffic from the east was fairly heavy, and completely composed of people moving out of the area. We rode for about a week before the changes became obvious - the brush and grass seemed to have died off, except for one tough, crabgrass-like variety. We passed several abandoned farmhouses and inns.

After 10 days, we reached Ethylia, the second capital of the empire as Propyla was third. (Rumor had it they were named for the emperor's consorts, but you know how reliable rumors are.) The city wall was only partially completed, but work on it seemed to have stopped. There were very few people in town, and those who were there were very distant, and seemed preoccupied with their own concerns. We stayed an uncomfortable and nervous night, then left. The clouds now covered half the sky, and looked blacker and nastier all the time; there was never any lightning, or anything you would associate with real clouds, but they did block out the sun VERY efficiently, like ink dribbled across the heavens.

Two nights out of Ethylia...

Kortul was on guard duty. We had an extra-bright campfire, and since there was no traffic, we decided to camp right in the middle of the road where there were no trees or grass for ambushers to hide in. The whole country feels rotten as a graveyard. . .

Kory: <Starts awake> "Whazzat?!"

Kortul: "Snake slid under your blanket. Not poisonous."

Kory: "Yahh!" <Throws it away> "Jesus, why didn't you tell me?!"

Kortul: "I'm not Jesus."

Dania: "Kory, shut up and let us sleep. . ."

Kortul: <Gazes into darkness>

Naverro: "Something is wrong. . ."

Dania: "What?"

Naverro: "I can't sleep. It's all too wrong, and it got worse just now."

Dania: "Nav, what are you talking about?"

Kortul: "Shhh. . ."

Silence. Everyone is awake and listening. Then, rushing footsteps. Many rushing footsteps.

Kortul: <Unsheathes Sun Sword; Light shows many disgusting humanoids rushing towards the camp>

Topash: "Ghouls, I believe. They are a violation; Kortul, Razuli, stay back from them, they can paralyze humans."

Dania: <Magic Missiles a Ghoul>

Kortul: "Hmph." <Steps forward, butchers one with Sun Sword>

Naverro: "By the Lords of the CorrecOOMPH!" <Ghoul barrels into his gut and drops him>

Razuli: "Aw, get up!" <Attacks Ghoul on Naverro>

Arlor: <Hides under a blanket>

Ghouls: "Gibber gibber gargle snort drool" <Claw Topash, Naverro, Arlor; all must save>

Topash: Oh shit, they're Ghasts.

Game Master: You're paralyzed. Shut up.

*<Navero and Arlor are also paralyzed.>*

Dania: "SHIT!!" *<Melf's Acid Arrow on a Ghast>*

Kortul: *<Butchers 2 more with Sun Sword>*

Razuli: "This is another fine mess you got me into. You really owe me, magic-user." *<Slices a Ghast, wounding it>*

Kory: "Say, did you notice that a lot of our decaying guests are dressed like farmers?" *<Slices another Ghast>*

Ghasts: "Gibber gibber *<obscene gerund>* *<racial slur>*" *<Flee>*

Kory: "Hey! Why'd they all run away? I was having fun!"

Razuli: "Must have seen your face."

Kory: "Oh, come on! I could play Dead Man's Party for them!"

Dania: "Oh, shut the fuck up. Get the wounded cleaned and bandaged."

Kory: "YES, MA'AM! Right away, oh party leader extraordinaire! Who elected you to the illustrious position of Queen of chaos. . ."

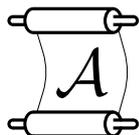
Kortul: "Bandage wounded. NOW. Get poison out first."

Kory: "You're no fun anymore. God, nothing around here is fun anymore."

*"Do you know an interior decorator who does exteriors? This place could sure use some brightening up."*

## XXVII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



FTER fighting off the Ghast pack and getting the paralyzed party members up and healthy, there were no further incidents. The Ghosts and Ghouls stayed away for the rest of the night. I guess they figured all those muscles would be too tough and stringy. Over half of the sky was covered with dark, a black as black as black could be. The stars in the eastern half slid by normally, but were being squeezed out behind the consuming darkness. There was neither rain nor wind, and the woods and grasslands were filled with moving shapes. We kept the fire burning extra-bright; nothing came near us.

In the morning, we continued on. The rising sun shone underneath the canopy of darkness and illuminated the landscape, which immediately took on a fresh tone; but the sun “set” at about 11 am. After a while, the road turned northward. We elected to follow it, rather than strike off into the wild lands, which even Topash was reluctant to enter. As we went northwest, a clearer patch in the inky cover became apparent, far, far ahead of us.

Dania: “What’s that up there?”

Topash: “I believe we should be far more concerned with what is around us right now.”

Kory: <Makes Legend Lore role> “That, I do believe, is Methigor, the smallest and westernmost of the capitals. It seems it would also be a good place for us to go right now.”

Naverro: “I don’t like it. That is a very bad place for us to be.”

Dania: “Nav, be more specific.”

Naverro: “I don’t know! It just feels... bad.”

Topash: “I’m surprised that everything here doesn’t feel bad.”

Razuli: “We’ll be careful, kid. I’m good at going where the sun never shines, right, magic-user?”

Dania: <Glares>

Topash: “Ah-hah. Quite appropriate that you bring that up when the topic of ‘feeling bad’ is in the air.”

Kory: “Or feeling badly. Sensitivity is required here! Sensitivity, and certain harmonies...”

Topash: “To bridge the dischords between us, bard?”

Kory: “Oh, no. The short and sweet of it is, of course, the short and sweet. Dania, DEAR; having trouble sleeping at night?”

Dania: “No. I have pleasant dreams of you getting gelded. Fuck off.”

Razuli: “Wizzerd, why don’t you scout ahead and look for an ambush?”

Dania: “Shut up.”

Kory: “Hmph! I’m starting to dislike her. I’m sure she could be fun, but GOD is she unfriendly! Maybe if we cut out her ovaries she’d be nicer.”

Razuli: “Nah. Just find another priest of Gothard.”

Kory: “Oh, that’d take care of the problem in a BIG hurry. How does one go about locating one?”

Razuli: “Well, first ya gotta get the right bait. . .”

Methigor was peculiarly situated; the cloud cover above it was less dense than it was here, but not enough to allow too much light in. The land around it was even darker and unpleasanter than where we were now; we could see no light or green at all. We rode until sunset, then camped and prepared for the coming night. Everyone was quiet; the setting was somber enough to shut most anyone up. We collected a LOT of wood, and kept it burning very bright. Methigor was not far - two or three hours ride, we guessed; we could get there by noon tomorrow, at the latest. Night deepened in the unpleasant lands around us. It felt as though we were being watched by unwholesome things.

Razuli: (. . . boring . . . boring . . . boring . . . I hate watch . . . boring . . .)

Suddenly, something falls out of the sky and lands in the fire. It turns out to be a big sack filled with water. \*SPLOOSH!\* Everyone springs up. Dania casts Dancing Lights, Kortul unsheathes Sun Sword, Navero casts Light

Dania: “Razuli, you idiot! Why didn’t you see that coming?!”

Razuli: “Aw, fuck you, magic-user!”

Kory: “Now, now, you’ll have to wait on that.”

Razuli: “Shut up! Incoming!!”

Great globs of sticky gunk are lobbed into the clearing. Kory and Razuli are hit, knocked down and stunned, and covered in goop.

Topash: “Ah, slimeballs.”

Dania: “I knew that already. What’s the gunk?”

Topash: “A product of certain fungi that grow in unhealthy places. It is worth noting that it is strongly attracted to its own kind.”

Spectral forms and rotting bodies approach the campsite. The spectral ones were indistinct and easy to miss (Shadows, I believe) with all the corporeal ones running around getting in the way

Navero: “By the power of the Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way, I doth Command thee to Depart!!”  
<Rolls a 2 on his dispelling check>

Undead: <Guffaw slightly>

Topash: “Hmph. To be expected, I suppose. Put your new mace to use, good boy, and see if you can do anything.” <Cuts at a shadow>

Kortul: “Useless priest. . .” <Cleaves a Ghoul>

Dania: “#!&!\$%&@!!” <Magic Missiles a Zombie>

Arlor: “AHHH!!!” <Runs frantically about hacking with a short sword>

Undead: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool” <Zombie claws Kortul; Shadow ignores Arlor; Shadow hits Navero; Ghoul hits Dania>

Navero: “Where are they all coming from? What do they want?”

Topash: “They wish to kill us. Do something.” <*Slices a Ghoul*>

Kortul: <*Mangles a shadow*>

Dania: “Urk!” <*Shadow grabs her by the throat from behind*>

Naverro: “YAAHHHH!” <*Charges to aid Dania*>

Dania: (Oh, no, please Lords, don’t let him fuck up AGAIN. . .)

Arlor: <*Hacks Shadow’s knees out, it lets go*>

Naverro: <*Rolls a 3; Dents the ground*>

Undead: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool fuck you” <*Kortul hit by Ghoul and Shadow, makes save vs. paralysis; Topash is missed; Dania is coughing; Arlor hit by Zombie; Naverro is missed; A Wight appears, and something large can be heard approaching*>

Naverro: “Go away!” <*Swings, rolls a 1—critical fumble*>

Game Master: <*Rolls dice*> Naverro, roll to hit Kortul.

Naverro: <*Rolls an 18*>

\*CLANG!\*

Naverro: “Oops! Sorry.”

Kortul: “Grrr. . .” <*Masticates a Shadow*>

Dania: “Naverro, go heal wounds or something!”

Razuli: “Whaa. . .?”

Topash: “Wash the goop off with alcohol. Or burn it.”

Razuli: “But I’m in the @\$&\$%!! middle of it!!”

Dania: <*Bashes a Zombie with her staff*>

Undead: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool fuck you all” <*Kortul is missed; Naverro is missed; Dania is hit by Zombie; Topash is missed; Arlor is missed; Big thing is getting closer*>

Wight: “Surrendur! Can hav posishun in armee!”

Kortul: <*Purees Wight*>

Topash: <*Cure Light on Dania*>

Arlor: <*Hides under a blanket*>

Razuli: “#%!#&%@!fuck&!&\$%@!” (Struggles with gunk.)

Naverro: <*He misses; Ever had one of those lives where you just couldn’t do anything right?*>

Kory: <*A ghoul approaches him with knife and fork*> “Oh, my head. . . Hey! Something is chewing on me! And it’s uglier than Razuli AND Dania! Yeuch, get away from me!”

Undead: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool you in trouble now” <*Kortul is hit three times; Topash missed; Arlor pulled from under blanket and clawed by Ghoul; Naverro hit twice, drops; Razuli and Kory attacked*>

Great Shape: <*Approaching Big Thing appears from night; It’s some kind of Zombie Giant; Many more undead accompany it, including Wights and Wraiths*>

Kortul: (This is no good place to die. . .) <*Liquifies Ghoul*>

Kory: <Cures Light Wounds on Navero> “Navero, the Giant. Now.”

Navero: “By the Unconquerable Lords, please go away!” <Rolls a 5>

Giant: “AAUUUURRRR. . . HEE HEE HEE.”

Topash: “Navero, I’m beginning to lose confidence in you.”

Arlor: “Maybe we should run away.”

Dania: “Where the FUCK are we gonna run to? We’re <censored> fucking surrounded, IN CASE YOU DIDN’T NOTICE!! Where are the horses?!”

Arlor: “They ran.”

Dania: “Shit. There must be a million of the fuckers!”

Razuli: “Well, at least your fate is known, magic-user.”

Kortul: “Hold them a few minutes.”

Dania: “WHAT!?!” <MM’s a Ghast> “What difference will that make?!”

Kory: “Oh, it’s obvious! That’s when the nick of time comes, and we’ll be rescued by a troop of riders coming from the city! Dania, you don’t seem to understand the way the world works at all.”

Dania: “What riders?! WHAT FUCKING RIDERS!? I don’t see any godamn riders!”

Topash: “Those ones over there. Now resume thrashing, young lady.”

Undead: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool aw shit”

Riders from the castle arrive (in the nick of time) and race through camp, beating back the undead. Many clerics are in their midst as well; they drive the legions of darkness before them, etc. etc. ad nauseam. Party is picked up at a fast clip

The ride back to town was relatively relaxing. The riders were very grim-faced, and did not talk at all. Nonetheless, they acted with surprising single-mindedness, thoroughly professional. They smelled strange, like decay combined with perfumes. This was rather unnerving, despite the rescue, but as we raced towards the city, we realized that EVERYTHING around here smelled of death and decay and rot. It was as if every churchyard occupant for miles had come here for a big convention, and decided to bring all their friends with them as well.

Methigor was very small; a low castle on a hilltop, with only a few outbuildings. Most of these had been razed. The place was crawling with undead of all kinds, but the riders got in safely, and once inside, we met with a high dignitary in plate mail, who greeted us with all of the warmth and respect we were accustomed to. It was very gracious of him, that even under these trying circumstances, he took time to speak to us.

Dignitary: “WHAT THE FUCKING HELL WERE YOU IDIOTS DOING OUT THERE!?”

Topash: “Hail, fellow! Well met! I am. . .”

Dignitary: “YOU ARE INSANE!!”

Kory: “Here now! Not all of us aspire to that condition!”

Dignitary: <Blood vessels in forehead throb menacingly> “WHO THE &#%&#@\$!! DO YOU THINK YOU ARE!?!”

Kory: “I think I am The Incredibly Famous Kory Silvertongue, Master of Music, Keeper of The Faith, and general studmuffin. Whom do I have the great honor of addressing?”

Razuli: “Who’s Faith?”

Kory: "A girl I met in Minneapolis."

Dania: "SHUT UP!! Sir, we are truly sorry, it won't happen again..."

Dignitary: "I'LL SAY IT WON'T!! ROG! CARMEN! THROW THIS LOT IN THE BRIG!"

Kortul: "Grrr..."

*<Rog and Carmen appear; They are Hill Giants>*

Kortul: *<Pauses to consider how many hit points he has>*

Razuli: "Does this brig have a lock on the door?"

Dignitary: *<Eyes bulge dramatically>* "WHAT!?! OF COURSE!!"

Razuli: "Good! Kids, lets go to that nice safe dungeon where they can't hurt us! Ok, Big and Ugly, take us away!"

Dignitary: "Not so fast!" *<Crafty look creeps into piggy little eyes>* "Now, what WERE you doing out there, camped in the middle of an undead army?"

Dania: "We were trying to find out what all the clouds in the sky meant, so we came out here."

Naverro: "Truly and honestly, sir, we never had any attention of risking your men or any others. We didn't know."

Dignitary: "You must be stupid."

Kory: "Now, now, don't leap to the obvious conclusion. We are but..."

Dania: "SHUT UP! We came in complete ignorance to see what was going on, and got caught in the middle of it. Simple."

Dignitary: *<Stares for a while>* "You ARE stupid."

Naverro: "We're sorry."

Dignitary: "Sorry... SORRY??! THREE OF MY MEN DIED ON THAT! WHICH ALSO MEANS THREE MORE IN THE ENEMY CAMP! AND YOU'RE \*SORRY\*!?"

Kory: "Oh, this could be cleaned up in but a moment. All you have to do is call for The Three..."

*<Entire party jumps on him before he can complete the sentence>*

Topash: "I think not."

Naverro: "Surely there is some other way. I think they would not stop with the enemy."

Dignitary: "Oh, hell. Get bandaged up and man the wall. Maybe we can get some good out of you. His lordship the Duke will want to see you tomorrow night."

Dania: "Why not in the daytime?"

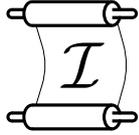
Dignitary: "He's a day sleeper. We all are, here, 'cause they only come at night. Now GET THE #&%\$ OUT OF MY SIGHT!!"

We got wounds bandaged, quaffed healing potions, had Naverro heal us, and generally tried to restore our strength as quickly as possible. The things outside the wall snarled, wailed and proved very difficult targets. The soldiers on the wall were untalkative - they stared out into the night, and either ignored us or looked through us with what seemed like contempt. Everything smelled sickly-sweet, from perfumes and oils that were doing a terrible job at covering the smell of rotting bodies. The dead army did not attack the castle, but it was a long and unpleasant night.

*"This place gives me the creeps. And Lord knows there are enough of them in this party already."*

## XXVIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



INSIDE Methigor, we all tried to settle in. Some got food, or looked for a cleric, or scattered along the wall. Kortul went looking for Naverro, and found him sewing up a rip in his robe. Naverro carries a needle and thread, among other things. (This is a conversation between my two characters. I thought it up while listening to Jeff and Shelby bitch out rules for making Holy Water.)

Kortul: "Priest."

Naverro: "Yes?"

Kortul: "Want you out of group."

Naverro: "What?"

Kortul: "Get out. Menace. Gods have cursed you."

Naverro: "No they haven't! I mean... I'm sorry about your head. It really was an accident. I didn't mean to."

Kortul: "Either looked down on by gods, or most incompetent asshole I ever met. Either way, get out."

Naverro: "Uh... I... I can't leave my friends."

Kortul: "Better off without you."

Naverro: "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hit you, or die any of those times, or anything! It just HAPPENED! I don't know what's wrong, really I don't. It MUST be that the Lords are angry with me."

Kortul: "Fine. Go somewhere else, let them be angry there."

Naverro: "But I can't leave my friends. I... It... It seems to me that would be a greater sin. You got me back from both... times, and I haven't proven I was worth it. I have to do that. 'Equity is most desirable among friends!'"

Kortul: "Priest, not listening. Said, 'Get out.'"

Naverro: <Looks nervous> "Uh... No."

Kortul: "Grr... You are menace. Cursed, damned. Signs in everything you do. GET OUT!"

Naverro: "No. I refuse. I cannot."

Kortul: <Glowers> "Priest, don't have a prayer. Do as I say. Get out. NOW."

Naverro: <Looks very nervous> "No."

Kortul: <Approaches> "Priest..."

Naverro: <\*Command\*> "STOP!!"

Kortul: <Stops>

Naverro: “No, I will not leave! I will not run! I have too much to make up for! I WILL NOT! I am going to show the Lords that I CAN do well! Yea, I will not allow these trials to bear me down, I will GO ON! I must bear it as I would any other burden, and I will prevail despite it! I will! I will! You can’t make me do what I don’t want to do! You can’t! No one can! You stopped. You did. The Lords do look on me with kindness, they do understand! I have been given a great task, and I SHALL PREVAIL!”

Kortul: <Command ends> “Fine. PREVAIL SOMEWHERE ELSE!”

Naverro: “No. Now go away.”

Kortul: “GRRR...” <Crouches for leap>

Naverro: “I don’t want this. I don’t. Please don’t.”

Kortul: “...”

Naverro: “Please.”

Kortul: <Considers the situation> (God, what a wimp this kid is. Was I ever that young and stupid? Surely not.) “Stay out of front lines, then.” <Walks off>

The night passed slowly, but peacefully. A few of us did get ill from the stench, and nobody had any kind of appetite. We couldn’t find the mess hall (Smells of food couldn’t make it to us), so those who felt like it nibbled old travelling rations. We slept during the day, like everyone else seemed to do; it was dark enough to get away with it, even in the relatively sunny city. The next night a soldier came looking for us, and told us to meet Duke Desmond in his observatory. Somehow, the guard could not find Naverro, so he was absent from the meeting.

In the observatory. The observatory was a high tower with a small room on top, with big windows, and glass windows in the roof through which stars could normally be seen. Duke Desmond was a thin man with very pale skin, and a furrowed brow. He looked ill, and very worried.

Desmod: “Greetings. I have heard of your arrival. Tell me, how fares the outside world?”

Dania: “Well, sir, we don’t know much, we came here to try and find out what was going on.”

Topash: “Tis a tale of great woe, your excellency. When we left the city of Propyla, the great blackness covered nearly a third of the sky. It has taken the city of Ethilia, I have little doubt, and consumed it.”

Kory: “Yeah, yeah. Whoever’s doing this has absolutely no appreciation of aesthetics whatsoever.”

Desmod: <Short, wheezy laugh> “Well, I suppose. Do you know if any of our messengers have gotten through to a free town?”

Dania: “We saw some ride into Propyla about a couple of weeks ago.”

Topash: “But we have not seen any on the road since we came from Ethilia.”

Desmod: \*Sigh\* “Yes. I wish my wife was here. She was a mighty Paladin, full of grace and beauty. She could secure the Bloodstone.”

Topash: “Bloodstone?”

Kory: “Grace and beauty?”

Desmod: “Sadly, she is finished. Yes, the bloodstone. It is an artifact in the keeping of a witch who lives south of here. My incantations have pointed it out as being responsible for the infestation of the undead you see here, but I have been unable to reach the item. I am no longer a young man, but I fear I may have little choice but to seek it out myself.”

Dania: “Explain this Bloodstone, please, your grace.”

Desmod: <Mirthless laugh> “It is an artifact, made by the Gods of Chaos. It holds a small piece of Death’s great scythe, and death radiates from it. To merely touch it with flesh creates a Vampire. I fear it is causing all this; it appears some witch or other has found it, and is using it for her own ends. I have heard her laughing in my incantations; she uses its power to guard it and herself, and I cannot reach the artifact from here. All the men I sent have never returned. I fear I must go myself, but without my wife, I fear my chances of even reaching it are not good, and the journey would drain my remaining health and leave me no match for its guardians.”

Kory: “Oh, my GOD... THAT WAS INCREDIBLE! So dramatic, and full of pathos, my dear sir! Have you ever considered acting?”

Desmod: “I know not what you mean.”

Razuli: “Where’s your wife?”

Desmod: “She died, recently.”

Dania: “Ah.”

Topash: “So, the thing we must do, obviously, is to get this bloodstone and destroy it.”

Dania: “Destroy a godly artifact? Good luck.”

Desmod: “There is a ritual which can be used to CONTAIN the bloodstone, if not destroy it. Many have quested and sought after a means of destroying the bloodstone, but nothing has come to light. It seems as difficult as conquering death itself.”

Razuli: “So, you wanna run south, get this thing, then run back here and put it inna lead box?”

Desmod: “Lead? Why would you use lead for this purpose?”

Dania: “Ah, never mind him. He’s just a idiot.”

Razuli: “How’d you like some...”

Kory: “Children, children, please! Let’s be reasonable and not kill each other all over his excellency’s floor. Something as dark and unpleasant as this place needs cleaning up. Why don’t we go do it, then get back to the Orb?”

Dania: “Oh, yeah. Your excellency, do you know anything about the Orb of Spheres?”

Desmod: “Orb of Spheres? You seek the Orb of Spheres? Why, I have it right here!” <Reaches into his pocket, pulls out a 3” diameter globe, whose surface seems to reflect the entire universe> “It is very useful in maintaining the wall of this castle against the assaults of those who would smash it. I propose a trade, then: If you can get the Bloodstone, I will no longer need this, and will gladly give it to you as payment! Then, your own quest will be satisfied, and my wife can rest in eternal peace!” <Looks excited, genuinely eager>

Razuli: “Waitaminute. Where’d you pull that thing from?”

Kory: “Razuli, shut up. You don’t know anything.”

Arlor: “Lets go.”

Topash: “I don’t know... this seems too easy, somehow...”

Dania: “Dear, when we get outside the castle wall it ain’t gonna seem easy.”

Topash: “I suppose you have a point there. We’d best leave at dawn.”

Desmod: “Yes, ha HA! Sleep well, my dearest one! Wait, one moment!” \*POOF\* <*A hole appears in the air beside him. He reaches in, rummages, and comes out with a plain silver ring*> “When you get the stone, rub this ring three times, and you will be teleported back here. All of you touch the ring and say ‘Thee and me be the ones to TP’ so it will know who to teleport.”

Topash: “Yes. What kind of holy water supplies do you have?”

Desmod: “Not much, I fear. It tends to get used a lot. Can’t your own priest make it? I thought you had one with you.”

Dania: “We do, but he isn’t here. Probably off praying.”

Razuli: “We’ll tell him. Ok, kids, let’s go.”

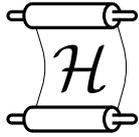
Kory: “Weeeeeeeee’re off to see the witch-bitch, the uglified witch with the stone. Because I’m a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. . .”

\*SMACK!\*

*“You have no appreciation of fine music!”*

## XXIX

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level



IS Lordship Duke Desmond was kind enough to loan us a few horses; they were nothing much, but faster than walking, so we left him and his silent soldiers at dawn the next day. He explained that the Bloodstone was in an old keep to the south, which was now in ruins. Following his directions, we rode southwards for a week. The trip was uneventful.

The keep was on a broad plain, near a group of low, rolling hills. The outer walls and roof were still mostly intact, but the eastern wall had a big hole smashed in it. It also looked like it had been scavenged for building stone in the recent past. There was a dried-up stream to the south, and the gates were ajar. It was late morning at the time, so there was no hurry to enter, and we sat to debate our course of action.

Razuli: “Right, kids. We go in through the breach. Only an idiot would walk in the front door.”

Dania: “Why not crawl in a window? They can collapse that wall on us if we go in the breach.”

Kortul: “Get attacked in window. Very bad.”

Naverro: “Can’t we sneak up when it gets dark?”

Razuli: “Naverro: Undead, remember?”

Kory: “Do we know if there are any in there?”

Topash: “If the Bloodstone is within, where else would they be? Naverro, do you detect any evil about the place?”

Naverro: “Yes. It’s everywhere. But there’s a big spot under the keep. I think it would be in the cellars. Why don’t we just go in and get it, and get away from here? I don’t like it here.”

Dania: “Nav, relax. It’ll all be over soon, then we can go someplace else.”

As we argued, a figure is silently watching the party from the bushes. He asks the GM what he sees.

Game Master: Ok, you see a tall obnoxious fighter, a short obnoxious bard, a very short magic-user, an imperturbable-looking elf in brown and green, a big smelly-looking human, and a very pious-looking human.

Figure: “I say, you look like a party! I think parties are bitchin’.”

<Party jumps a bit>

Topash: “Hail, fellow-skulking-in-the-bushes-over-there. Are you a PC?”

Figure: “Well yes, but I prefer at least 3 initials myself.”

Kory: Now, now, stay in character. <Walks up to figure> “You appear to be an unknown person of quite uncertain ancestry, possessed of poor social graces and bad breath. I am Kory Silvertongue, soon to be incredibly famous and known throughout the lands. Who may you be, dearest sir?”

Figure: “I may be called Meth Crystal, but I’m not quite sure. I think it was something like that, anyway. Do you party? I got some killer weed here if you’re into it.”

Dania: “Oh, Jesus...”

Kory: “The elf with the hooters over there is our darling little Dania, who needs no introduction. This slimy and disreputable individual is Razuli, a cheerful comrade and rear-flank warrior. That person over there is our front flank warrior; don’t talk to him, he’s no fun at all. And, for comic relief, we have Navero here.”

Meth: “Well hello there, small blonde person.”

Dania: “Hi. Who are you, and what do you do for a living?”

Meth: “Do? Lets not talk about that right now, shall we? Suffice to say... Oh shit, the sky turned colors again...”

Razuli: It says he’s a thief on his character sheet.

Topash: Ah, good. We’ve been needing a thief.

Dania: “Yeah, but are we this desperate?”

Game Master: What about Arlor?

Dania: What about him? He’s not even here 2 sessions out of 3.

Razuli: “C’mon! I’m sure he can put it right in there with the rest of us! You’d know all about that, magic-user! Give him a chance!”

Navero: “Why are his eyes so red?”

Meth: “All the better to see you with, hey, who are you?”

Navero: “I am acolyte Navero of the Correct and Unalterable Way. Have you heard of us? Our goal is to bring the light of peace to this dark and confusing world and help others to shine with the inner light.”

Meth: *<Stares at Navero for a moment>* “Yeah. Right.” *<To Kory>* “Where did you find this guy?”

Kory: “He appeared in this blazing beam of golden luminescence, and we’ve been trying to deal with him ever since. Just don’t get near him while we’re in a fight.”

Meth: “Oh? One of those fighting priests?”

Kory: “Uh... you *\*could\** say that, but I really wouldn’t.”

Razuli: “Kids, can we go now?”

Topash: “Yes, I believe we should. Our quest awaits, and the balance must be righted. We should enter through the breached wall. Are there any objections?”

Party: Nope, uh-uh, let’s go kiddies, etc. *<Party walks quietly to keep>*

Meth: “Inner light? Last time I had an inner light was when I tried all the Tantric stuff. Surely we’re not talking about the same thing.”

We walked up to the keep; death did not rain from the sky onto our heads, nor did the earth erupt and swallow us down into its depths. All was quiet. Through the breach in the eastern wall of the keep, we could see a room, empty but for a dash of debris. Kortul went in first, then came Kory, then everyone else. The room was about 30 by 40 feet, with passageways in the western and northern walls. The room seemed to have been a kitchen in the past, but nothing worthwhile remained within. We left through the northern passage; it went northwards, turned east, and opened into another room with a whole bunch of bones in it. Most seemed to be human.

Meth: "Oh, must be somebody's pantry!"

Topash: "Or garbage heap."

Dania: "Or dining room."

Suddenly, the bones start moving. Ten skeletons spring up and attack the party, rattling their shaky bones.

Undead: RATTLE RATTLE RATTLE

Naverro: "AAHH!! Go away, evil nasty icky things!" <Rolls a 14 on dispelling>

Undead: <All of them turn around and run away>

Kory: "Nav! You did something! I'm shocked speechless!"

Naverro: <Is also shocked speechless; Stares at cowering undead>

Dania: "Hey, good going, Nav! Lets check out the room."

Naverro: <Still staring at cowering undead>

Dania: "Nav?"

Razuli: <Looks in Naverro's ear> "I don't think he's home right now."

Naverro: <Drops to knees> "Oh, Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way, the way of Light and Life, Caretakers of All, I KNEW you hadn't forsaken me!! Oh, thank you thank you..." <The rest of the party goes to look at the room> "...thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you!! I am blessed to stand in your joyous radiance and shine by the reflection of your divine love! I walk in darkness but for thy divine radiance which illuminates my way and I do GOOD! Yea, my faith may flag, I shall always follow the radiance of your goodness as I can! Look upon your unworthy and grateful servant..." <The rest of the party has finished with the room; nothing interesting> "...who rejoices in the light of life under your flag, now and forevermore! Oh Lords,..." <The rest of the party is waiting impatiently> "...though I may fail to bring about your works, forgive my weakness, and reward me with..."

Razuli: "Naverro?"

Naverro: "...your divine... Yes?"

Kory: "'Icky'?"

Naverro: "Uh... well, they are icky. I mean, uh..."

Dania: "Nav, lets go. There's another entrance over here."

Naverro: "But I must thank the Lords for their divine mercy and goodness in allowing me to be the instrument of their work."

Topash: "It might not occur to you that now is not the time. Tell you what: why don't you remember everything the Lords do for you, and then thank them all at once later, Ok?"

Naverro: "But..."

Topash: "Very good. Let's go now."

The hall went east. We immediately ran into a bunch of zombies. Again, they fell back before the wrath of Naverro.

Razuli: "Don't get cocky, kid."

Naverro: "Cocky? No!" <Hums short ditty, looks pleased with himself>

The first door on the north opened onto an empty room. The second had a stairwell going up.

Razuli: "I think we need to find stairs going down, kids."

Topash: "Perhaps we may find a secret entrance on the upper story, which will lead us to our goal. The witch, if there is one, will also be up there, should we choose to deal with her."

Dania: "Oh, just get up there and see if we can find any money. And magic items! She should have lots if she's got the Bloodstone."

Topash: "All of which will be used against us in any battle."

Kortul: <Snarls, tromps upstairs>

Kory: "I think the decision has been made by a higher power. Shall we?"

Dania: <Grumbles>

Undead: <Green skeletons charge from above> RATTLE RATTLE RATTLE

Kory: "Oh, Nav? There are some people up here who'd like to see you."

Naverro: "By the Light of the True Path, Begone!!" <Rolls a 6>

Undead: <Blatantly ignore Naverro and attack>

Topash: "I knew it couldn't last."

Naverro: "Lords?"

<Generic combat sounds, screaming, etc.>

The Green Skeletons proved tougher than the normal sort, but were vanquished without serious loss. At the top of the stairs there was a locked iron door, with some kind of runes in the surface. Dania did not detect any magic, but Naverro thought they looked disturbing. Meth got the lock, and a fine wire at the bottom, which he disconnected. Inside, there was a small room, with big worm-like things writhing in a layer of slime on the floor; each had a distorted face.

Kory: "Oh, yuck, I think I recognize these things."

They wriggle through the door and start maliciously biting everything. They are all killed shortly thereafter.

Naverro: "Those were Larvæ, the souls of evil people housed in forms more fitting to them. But those are supposed to be in the damned place, not here! Who could have brought them here?"

Dania: "We'll probably find out. Any treasure?"

Razuli: "Nope. Lets go back down and look for the cellar stairs."

Suddenly, the other door in the room opens. A hunchbacked, vaguely female figure looks in, grinning maliciously.

Naverro: "AAHH! That's not a witch! That's a Night Hag!"

Dania: "FuckingshitjesuschristKILLIT!!" <casts Magic Missile>

The missiles hit the Hag and fizzled out. It grinned more maliciously, and snapped its fingers. The ceiling collapsed on Kortul, knocking him out.

Night Hag: "The rest of you can go now."

*"Oh, shit. We're dead."*

*"You keep saying that."*

## XXX

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level

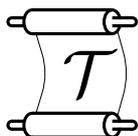
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level

**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level

**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



HE Night Hag cackled, rolled her eyes, and looked unpleasant. Dania stared at where her missiles had fizzed out. Naverro sat there hyperventilating. Kortul lay there and bled. Things looked really grim.

(A few notes on Meth Crystal are in order, concerning what little I know of his background. His species can best be described as uncertain; he's about 1/4 Human, 1/4 Orc, 1/4 Elf, 1/4 Drow, with some other interesting things mixed in, including Hobgoblin, Bullywug, and Lesser Demon. He is the product of at least two generations of rape. I also know that Meth Crystal is not his real name, but didn't pry.)

Night Hag: "How very unkind of you to kill all of my playthings. Now I'll have to take this one to satisfy my appetites. Pity he doesn't have more evil tendencies to him; just meat."

Kory: "Yeesh, what an ugly bitch! She's ALMOST enough to make me swear off sex forever. If it were not for the presence of..."

Dania: "Shut up. Uh, we'd really rather not lose Kortul, here, uh, we have some travelling rations...?"

Night Hag: "Dearest, you should know better than that what appetites I'm talking about."

\*BLAM!!\*

<Whole party is blasted by flames from the floor; We all dive out of the corridor into the slimy room with the Hag>

Meth: "Dearest magic-usurer, get a clue, will you?"

Naverro: "By the Lords of The Correct and Unalterable Way, GO AWAY!!"

Night Hag: "Ah, what a darling little priestling. Come here, sweetcheeks." <Backhands Naverro across the room into a wall>

Kory: "Ho ha ha guard turn parry spin thrust!" <Sword glances off Night Hag>

Dania: "AAAHHHH!!!" <Blasts the Night Hag with Staff of Thunder and Lighting; The bolt splits between Razuli and the Night Hag>

Razuli: "OW!! JESUS-FUCKIN' CHRIST!!! Watch it, you stupid bitch!!!"

Topash: "A word to the unwise, dearest mage: the destructive magics you specialize in would not be to our advantage in such close quarters. I suggest you restrain your more destructive impulses for now."

Dania: "Fuck you and the horse you rode in on. KILL IT!!!"

Naverro: <Slips in the slime and falls on Razuli>

Meth: <Looks on in a bemused sort of way>

Razuli: “Kid, just go wake Kortul up.” *<Shoves Navero in the appropriate direction; Hacks at the Night Hag, sword bounces off>*

Topash: “I am Topash Raycin of the Green Brotherhood! Your presence here is a disruption of the world! You must leave!” *<Slips in the slime and falls on his rear>*

Night Hag: “Oh, we wouldn’t want your tiny lives to get dull, now, would we? Your antics are amusing, but duty calls and I must be elsewhere, so I trust you can find your own way out.” *<Disappears>*

Kory: “Well! We scared her off! Did your robe fall open, Dania? Why don’t we go down and find a way to the cellars, and let our most charming hostess do whatever she wants to up here. How’s Kortul?”

Kortul: *<Groans>*

Kory: “Oh, wonderful indeed. Now…”

Dania: “Shut up. What’s beyond that door?”

Meth: “Beyond the green door…”

Navero: “Huh? It’s not green.”

Kory: “You’re not thinking of staying up here, are you?”

Dania: “The lightning did hurt her. I know I can kill her if the rest of you just keep her off of me.”

Razuli: “Oh, Christ. Magic-user, the lighting didn’t do nothin’ to HER. And if you wanna start waving that fuckin’ stick around again, you an’ me are gonna have to have a little discussion about it.”

Navero: “We must send this thing back where it belongs. It isn’t a her at all, it’s an IT. It doesn’t belong, and we must send it back.”

Dania: “Right. Besides, think of all the magic shit it will have stowed away somewhere.”

Topash: “Ah, the power of greed. What a wonderful motive. It should be quite obvious that the Hag is guarding the bloodstone. As such, it will interfere with all of our efforts. We must either leave now in failure, or find some way around, or through, it.”

Kory: “Maybe. If we can avoid it, we should. Why don’t we just go down and look for a stairway into the cellar? It’s really simple to do, and we won’t bleed NEARLY as much!”

Kortul: “Where’s ugly bitch?”

Razuli: “Right here, like usual.”

Topash: “We believe it is somewhere on the second floor.”

Kortul: “Fine.” *<Walks through the door the Hag came in through>*

Kory: “I’m beginning to think the decision-making elements are getting just a WEE bit localized here.”

Razuli: “Ah, fuck it. C’mon.” *<Walks through door>*  
*<Navero and Dania also walk through door>*

Topash: “Shall we?”

Kory: “Why do I put up with all this? This place is so depressing, and nobody around here knows how to have FUN. Demons and dragons come and go, but you can’t just WORRY about them all the time or you’ll never get anything out of life. Gods, this is fucked.”

Topash: “That is a surprisingly short-sighted attitude. We are here to keep a bad thing from getting worse. Fun will come later, if at all. Now come on.”

We crept down the hallway. The first door, on the south side of the hall, opened into a small closet. There were several shelves with some jars and bottles, a few brooms in a corner, and a bucket against the back wall. A sweep for magic showed that a few jars and one bottle contained magical substances; these were unlabeled except for one which said, "Add water for full potency." Inside was an ugly brownish-black powder whose smell stung the nose quite strongly. We sealed the jar and Dania stuck it in her backpack, along with a bottle of blue liquid, and a jar with a whitish ointment. Navero said the ointment looked like Keoghtum's Ointment, a healing remedy.

The second doorway was on the north wall. Behind it was a stairway leading up. At the top it opened out onto what was presumably the roof. We went up and looked around. The roof was weak, and had collapsed in a few places, and might not hold up under fighting. The battlements were mostly intact, except on the breached eastern wall.

Night Hag: \*Poof!\* "I thought I told..."

Kortul: "HAAAH!!!!" <Attacks with Sun Sword, chops small gash in it>

Dania: "KortulGetThe<censored>AwaySoICanKillTheBitch!!" <Casts Magic Missile, they fizzle out>

Navero: <Chants>

Night Hag: "Dear, oh dear." <Smashes Kortul back downstairs>

Meth: "I say, this isn't going at all well."

Kory: "Oh, what fun! Been nice knowing you all.  
Oh, we will all go together when we go,  
All consumed in a radioactive glow..."

Topash: <Scimitar bounces off Hag> "What a heart-warming thought."

Night Hag: "Oh, you found the broom closet. You really shouldn't mess with my cleansing powders."  
<Gestures>

Dania: "Urk!" <Her backpack suddenly becomes very heavy, as a load of water appears within; Horrible brownish-black goo starts foaming out, dissolving through the leather; Dania takes acid damage>

Navero: "Yuck! Get away!" <Rips pack off, Casts Cure Light Wounds on Dania's back>

Kortul: <Charges back upstairs>

Kory: "Hey! I feel lucky!" <Charges in with luck blade, wounds Hag>

Night Hag: "You are all beginning to annoy me very much!"

Meth: "So relax." <Tosses 3000 milligrams of LSD into her mouth; She swallowed>

Topash: "Ah, Acid?"

Meth: "Acid??"  
"Acid??" "And what would you know about such things?"  
"Acid??"

Topash: "I have heard of them, although my brethren prefer more natural products. They are used to contact higher powers."

Meth: "I see! Well! I'll have to visit you all sometime!"

Navero: "How do you get your voice to come from three different directions like that?"

Dania: "<censored>" <Hits Hag with Lightning; It does nothing>

Kortul: <Chops Hag>

Night Hag: “YOU... YER... YOW... YEEK!”

Topash: “Ah, very fast.”

Meth: “I only use the best myself.”

Dania: “Fine! Great! Now KILL IT!!”

Kory: <Rolling around laughing>

Kortul: BashSmashHackCutDestroyMaimKillStompIrritateIrkBotherVexAnnoy. <He realizes that he is not making much of an impression>

Kory: “Mister Cryster, SIR! You and I are going to get along FAMOUSLY! At last, someone with some appreciation for the necessities of life! My hat is off to you! Now lets go gang bang Dania.”

Meth: “Ew, her? I dunno about that...”

Topash: “Children...”

Kory: “C’mon. She’s female and she’s here.”

Meth: “You *could* say the same thing about the Night Hag, you know.”

Night Hag: <Unintelligible screaming>

Dania: “WILL YOU IDIOTS BE SERIOUS!! Get over here now!!”

Meth: “Oh, *lighten* *up*. She’ll be flying for days.”

Kortul: <Drags the Hag to the battlements and heaves it over, head down; Screaming, the Hag drops off into the night and lands with a thud; After, all is silent>

Dania: “Good! Very good! Is it dead NOW?!”

Kortul: “Why not you go and look?”

Dania: <Snarls> “It damn well better be, or I’m gonna...”

Meth: “Or you’re gonna WHAT? I didn’t see you getting any bright ideas. You just ran around screaming at everyone, which, I must say, is highly inconsiderate of you.”

Kory: “Indeed. Dania, you take life so SERIOUSLY. That’s really bad for you. When you live as long as we do, you just can’t AFFORD to take life that seriously, or it just gets too boring to live. You were raised among humans, weren’t you?”

Dania: “Leave my fucking parents out of this and listen, you stupid pointy-eared flit: If you weren’t an elf I’d fry you. I WOULD.”

Razuli: “What about me, yer wizzerdship?”

Dania: “\*SHUT\* \*UP\*!! All of you!! Now, get the <censored> downstairs, find the <censored> bloodstone, and get the <censored> out of here!!!” <Tromps downstairs in a furious huff>  
<Rest of party pauses>

Navero: “Why does Dania always get so angry all the time? I thought some of the jokes you make sometimes are kind of funny.”

Razuli: “Oh, forget it. She can’t take a joke.”

Kortul: <Goes downstairs>

Naverro: "I do wish that you wouldn't say so many mean things about her. She's a nice person. At least, she's nice to me."

Kory: "Yeah, yeah, Nav. She's just... she doesn't know how to deal with anything. Too uptight."

Topash: "She does seem almost driven at times. But I do think it would be a good idea if you two... no, you THREE were to stop goading her. Everything would go much better for all concerned."

Meth: "Well, I have no problem staying as far away from that little witch as possible. She just does not seem like my type at all."

Kory: "I like to think of it as a challenge. Surely there must be a fun-loving person somewhere in there. But for now, lets lay off and let her cool down."

Downstairs...

Dania: "Where the hell are they?!?"

Kortul: "Talking. Down soon."

Dania: "And you came down to protect me? How fucking sweet; I didn't know you cared. Look, I don't need YOU to protect me. I can take any one of you out, anytime. Any TWO of you."

Kortul: "No one goes anywhere alone. And CALM DOWN, elf. They tease because you make it easy."

Dania: "Oh, God, I know. I hate losing my temper. I wish it didn't happen, but they are so fucking IRRITATING!"

Kortul: "Never bigger than what gets you mad. Don't listen to them."

Dania: <Grumbles> "Why the fuck did I have to get into this bunch?"

Kortul: "Often wonder. Live with it or leave."

Dania: "Hmph."

Kory: <Comes downstairs> "Ok, we're here! Any treasure?"

Dania: "Fuck you."

Kory: "That, dear... Shall we go on?"

Kortul: "Yes." <Stomps down hallway>

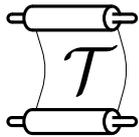
Naverro: "I went through your pack and got what I could. The magic bottle and jar were safe, and some other things. And Razuli gave me one of his tunics so you can cover the big hole on your, uh, backside."

Dania: "What? AAHHHH!!!"

*"Cheer up. It could have been much worse."*

## XXXI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Arlor**, male dwarf thief, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



THE Night Hag had been thrown off the roof, and now seemed to be dead; at least, it wasn't making any noise. Under the assumption that it had met with a timely demise, we went to explore the rest of the keep. We tried to keep the conversation business-related, and succeeded to a small degree; Dania quit grumbling for a while. We went west down the hallway to a corner, where it turned south; there was a door in the south wall at the corner. It was perfectly ordinary, except for a rug protruding from under the door; the room was carpeted. The door wasn't locked, so we opened it and looked inside. The room seemed to have been someone's chambers; typical chamber furnishings stood about. They were all very old, but there wasn't much dust anywhere. A humanoid's bones were scattered in one corner, with a large wooden stake thrust into the rib cage; we elected not to disturb them. The closet was empty, the bed collapsed when jostled, and all the drawers were missing. A prolonged search revealed a roll of paper hidden in one of the bedposts; it was a map, but not of the keep. It looked like some caverns, with one place marked "Histidyn." We had no idea what this meant, so we stuck the map in Naverro's backpack and forgot about it.

We left the room and went south. On the west side of the corridor, arrow-slits and narrow windows looked out onto the hills; the wind was starting to blow colder, indicating that the sun would be setting soon. The corridor had one door on the east wall, which opened onto a stairway leading down to the first floor.

Dania: "Alright, do we stay up here? I wanna find that Hag's lair."

Kory: "Well, I wanna find that bloody rock and get outa this joint. This is the most gawdawful place I've seen in the last few hours, and I don't want to be here much longer than that either. Let's go down, find the thing, rub our magic ring three times and GO!"

Topash: "Yes. The Hag may not even be dead. Time is of the essence."

Meth: "Err... look, even if it isn't QUITE dead, it WON'T be bothering us. We are, shall I say, the least of its concerns at the moment."

Razuli: "Look, it's dead. Let's find its cash and get outa here. Duke Dipshit can wait."

Dania: "There's nothing to stop us from looting the place. Let's go."

Naverro: "Shouldn't we get the bloodstone first? I mean, night will be soon, and this might not be a good place to be at night. And the Duke did say he needed it soon, I think."

Topash: "Quite. There is indeed something to stop us from 'looting the place', and I suggest we use our remaining time wisely."

Dania: "Naverro, if you see anything, dispel it."

Naverro: "Huh?"

Meth: "Err... Him, our mighty protector?"

Razuli: “Wizzerd, do you see who you’re talking to? If there’s gonna be undead I’d just as soon split. Ok, its decided! We’ll go down the stairs, get the thing, and get out before sunset. Ok? Ok! Your buffness, you go first.”

Kortul: “Catacombs.”

Dania: “Huh?”

Naverro: “Uh, yes. There would be catacombs down there, wouldn’t there?”

Kory: “Of course! We’ll have undead up to my pointy ears unless we get out of here. Really, Dania, I can’t see why you want to stay in this awful place. Does it remind you of home?”

Dania: “Up to your pointy head, I think, and. . .”

Topash: “Children. . .”

Razuli: “Speak for yourself.”

Kortul: “Sun setting. Find room with one door to defend.”

Dania: “Yeah. We can clean the place out in the morning. Plenty of time. Let’s go look.”

Naverro: “What about that room back there?”

Razuli: “You want to sleep with a dead vampire? C’mon.”

We went south to the corner, then east. There were more slits on the south, and doors on the north. None of them were locked. The first door opened into a room had many barrels, casks, and other containers; some of them were leaky, and the smell was very unpleasant. The liquids in the casks were reddish, smelly, and unidentifiable. The barrels had many different things in them; bones of unknown origin, bones of known origin, various internal organs, powders (including some more cleansing powder) and slabs of rotten-seeming meat. We didn’t stay long.

The second door opened onto a large room with many old shelves; a library. The shelves were mostly empty, except for a decaying lump that might once have been a large worm. There were three doors in the room, two from the south and one on the east. The eastern door opened onto a smaller room whose floor and ceiling had collapsed. It was very chill inside, and it was impossible to tell what the room had been used for. We saw several largish spiders in one corner, but didn’t bother them. Then, one of the doors in the south wall of the library creaked open.

Party: <Whirl around and bristle with assorted weapons>

2 Skeletons: RATTLE RATTLE RATTLE

4 Zombies: SCHLOPSH SCHLOPSH SCHLOPSH

1 Wraith: WAFT WAFT WAFT

Party: “AHH! Kill the Wraith!”

Dania: “BOLT!” <Staff fizzles, small spark stings her thumb> “SHIT!”

Naverro: “By the Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way, of whom I am representative, go away!” <Rolls an 8; Skeletons and Zombies leave through open door; Wraith hesitates>

Kory: <Sings battle song>

“Fight fiercely Hahvahd, fight fight fight!

Impress them with our prowess, do!

Albeit they are an ugly fright,

Nonetheless, we’re ugly too!”

Kortul: HACK SLICE DESTROY ETC. AD INFINITUM

Wraith: <Exeunt>

Meth: “Hey, why don’t we go someplace and hide for a while? I do not like the situation, and these people don’t party at all.”

Razuli: “Where? The Dead Vampire room or the broom closet?”

Topash: “I think perhaps the Vampire room. It has two doors, but the closet will be too small for us all to spend the night.”

Naver0: “Shouldn’t there be a room here?”

Dania: “What?”

Naver0: “I’ve been drawing a map. This section is totally blank, but there aren’t any doors leading into it.”

Kory: “Ah HAH! A secret chamber! Where?” <Looks at map> “Oh, this is easy! The hidden door is right here... Or maybe here... Or possibly here...”

Dania: “Gimme that. Where... Probably here.”

Topash: “Have you noticed that to go there, we will have to cross through this room, with the collapsed floor? Can you fly and open a door at the same time, dear magic-user? I certainly cannot.”

Naver0: “It’s either here, from the corridor, or the larvæ room.”

Kortul: “Or the roof.”

Dania: “What?”

Kortul: “Holes in roof. Go down.”

Topash: “And the entrance should be much easier to find from inside.”

Dania: “All right, good thinking. Let’s get over there before any of those things come back.”

Out in the hall, we saw 2 skeletons and 4 zombies in a corner. They fled when we appeared. We quickly went east, then north, and turned the corner to go west. However, right around the corner, the corridor turned black as night, and seemed to be moving.

Naver0: “By the great goodness of our Lady of The Sunlight and Flowers, begone!” <Rolls 18, all Shadows flee>

Dania: “Good going! All praise our Lady.”

Naver0: “Um, yeah. Wow!” <Looks rather pleased with himself>

Razuli: “Right, right. Lets go before any more show up.”

The roof was deserted; we looked for a hole in the right place, but they were all patched up in that particular section. Kortul solved the problem by finding a weak part of the roof; the fall didn’t hurt him too much. Inside, he looked about with his Sunsword, but nothing attacked.

Kory: “O Great Weight lifted from our shoulders? Do you see anything?”

Kortul: “Small room. Smell very bad.”

Topash: “Yes, we can tell. Is there anything in there?”

Kortul: “Several boxes, caskets. Some are opening. Get down here.”

Dania: "Get some rope! Lower a lantern so he can see!"

Razuli: "Magic-user, he's got a glowing sword."

Dania: "Yeah! Kortul! Drive them away with the Sunsword!"

Kortul: <Grumble>

Naverro: <Fumbles with rope; It has gotten tangled in his pack>

Kory: "Here I come!" <Jumps down>

Undead: "gargle snort drool" <2 corporal undead appear from caskets>

Kory: "Yuck! I didn't want my mummy!"

Kortul: "Shut up." <Hacks Mummy>

Dania: "Burn them! Razuli, get in there!"

Kory: "Burn them?!"

Razuli: "Get in there!?"

Naverro: "Return to the sleep you were supposed to have!" <Rolls a 5>

Mummies: <Both shamble out of caskets, moving slowly>

Kortul: <Two great whallops destroy his Mummy>

Kory: "Ho Ha Guard Turn Parry Dodge Spin Thrust!" <Does 3 hit points>

Meth: "Hey, you're dead. Be mellow."

Topash: "Your technique seems somewhat ineffective." <Pours flask of oil on the remaining mummy>

Kory: "Hey! Don't light that thing! We're down here!"

Naverro: "Can't you just stay away from it?"

Dania: "Yeah." <Drops lit torch on Mummy>

Mummy: \*FLOOM!\*

Kortul: <Grumble grumble curse> "<racial slur>"

Kory: "Are you NUTS!? Get me outa here!!"

Naverro: <Throws down rope>

Mummy: <Attacks Kory, flaming all the while>

Kory: "YOU STUPID BITCH!! WE'RE DOWN HERE WITH IT!! AHH!!" <Runs frantically about, shouting many words which Naverro does not recognize>

Meth: "That may not have been the smartest thing to do, you know."

Kortul: <Climbs up rope; Kory grabs rope, is pulled up>

Topash: "Well, that was exciting. How long will it take to burn out?"

Naverro: "Probably a while. Look, that box caught fire..."

Kory: <To Dania> "YOU DO \*NOT\* TORCH OTHER PARTY MEMBERS!!"

Dania: "Look, I don't like fire either, but it's the best way to kill it."

Kory: "Oh yeah? Look: boxes full of stuff down there, right? The Hag's treasure hold, right?"

Dania: "Right! What the fuck is the matter with you? It's a stone keep, it isn't going to burn down or anything."

Kory: "The Hag used magic several times, right? So it must have scrolls and spellbooks, right? Which are flammable, right?"

Dania: "Uh... maybe."

Topash: "Including, possibly, wands or staves? WOOD staves?"

<Pause>

Dania: "Nav, how big is the fire now?"

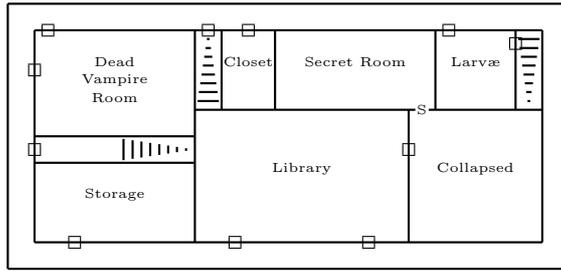
Naverro: "Well, everything in there was old and dry. Almost everything is burning very hot now."

The party scattered to the edges of the roof. Flames licked out of the hole in the roof, fierce and hot; mortar between stones caught in a few places. Then, there was a tremendous **\*\*BOOM\*\*** and the roof over the room flew apart into the air. The whole building shook and rattled as a great sparkling ball of violet, flaming radiance blasted up out of the room. It filled the sky and spread into the heavens, for a moment lighting the area up like a small sun; then it faded away in the night, leaving the smell of burning metal and ozone in its wake. We got up and examined the room; the fire was out, and the inside of the small chamber was completely covered with sparkling ashes. No identifiable bits of treasure remained among the blackened debris.

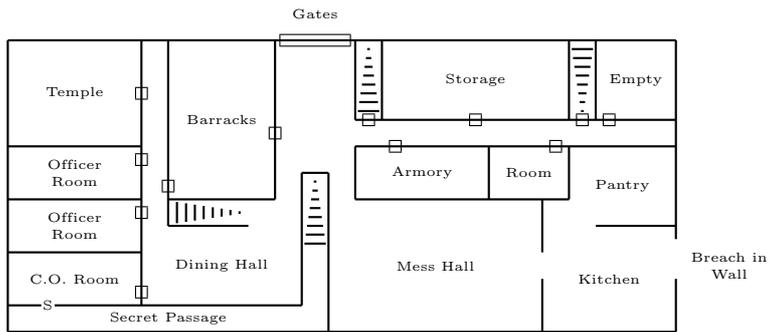
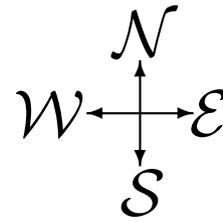
Kory: "Well, looks like they're all dead now."

*"I hate to think what will happen when she gets Fireball."*

MAP OF RUINED KEEP



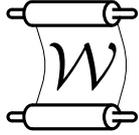
SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

## XXXII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



We lowered Dania and Kory to examine the blasted-out secret room, reasoning that they were the lightest and least likely to collapse the weakened floor. Kory was rather upset with Dania, and refused to speak to her. For her part, she wanted to put the whole incident behind her and get on with the looting. There wasn't too much left in the room to loot; the sparkling in the ashes proved to be bits of gold and platinum, embedded in the walls, not really worth the trouble of removing. Much grumbling commenced. The floor and walls in the room groaned a lot, and occasionally a stone would fall, so the inspection was completed with unusual speed. We were disturbed at one point, when a dead person came upstairs and attacked, but Naverro sent it away.

We decided against spending the night in the secret room, as some had previously thought we might do. Instead, we went down and spent the night in the dead vampire room. We didn't get much sleep at all, Naverro especially. The great explosion sent all sorts of undead prowling about the second floor, and what little sleep anyone got was punctuated with bad dreams. No one was seriously hurt, and no levels were lost (all the undead who could drain were terminated with extreme prejudice.) We knew morning arrived when all of the undead went away. Arlor's player finally told us he was dropping out due to a lack of time. He was eaten by rabid undead poodles during the night.

We waited for a short time, both to get a little more sleep and in case it was some kind of trick, then left to go back down to the first floor. We went down from the larværoom, back into the east-west running hall, and went west. The next door was on the south; it was unlocked. Inside, there was a small room that had been someone's chambers long ago. The furnishings had probably been quite spartan, but there was too little left to tell. The bed was the only intact furniture. Razuli tore open the mattress, but the only thing he found was a lot of some reddish mold. Kory found a brass key, but it didn't seem to fit any lock in the room. We left.

The next room was on the north side of the hall, and much larger. Inside, there were a few piles of stuff; leathers and bags and sacks and shoes and moldy hay and boxes and barrels and casks and crates. Also a lot of spider webs, but they all seemed normal-sized. Weak sunlight shone in through a lot of large cracks in the northern wall, and dirt and bits of stone were everywhere. A quick look at the map confirmed that the western half of the room was right under the secret room on the floor above.

Dania: "Razuli, go look at those sacks over there. Kory, check those boxes, Kortul get that big pile over there 'cause you're tall."

Kory: "Again I ask: Who elected you? Razuli! Let's look at that cask marked 'Brandy' over there."

Topash: "Why doesn't everyone just check out the room, each in his own fashion, and then we will leave?"

Naverro: "Well, some things might not get checked."

Dania: "Right! Now Kory, get over there!"

Razuli: "Wizzerd, don't scream. The roof'll collapse on you."

Dania: "Oh, shut up about that."

Topash: "What's that?"

Meth: "What's what?"

Topash: "That noise... scraping, it sounds like..."

Dania: "Sounds more like something moving. I think it's over there."

Kortul went to investigate in the indicated direction. Kicking aside a box, he found what looked like a large, blackish lump of some earthy kind of stuff. It sat for a second, then lashed out with a pseudopod and struck him on the leg.

Thing: SIZZLE SIZZLE <Acidic secretions burn into Kortul's leg>

Dania: "It's a pudding! Get out of there!"

Kortul: <Hacks pudding away, jumps back, falls down>

Razuli: "Magic-user, lets not burn it, ok?"

Dania: "Fine with me. How are we gonna kill it?"

Naverro: <Heals Kortul's leg>

Topash: "Dania, let's not. This is an old storeroom, and most of the things here are rotted and useless. I doubt that there is anything of any value here, so killing this creature would be wasted effort. Let us go and find a way into the cellars."

Kory: "I agree. This is incredibly boring."

Razuli: "Even with the brandy?"

Kory: "Oh, yes. It should be quite well aged, provided it was any good to begin with." <Procures cask>

Dania: "Will you be serious? Let's go."

The next door was on the south side. It was locked, but the key we had found opened it. Inside, there was a lot of rusted armor, rotted arrows, and other decayed weapons. We didn't even bother to check it out.

The last door was on the north side; to the west, the corridor opened out into the entrance hall of the keep. The door opened easily; beyond it, we could see stairs going down into the earth. We went down carefully, but after 30 or 40 feet, the stairs were blocked.

Kory: "Blocked?! Shit. Gee, I wonder where all the undead go to hide during the daytime. Speaking of which, what time is it?"

Topash: "Getting towards noon. With the cover on the sky, they may have full power while under the earth, away from what little light there is. Can we dig through the collapsed section?"

Kortul: <Works at it a bit> "No."

Dania: "Shit. Let's find another way down."

We went out into the entrance hall. It was a big, bleak place in the feeble light, which was already growing dark. There were some hooks for hangings up on the walls, but no hangings, and many dead leaves and small animal bones were in scattered piles and in the corners. The hall we had come from was in the eastern wall. The big gates, partially off their hinges, were to the north; outside, the sun was moving behind the sky's inky cover. Two more passages branched off of the southern end of the hall. There was also a door in the western side of the hall; it was open, and some furniture could be seen within. We decided to look into the east of the southern passages, to fill up a blank part of the map.

The passage went south a short way, then opened out into a big hall which had been a mess hall a long time ago. Several long tables and lots of chairs were within, mostly rotten and broken. A door in the eastern wall led into the kitchen where we had originally entered. We were just deciding to leave when a bunch of tentacles came down from above the doorway and lashed Kortul in the face. He suddenly collapsed, and the tentacles grabbed him and started dragging him upwards.

Dania: "Grab him!"

Navero: *<Grabs him>* "A big worm with tentacles got him!" *<Both are pulled into the air>*  
*<Party charges into the room to get it>*

Kory: *<Shoots it twice>*

Dania: *<Casts Magic Missile>*

Razuli: *<Shoots it>*

Thing: *<Drops>*

Topash: "Don't touch the tentacles. They contain a paralytic venom. And get it off Kortul's face."

While Kortul recovered, the party explored the hall. The tables and chairs were all very old, and weren't worth much when they were new. Several people had carved their initials into them, along with some more objectionable things. Everything was covered with dust and dirt, and a cold breeze blew in from the hole in the kitchen. It looked as if there were something moving out there, but whenever anyone looked directly, nothing could be seen. We assumed that they were undead chipmunks or something and left it at that.

Back in the entrance hall, we looked through the west door into a barracks room. It had lots of cots, each with a footlocker. We also saw a big patch of a yellowish mold on the ceiling. We didn't know if it was the deadly variety, but decided not to risk it.

The other hallway leading out of the entrance hall went south and opened up into a smaller mess hall. This one was much better appointed; there was only one table, and no one had carved their initials into it. The chairs once had cushions on them, long ago. A large stairway went up along the northern wall, leading to the second story. There had been hangings on the walls, but they appeared to have been burned. There was a passage leading off from the north wall, and a door in the west. We decided to check the passage.

The passage went north. We could see four doors, three on the west wall and one on the east. Our map indicated that the east door opened into the barracks room, so we didn't bother with it. The first door on the west opened with difficulty onto a small room.

The room had been a bedroom, with bed, desk, etc. The quality of the furniture was higher than elsewhere, and was mostly intact. A skeletal body was collapsed on the bed, wearing the remains of armor and surcoat. It didn't move when Navero tried to dispel it, so we assumed it was dead. We found a key in the skeleton's pocket which didn't match the one we found earlier, but it didn't fit anything in this room. The next room was much like the first, only there was no body.

Kory: "Gawd, this has got to be the most boring dungeon in the world. There's just NOTHING in here!"

Game Master: What do you expect when you run and hide whenever the monsters come out?

Kory: Yeah, but these monsters are DANGEROUS! Undead are not nice people.

Dania: "Maybe if we found more money it'd be more exciting."

Game Master: You can think of this empty dungeon as something to lull you into a false sense of security. Or, not.

Kory: I don't like the sound of that.

Game Master: *<Enigmatic smile>*

Razuli: “Shall we go, kiddies?”

The last door was somewhat different. It looked like it had been broken in, and then someone put it back. It was unlocked, and creaked open to reveal a small chapel or shrine. At the western end, there was an altar and statue, dust-covered. The statue was of a female deity of the arts of war. Some benches were against the walls. In the middle of the room, there was a big pile of skeletal (or nearly so) bodies, most of them stripped and all of them hacked up. Bits of skull and limb were scattered about. The altar had dried blood all over it, and the statue had a stupid face finger-painted onto its peaceful countenance.

Naverro: *<Gives the last rites to all the dead>*

Kory: “Do we wanna check this place out? Somebody else got here first.”

Topash: “A body by the altar is clothed. If you wish, you may loot it.”

Dania: “Nav, are any of these undead?”

Naverro: “The place feels evil, but it’s kind of diffuse. It’s stronger by the altar, but all the bodies are dead. I wish you wouldn’t disturb them, though.”

Kory: “If you don’t mind, I’ll wait in the hall. Yeesh!”

Dania: “I don’t mind at all.” *<Marches in, kicks body out of her way; Dust flies up from bodies>*

Dania: *<Starts coughing, collapses>*

Kortul: *<Goes in, grabs Dania, gets out; Dust begins to coalesce>*

Naverro: “It’s forming something!”

Kory: “Nav, dispel it! Or shoot it! How’s the greedy bitch?”

Kortul: *<Tosses Dania to Kory; Dania is still coughing her lungs out>*

Something: *<Howling noise, like wind through gravestones>*

Topash: “Hmph. A pile of dead bodies would be a likely breeding ground for all manner of diseases. Does anyone know any cure spells?”

Razuli: “We’ll get her later. Let’s get that thing now!”

The shape coalesced from the dust. It appeared to be an old man with a robe and armor. The howling rises into a screech. A horrifying light shines from its eyes. The clothing strongly resembles that of the clothed body.

Party: *<Everyone gets outside real quick>*

Ghost: *<Approaches, dust flying; Party retreats, and rapidly too; Door slams, howling subsides, and is gone>*

Naverro: *<Casts Cure Disease on Dania>*

Dania: “Aggg..”

Topash: “Let’s not go in there again, shall we?”

Dania: “Yeah... urk.”

We went back south to the hall. The door to the west was locked, but Meth picked it. This room was also someone’s quarters, but it was a bit larger than the other rooms. There was a carved wardrobe (empty), a double bed, large table, two chairs, vanity, mirror, sofa, dresser, and hooks for wall hangings. At the moment, though, it was much like the rest of the keep; ruined. A search turned up a small sack of gold under a flagstone, but not much else.

Razuli: "Ok, how we gonna get downstairs?"

Navero: "This part of the map is blank. I think there's a secret passage."

Topash: "Alright... it should be right... here." *<Pushes at back of wardrobe, it collapses back and reveals a passage heading off to the east>*

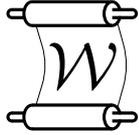
Dania: "Right. Let's go."

*"Everything in here is either wimpy or overwhelming."*

*"Don't worry about it. At least we can always run away."*

## XXXIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



W E marched down the secret passage, until it turned to the north, revealing a long stairway going down out of sight; the steps were not carved from stone like the rest of the keep, but were made of packed dirt. They were still in good enough shape to walk down, although as we went deeper they began getting damp and slippery. The steps went down about 100 feet or so, before leveling off into a narrow, damp, moldy-smelling passage going northwards. There was a hole dug into the east wall; it looked like a hole for giant rats, or possibly ghouls.

Razuli: “Ok kids, the big tunnel is prob’ly an escape tunnel going up to the surface. Naverro, is the evil still below us?”

Naverro: “Sort of, but it’s more that way.” *<Points southeast>* “Do you think that we should light a lantern or something? The Sunsword is nice, it really looks like the sun, but shouldn’t we have something else?”

Dania: “No open flames. Something might catch, or we might hit a gas pocket, or you might drop it.”

Razuli: “Magic-user, if we hit gas, we’re dead anyway. Light a torch.”

Dania: “But someone might see it, and then they’ll know where we are!”

Kory: “Trust me, they already do. Light it!”

Kortul: *<Looks down hole with Sunsword>*

Naverro: *<Lights lantern>* “Does anyone else have any more oil?”  
*<Silence>*

Razuli: “Oh, Christ. Oil is second only to rope! Shit.”

Kory: “No, food comes next. By the by, did anyone bring holy water?”

Naverro: “I did! I brought 4 flasks.”

Dania: “Good. Keep it out.”

Naverro: “I also brought some garlic.”

Topash: “Ah, so I wasn’t smelling Meth at all.”

Meth: “Why would you think so? That’s really not my sort of herb.”

Naverro: “And I have some wood stakes and a mallet, and climbing irons, and Undead-off, and some copies of the holy writings, and. . .”

Dania: “Ok, ok, we get it. Nav, you’re supposed to travel light.”

Naverro: “Well. . . ‘The Lords smile upon those who are prepared.’”

Kortul: "Nothing there."

Topash: "That's a very small hole to have you going in first. Why doesn't Razuli take the lead for once?"

Razuli: "ME?! Oh no, really I couldn't. I must insist."

Topash: "WE must insist a little more strenuously. Why don't you take a torch or lantern or something and go inside. We'll follow you and make sure nothing bad happens to you."

Razuli: *<Makes small incoherent noises; A lit torch is shoved into his hand and he is escorted to the entrance>*

Game Master: Undead-off??

We set off into the tunnels. They varied between two and four feet high, so everybody had to crawl. Razuli went first, thrusting his torch ahead into every cranny he could see. Kortul had the most trouble with maneuvering, so he brought up the rear. He wasn't happy about that, but he accepted it with his usual silence.

The tunnel wound eastwards. The smell became stronger inside; mold and dampness, mixed with rat feces and other, less pleasant odors. Rats and Cave Crickets went scurrying away, and their small evil eyes stared out at us from the dark. There were many tiny rat tunnels, all much too small for us. The passage continued for about 30 feet, and then widened out slightly. There were several tunnels leading out of the area to the north, and one to the south; it was also inhabited.

Razuli: "There's something up there, and it smells dead! Priest!"

Naverro: *<Squirms to front of party>* "Where is it?"

Ghouls: "gibber gibber gargle snort drool hi there"

Razuli: "Aw shit, not these guys again. Do yer thing, kid."

Naverro: "By the power invested in me by the true Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way, begone foul spawn of darkness, back to whence you came!" *<Rolls a 2>*

Ghouls: "gibber gibber gargle snort drool" *<Several obscene gestures>*

Naverro: "Why are they holding their fingers up like that?"

Razuli: "Shit. Magic-user!"

Topash: "Perhaps we should appeal to a different set of gods. There are so many, after all."

Dania: "Nav, throw your holy water! Meth, move it!"

Meth: "Jesus Christ, if you're going to be like that about it..."

Ghouls: "gibber gibber gargle snort drool fresh meat!"

Topash: "I believe they are Ghouls. I shall fight them off, if you all will get out of my way."

Razuli: "Well, I would, but they're trying to chew my leg off." *<Bashes Ghoul 1 with torch>*

Naverro: "Ahh!" *<Dumps holy water vial on Ghoul 2>*

Dania: *<Magic Missiles Ghoul 2>* "Razuli, get that sword moving!"

Razuli: "Now honey, this is neither the time nor the place for all that. You'll just have to wait, I have some guests to take care of."

Kory: "Aw, poor little deprived Dania. I guess you'll have to start a torrid affair..."

Topash: "Kory, behave. And Naverro, get out of the way."

Ghouls: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool claw rip tear rend” <One fumbles, and his teeth fall onto the ground>

Razuli: “Oh, gross.” <Gets sword out, kills Ghoul 1>

Naverro: “Go away!” <Tries to splash Ghoul 2 with more holy water, ends up splashing Topash>

Topash: “Naverro, get out of there before you get paralyzed.”

Dania: <Magic Missiles Ghoul 2; It dies>

Topash: <Elbows past Naverro, closes with scimitar>

Razuli: “There ain’t much room up here!”

Ghouls: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool you all look familiar” <One claws Razuli, he saves; More come out of the northern tunnels>

Meth: “I still can’t believe no one brought any oil for cocktails.”

Kory: “No, all we got is brandy. . . Brandy!”

Dania: “Don’t burn them! This whole place could. . .”

Kory: “Dania, haven’t you noticed that it’s just a touch damp in here? And it is rather difficult to burn dirt. Help me get the lid off.”

Dania: “Oh, fuck. Just don’t get any on me.”

Razuli: “Fuck, but don’t get any WHAT on you?”

Dania: “SHUT UP AND KEEP FIGHTING!”

Ghouls: “gibber gibber gargle snort drool oh fuck you” <They depart>

Topash: “They have left, but have not gone far. I believe they intend to return and attack us from behind when we have passed.”

Meth: “Passed what, your druidship?”

Topash: “Never mind. Kory, take your cask of brandy and dump it there, by those tunnels they left by. Then, light it. We shall take the southern tunnel, as Naverro says that is the correct way.”

Kory: “Now wait just a moment here! Before we go dumping such fine brandy, we may want. . .” <Smells the brandy> “Yuck! This stuff is shit! Ok, dump it.”

\*FLOOM!\* <It is done; Many evil red eyes reflect the glare>

We went south, with all speed. The tunnels made an admirable maze, and Naverro was hard pressed to keep up on his map, as we were moving quickly to get there before the brandy burned out. We kept going south and east, until we slid down an inclined passage into a brick wall.

Razuli: “<censored>”

Dania: “Search for secret doors.”

Kory: “. . . Dere be nuttin’ here. We don’t want to go back, you know.”

Naverro: “It’s just south of here. It must be on the other side.”

Topash: “Is there any way around?”

Razuli: “No.”

Kortul: “How thick is it?”

Dania: “Oh, come on. We’re not gonna dig through it.”

Kory: “It sounds pretty thick.”

Dania: “Wait; is the mortar wet?”

Razuli: “Yeah. Think we can get enough out?”

Topash: “We can but try.”

Naverro: “I brought a shovel! And a hammer and chisel and some nails and a saw and...”

Razuli: “Great. Gimme the shovel.”

*<Dig dig dig>*

Kortul keeps watch behind, up the slope. Razuli and Kory eventually pry a brick out and look inside.

Naverro: “What’s inside?”

Kory: “My god...”

Dania: “What?!”

Razuli: “It’s Jimmy Hoffa...”

Dania: “Oh, cut it out!”

Kory: “Never say that around people with swords.”

Kortul: “Something coming. Get it open.”

*<Dig dig dig dig strain ouch>*

More bricks are worked out, revealing a large natural chamber. This cave is immense—larger than our lights can light. There are many rock formations, and dripping water is everywhere.

Kortul: “Many ghouls. Is it open?”

Dania: “It’s coming. Naverro, get up there.”

Naverro: *<Scrambles back up>* “By the light of all that is good, oh please, please be dispelled!” *<Several ghouls flee>*

Topash: “Work faster.”

Meth: “I got something that’ll help you with that. Just take two of these and wait a couple minutes...”

Razuli: “Don’t got a couple minutes.” (Whew!)

Dania: “Get back to Kortul. I’ll take a shift.”

Razuli: “Right, right.”

Suddenly, hordes of rats start streaming out of the walls, screeching and squealing and biting everyone. Giant rats burst out of side tunnels and attack Kortul, Naverro, and Razuli. The shadows lengthen; something blows the lantern out.

Topash: “I believe the sun is setting. Anyone got any bright ideas?”

Razuli: “Fuckingshitjesuschristahhh!” *<Swats and smashes at rats>*

Dania: “AAHH!!” *<Squirms through the hole with surprising speed>*

Topash: “Ah, the hole is wide enough. Thank you for letting us know.”

Ghouls start coming down the tunnels again. Rats are everywhere. The ambient temperature drops 10 degrees. Things look grim...

Kory: <Dives through the hole>

Meth: <Dives through the hole>

Topash: <Grabs lantern, dives through the hole>

Razuli: <Dives through the hole>

Naverro: <Dispels one pack of ghouls, runs, dives through the hole>

Kortul: <Dives for the hole, gets stuck> "SHIT!"

Dania: "Grab him!!"

Kory: "Naverro, where's the fucking bloodstone?!"

Meth: "Wow, are there PEOPLE coming in through the ceiling?"

Naverro: "It's that way!" <Runs off to the south>

Dania: "NAVERO, YOU IDIOT!!" <Runs after him>

Kory: "Another fine mess you've gotten me into."

Topash: <Grabs Kortul> "Push!"

Kortul: <Pushes; Wall strains, holds him fast>

Dania: "Naverro, slow down!"

Naverro: "It's there!! It's there!! In that... thing."

There, at the southern end of the cavern, lay an immense and ugly golem, made entirely of some hard, greenish stone like jade. All except for one part... it's heart, which was a small black stone with pulsing red veins running through it. It reeked of evil. The golem was lying on the cavern floor, as if asleep; the bloodstone (for there could be no doubt that this was it) set deep in its chest. You could just reach in and take it; all you had to do was climb over the golem.

Kory: "Well?!"

Dania: "Well what?!"

Kory: "Is it down there?!"

Dania: "Yeah! ... sort of!"

Razuli: "So what the fuck are you waiting for!? GET IT!!"

Kortul: <Pushes one last time, with Topash and Razuli pulling; The wall gives and he comes crashing into the room>

Naverro: "We're not supposed to touch it, are we?"

Dania: "No. Here, watch and make sure it doesn't move." <Climbs up>

Naverro: "How do I do that?"

Dania: "Just tell me if it moves!" <Covers hand with cloth, grabs bloodstone; Tosses it in a sack, wrapped in the cloth>

Naverro: "It didn't move. Is that good?"

Dania: "Great! Now let's get out of here!"

Meanwhile, back at the hole, the undead are coming on in great numbers. Ghouls and Ghosts and rats are coming through the hole, shadows are all over, and several more powerful undead are also showing up.

Kory: <Sings a Protection from Evil 10' song; Everyone crowds close>

Topash: "Navero and Dania are unprotected."

Kortul: "Right." <Picks Kory up and starts jogging south with him>

Razuli: "I sure hope he can keep this up all night."

Navero: "Go away! And you! And you!" <Many shadows flee; Nothing else is around them yet; The rest of the party joins them>

Dania: "Shit! What do we do?"

Navero: "I'll cast Protection from Evil on us. Kory sounds tired."

Topash: "Don't you have the area-effect spell? Never mind, it will do."

<... kkkKKKRRRRRRrrrr... >

Razuli: "Whawazat!?"

<Golem-thing opens its eyes, slowly sits up>

Kory: "Oh, Christ. Nice knowing you all."

<Undead converge on party>

Topash: "Well, the Indians have arrived, General Custer sir. Shall we go mop 'em up?"

Razuli: "I don't wanna die, I don't wanna die..."

Meth: "Oh, shut up. Me, I'm gonna take my entire stock all at once and see if maybe I'll go ethereal..."

Dania: "Look, kill the golem and maybe the magic will protect us from the undead."

Topash: "I believe you are clutching at straws, young lady. But, we have few other options. Let us commence."

Light! Hurl!      Twang!      Chop!      Stab!  
                         Spellcast!      Throw!

Golem: <Small scratch is visible on right big toe; Looks at party, and the floor beneath them turns to mud>

Party: "Ga-blubbb..."

Kory: "WAITAMINUTE!! WAITAMINUTE!! WHO'S GOT THE FUCKING RING!?!?!"

Topash: "What ring!?"

Kory: "THE FUCKING TELEPORTATION RING!! RUB IT!!"

Topash: "Oh, I have it!" <Rub rub rub>

\*POOF!\*

The party suddenly finds itself sitting in the middle of Duke Desmond's observatory. The Duke is there, with two guardsmen.

Desmod: "What in the nine hells... Oh, it's you!"

Dania: "Yeah."

Desmod: "You're all covered in mud!"

Razuli: "Yeah."

Desmod: "You're getting it all over my new carpeting..."

Kortul: \*Sigh\*

Kory: "Never mind all that! The news we bring you, o gracious duke, is worth an eternity of dry cleaning bills! I, the Incredibly Famous Kory Silvertongue, present... The Bloodstone! This despicably evil item brought to you after many amazing adventures and heroic efforts by yours truly (and my faithful companions)..."

Desmod: "You got it! Where is it?"

Dania: "Here. Yuck. Do you have a shower?"

Desmod: "Ha ha" <Grabs sack away from Dania> "Ha Ha Ha" <Grabs Bloodstone from sack and gloats over it> "HA HA HA HAAA..."

Naverro: "I thought you weren't supposed to touch it."

Dania: "Yea, it would turn you into a vamp..."

Desmod: "HA HAAA HAA HA HAAA... YOU TINY FOOLS..."

Razuli: "Aw, no, we just quit this scene..."

Meth: "I thought you said you knew this person?"

Desmod: "NOW, TO GET RID OF THESE PITIFUL ILLUSIONS..."

The guards are not guards. They are Specters. The castle suddenly becomes much gloomier, darker than the surrounding area, not lighter. It is filled with undead. Cold laughter echoes throughout the land.

Dania: "Oh, shit."

Desmod: "NOW I SHALL RULE THE WORLD. GUARDS, YOU MAY HAVE THESE ONES. I SHALL SOON BE VERY BUSY ELSEWHERE."

Razuli: (I never thought I'd do this...) "Hey! THE THREE! Where the FUCK are you?! THE THREE <censored> PALADINS!!"

Desmod: "NO!!! Do you realize what you're DOING!?"

Party: "THE THREE MORONS!!" "THE THREE IDIOTS!!" "THE THREE..."

\*POOF!\* <Both Specters crumble into velleities>

Paladin 2: <Clutching turkey leg> "Yes, what is it?"

Party: "LOOK!! EVIL!!"

Paladins: "WHERE?!"

Party: "THERE!!"

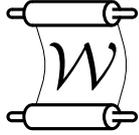
Paladins: "FOR GLORY!" "AND RENOWN!!" "AND XP!!!"

Paladin3: "A 23rd level vampire illusionist? I hate wimp dungeons."



## XXXIV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 4th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 4th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 3rd level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 3rd level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



E tore out of Methigor into the night. Behind us, violent explosions came out of the observatory. The undead around us screamed and wailed and howled and gibbered, with fear and anger and an awful hunger. We pushed our mounts to a speed only those which feel no pain can achieve. Gradually, the undead thinned out, and then were gone altogether. We stopped, counted party members, and looked back. Nothing was left of the observatory tower, and of most of the other towers. The outer wall had been breached in places, and the courtyard was filled with fire. As we watched, the walls collapsed, and it all came tumbling down.

Dania: “Shit!”

Kory: “Good Lord.”

Game Master: Aw, come on. It wasn’t that bad, was it?

Party: Grumble Mumble Bitch Snarl Glare

Game Master: Alright, I admit fooling you about Desmod like that may have been uncalled for.

Kory: Oh, I enjoyed it immensely. However, we are quite a bit poorer than we were when we started all this. And we still have no idea where the Orb of Spheres is. I hope you do, dear dungeon master.

Game Master: Oh, I know where it is. You’ll find it eventually.

Dania: I didn’t think we’d actually lose money on an adventure.

Game Master: Well, sure! Think of archaeological expeditions; you don’t get what you want every time.

Naverro: Sometimes you never find it, just spend more and more money looking.

Game Master: Exactly.

Dania: Can I get Dania’s staff recharged?

Game Master: Uh... <Looks in book> Yeah, you can. Look for someone who can do it in the next town.

Razuli: Ok... getting us to throw our money away on a useless adventure is alright, so long as you don’t start making a habit of it.

Game Master: Useless? Oh, no no no. But you’ll see about that later.

Razuli: “Can we go home now?”

Topash: “I believe we should stay and clean up this mess, and restore the greenery that once covered the land. Someone must do it.”

<Pause; Everyone stares at Topash>

Topash: “... well... maybe not right now.”

Meth: "I'm going to get to the nearest city and spend a lot of time convincing myself that this was all just another hallucination."

Navero: "Lots of the undead have been destroyed. What will happen to the Bloodstone?"

Dania: "The idiots will take care of it, probably. They certainly wouldn't miss out on destroying an evil artifact."

Topash: "Hmmm... Shouldn't these horses be returned to the earth, where they belong?"

Dania: "You wanna walk?"

Topash: "Yes, perhaps we'd best do it later."

Navero: "Uh, all the undead that weren't killed are fleeing the castle. A few hundred of them are coming this way. Shouldn't we run?"

Kory: "Yes, lets. Perhaps we can stop for tea another time."

We rode. And rode. And rode and rode and rode well into the night until our butts were threatening to sue us for damages. Nothing came near us, although we saw plenty of things along the way. We did notice that the great black cloud cover seemed to be breaking up; a star could be glimpsed occasionally. When we were finally just too tired to go on, we stopped in the middle of the road to camp. We didn't bother with a fire, and almost didn't set a watch; Kortul was the last one standing, and saw that everyone else had collapsed, so he lit a lantern and dozed standing up, leaning on his sword.

Dawn broke, and with it came a young rider from the east. He was young, older than Navero but not by much, and obviously more used to hitching a horse to something than to riding one. He came towards our strange little camp with a disconcerted look on his face; obviously, he didn't know what to make of our skeletal horses, or us for that matter.

Kortul: *<Wakes up>* "Hmph?"

Rider: "Uh, hello. My name is Barney, I'm from Ethylia. Ah... we saw all those lights out over Methigor last night, and now the clouds are breaking up, and, uh... We were wondering, uh, what happened?"

Kortul: "Castle blown up. Vampire killed. Very messy."

Barney: "You blew up a castle and killed a vampire? Uh, yeah, right. Why do you have those horses? And why are you all so filthy? And what are you DOING here, anyway? With all the living dead, only an idiot would be out here at night."

Kortul: \*Sigh\* "Shut up."

Barney: "Oh. Uh, you guys must ride your horses awful hard."

Kory: "Mgmph?"

Barney: "Oh, hello. I'm Barney, I'm from Ethylia. The council sent me to find out what happened. Do you guys know anything about it?"

Kory: *<Ponders sleepily for a moment>* "I know absolutely nothing about this whole embarrassing incident. Now go away and lemme sleep."

Barney: "On the ground like that?"

Kory: "There's never been a soft'r bed..."

Razuli: "Grgmph?"

Barney: "I'm Barney. I'm from Ethylia. Do you know anything?"

Razuli: “Agg. . . Shit, my back is killin’ me. . .”

Barney: “Never mind. Do you know anything?”

Dania: “. . . fuck off. . .”

Barney: “Uh, maybe you all had better come back to town. We have beds and hot baths there for you.”

Dania: “Hot bath?”

Barney: “Uh, yeah. I think my mom still has some of her soup left too.”

*<Party slowly drags itself up and groggily stumbles to the horses>*

Barney: “Uh, do you wanna ride, uh, I mean. . . those horses? Maybe we should get you some others. Uh, not that I have others, but I could go back, and, uh. . .”

Razuli: “Kid, fuck the horses. Let’s go.”

We very slowly rode down the road to the east. Barney led the way, and occasionally glanced back at us and our mounts. I’m afraid we must have presented an unsettling sight, but at that point we didn’t really care. Had any of us looked up, we would have seen that the black cloud cover was nearly half gone, and snow was beginning to fall in tiny little flakelets. We got into Ethylia, and caused quite a stir; most of the town’s remaining inhabitants were out, and the place was abuzz with excitement: something had happened, and they wanted to know what it was. All of this we completely ignored, as our skeletal mounts carried us to the inn, the House of Dimittus, arriving just after noon. We asked for separate rooms, paid, and despite the persistence of the town council, no useful information could be gotten out of us until the next day.

That evening, after we had slept, bathed (those with a mind to), changed clothes, killed the undead horses and buried them, and generally advanced closer to sentience, we went to see the town council. However, they did not want to see us right then. We noticed an armored carriage with four sleek, well-fed looking horses and the seal of the governor of Propyla by the town hall, along with several well-armed guards. They gave us several nasty looks. We didn’t know any of them, and I don’t think they recognized us, as we were in a cleaner-than-usual state. The party then dispersed into the town and outlying areas. Navero went out to help some farmers, who were plagued with undead and wolves. Topash went out into the woods, and got himself happily lost. Meth went to his room and did something else entirely. None of the local people were pestering us for information anymore, but we didn’t mind that at all.

Dania: *<Goes into the inn, talks to Dimittus>* “Do you sell ale?”

Dimittus: “Yes. Ales and wines, with meals. I do run a respectable establishment here, ma’am.”

Dania: “Great. Gimme a sandwich and two or three bottles of your best.”

Dimittus: “What kind of sandwich would you like with your wine, ma’am?”

Dania: “I don’t care. Just gimme.”

Kory: “Darling little Dania, you shouldn’t drink so much on an empty stomach. And what fun is it to drink alone? Razuli! Come ’ere!”

Dania: “Get your own booze.”

Kory: “Hmph! Innkeeper!”

Dimittus: \*Sigh\* “Yes, sir?”

Kory: “Do you have White Ice Ale?”

Dimittus: “I sell Beer, Southern Blend Ale, my Personal stock, and Red Wine. And only with meals. I do not cotton to drunken lewdness or other such depravities.”

Razuli: "Shit. Propylan guards coming."

Kory: <Disappears, or rather attempts to; A guard blocks his path>

Guards: "The council would like to see you all now."

Razuli: "Sure. Be there right after dinner."

Guards: "The council would like to see you all NOW. Sir. I must say, you do look rather familiar, sir, apart from being somewhat clean."

Razuli: "...right. How can we refuse such an invitation?"

We were brought together in the town hall (except Topash, who had disappeared. Meth was physically present, but it was obvious that his mind was elsewhere.) The council sat at a large horseshoe-shaped table which seated nine; five councilors were present. Also present were 14 guardsmen in the livery of Propyla, a familiar-looking lieutenant, and a bored-looking dandy, all in silks and ruffles. We were seated inside of the horseshoe, and told the council everything that had transpired since we set out towards Methigor, omitting only the details which might get us arrested. After hearing our story, the councilors looked fearful, the guardsmen looked skeptical, the lieutenant looked insulted, and the dandy still looked bored.

Navero: "Well, uh... that's it."

Dania: "Yeah."

Lieutenant: "A preposterous tale. Why not tell of dragon-slaying, hmm?"

Razuli: "Nah, we don't do dragons."

Kory: "Just vampires who want to take over the world with disgustingly evil artifacts. We're specialists."

Lieutenant: "I don't believe you, and neither does anyone else in here. Ridiculous. Utterly incredible. Do not take us for the country bumpkins you are used to spinning your absurdities with."

Dania: "Grrr... Look, that's what happened."

Guard 1: "Shut up and don't insult his lordship."

Kory: "Well, whatever. At the very least, I have the stuff with which to spin tales for eons to come. I can see it all now, my name in lights, the cheering crowd, the..."

Lieutenant: "That will be QUITE ENOUGH! You, sir, are utterly unworthy of the attentions you have received on this night, much less your ludicrous dreams. As a deputized agent of the King of the western provinces, I forbid you to spin these wild fantasies as truth, in any form, under the penalty of the law! Is that understood?!"

Kory: <Starts to protest mightily; All guards finger their weapons> "I, of course, would never willingly break the law as laid down before me by one so prolix. You have the solemn word of Malcom Goldentongue that I shall never spread these foolish tales."

Lieutenant: "See to it, Mr. SILVERTongue. Or I shall see to you all. Now good night, and don't bother anyone again."

The Propyla contingent went back that very night. We also left for Propyla, but only after resting for a day. No one knew why we wanted to go back to Propyla; it was just the general consensus that we wanted to get away from here, and go somewhere where we could forget about this latest catastrophe for a while. Also, Propyla would probably have more opportunities to reverse our negative cash flow problem, as well as more information on the Orb of Spheres. But we didn't leave for another day; Ethylia was a quiet town, suited to relaxing and recuperating, although the night life left a lot to be desired. We bought some more horses, and something else.

Razuli: "What is that?"

Merchant: “That? You have a good eye, sir; that is a Gronk, a splendid pack animal, very strong and capable of travelling far.”

(The “Gronk” was a reptilian thing, about six feet long and three feet high, and built like a tank. It had beady little stupid-looking eyes, a short, stubby tail, and lots of teeth.)

Razuli: “A horse could leave that thing in the dust, Mac.”

Merchant: “Not at all! Why, the Gronk may look slow and ungainly, but never was there a speedier beast of its size. I’d put one against a horse any day, but not for riding, certainly; too bumpy. But I see that you are skeptical, sir. Lets take it out to the run so you can see how truly amazing it is.”

The merchant puts on a ring, and the Gronk immediately begins following him. The Gronk does move quite quickly, especially on the open track.

Razuli: “What’s the ring?”

Merchant: “A Ring of Gronk control. Each is personal, and included with every purchase. A Gronk will never run away with your equipment, nor will anyone else be able to move it against your will. And, in addition to that, Gronks are never killed by a wayward arrow or spear like horses, for Gronks possess a grace: they are favored of the deity.”

Razuli: “Which god?”

Merchant: “That which lies above them all, and is whispered in hushed tones as the mighty DM. The Gronk is his personal favorite, which makes it virtually unkillable.”

Razuli: “DM’s favorite monster, huh? Alright, how much?”

Gronk: “GRONK!”

Later...

Dania: “What’s that thing?”

Razuli: “It’s a Gronk. C’mere, Gronk.”

Gronk: “Gronk!”

Kory: “I like it. I think it’s cute!”

Razuli: “I’m gonna make some hip boots out of him.”

Kory: “Hey!”

The ride back to Propyla was leisurely and uneventful. Many people were travelling back to the west, including lots of guarded wagons; why there weren’t more bandits was unclear. Perhaps these WERE the bandits, returning to their old territories. Once back in Propyla low-town, we set about finding facilities for training; only Dania was left out, as usual. We also found something else of interest; several posters and flyers put up all over the city:

# HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

Let it be known that after a long Campaign  
which has only now borne fruit,

the honorable Lordling BENTWICK of Feluca  
has proven his right by honor in battle  
to succeed his honorable Father,

## THE LORD EMODED OF FELUCA,

as GOVERNOR of this city  
under the terms of Rightful Succession

for his Valiant Slaying  
in Single Combat  
the VAMPIRE  
Desmod the DARK

and so Dispelling the curse lain on our fair land  
by the same.

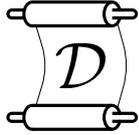
23rd of the Winter season, year 32 AE. Councilor Nunhillis recording.

*“Jeff, I’m going to kill you now.”*

*“You can’t do that. I’m the DM.”*

## XXXV

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 5th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 4th level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 4th level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



ANIA was unable to find a spellcaster who would give her the training she needed to reach the next level. It was becoming obvious that something would have to be done about it, but we were having problems establishing any kind of permanent ties anywhere.

Naverro went back into the inner city. The guards at the gate didn't seem to recognize him; they remained uniformly bored, and Naverro got in and went to his temples, where he bathed and spent a few hours praying and reading the holy words. He also replenished his stock of holy water, and got a couple more healing potions. The priest he had conversed with earlier found him, and they had a short talk.

Priest: *<Sees Naverro praying before main alter>* "Oh, hello, I do believe I recognize you."

Naverro: "Yes, father! I'm acolyte Naverro, I was here 3 weeks ago."

Priest: "Ah, yes, acolyte Naverro. You were under Luminot, weren't you? Yes. Well, when we last met, I believe you were telling me about some adventures you had been on with those strange friends of yours."

Naverro: "Yes, father. We went out and had some more. We went west to find out what all the clouds were, but there were Undead all over, so we fled into a castle called Methigor, where Duke Desmond was..."

Priest: "Desmod the Dark, you mean? My soul, I'm glad to see you alive, my young friend! Whatever possessed you to enter his clutches?"

Naverro: "He set up illusions, and told us he was trying to fight off all the undead. I'm afraid I was fooled, father. We went out and got this thing called a Bloodstone, and..."

Priest: "Oh! You didn't give it to him, did you? Of course you didn't; you're still here, and so am I. Well, hmmm..."

Naverro: "Do you believe me?"

Priest: "Oh, I believe you, I believe you. The alternative, of course, is to believe that Bentwick killed Desmond; that, of course, is quite impossible. Naturally, you'll have to tell me all about it later; the important thing, my young friend, is that you did it! Somehow or other, you did it! Now, are you sure Desmond is dead?"

Naverro: "Well, no."

Priest: "All right. Did you destroy the Bloodstone, then?"

Naverro: "Well... no."

Priest: "Well... do you know where it is?"

Naverro: "Well..."

Priest: "I see... what, exactly, did happen?"

Navero: “Well, Desmond revealed what he was, and then we called for Those Who Are More Than 2 And Less Than 4 and they came and...”

Priest: <Suddenly turns white as a Sheet Phantom> “Do... do you mean... The Paladins, Scourge of Evil and Embarrassment of Good?”

Navero: “Uh, yes. They...”

Priest: “Oh...” \*Thud\*

Navero: “Father?”

Meanwhile, Dania went looking to see if there were any magic-users in low-town who could recharge her staff; there were none. She braved the gates, and although the guards were a little suspicious, none openly voiced objections, and she quickly made her way to the magic shop.

Shopkeeper: \*Snif!\* “May I HELP you, ma’am?”

Dania: “Yeah; do you know where I can get a Staff of Thunder and Lightning recharged?”

Shopkeeper: “Your staff needs a bit of reCHARGing, ma’am?”

Dania: “Yeah. It fizzled.”

Shopkeeper: “It... FIZZled, you say? I SEE. George?”

George: <From the back> “Yes?”

Shopkeeper: “Do we get any COMMISSIONS for recommending SPELL-casters, hmm?”

George: “Yes; from Lielerionti the Holy, Al the Stubborn, Alphor the Affluent, and That Other Mage Who Lives Down The Block.”

Dania: “Don’t you know his name?”

Shopkeeper: “That IS HER name. She is JUST a TAD eccentric. PerHAPS you would not be INTerested in such. I think that AL would be your BEST opportunity. He IS rather comBATive, and very interested in ITEMS, use and upkeep. He can usually be found at his workshop at 236 Flamebreath Road.”

Dania: “Sure, thanks. Bye, George!”

George: “Bye, come again!”

Dania walked to Flamebreath Road, past a smithy, a leatherworker, and a very large stable, to a big open building with furnaces and things. Several people are occupied in glassblowing, heating, etc. A tall fat man seemed to be supervising it all.

Dania: <To large man> “Hello, do you know where I can find Al the Wizard?”

Foreman: “Al the Wizard? I think the master might be found somewhere. And who wants to know, darlin’?”

Dania: “Me. I’m Dania Couliari, I’m looking for someone who can recharge a Staff of Thunder & Lightning.”

Foreman: “Well, well, well. You need a staff with some juice in it, do ya, little lady? Ha, ha! MORGAN!! See if he’s in. Meanwhile, care to have a look around, lass?”

Dania: “Sure, thanks. Big set-up you got here.”

Foreman: “We have been very successful working here, missy. We specialize in glassware for the local laboratories, but there’s also good demand for it among the wealthy. So very much more attractive than clay or stone, eh? O’ course, it doesn’t change what’s on the inside, but if they’re willin’ to pay for it all, we’re willin’ to supply.”

Dania: "Yeah, right. Does Al usually recharge items?"

Foreman: "Sure, he ain't proud, like some. This the item, then? Looks fairly standard, shouldn't be too much trouble at all. How much you got to pay for it, then?"

Dania: "Enough, I think, mister."

Foreman: "Here now, no need to get unfriendly, my diminutive miss! Al will set the price himself, o' course, no help from me. I just want to know if I should chase you off the lot before you waste any of the master's time."

Dania: "I'll discuss it with him, if you don't mind. Where is this guy, anyway?"

Foreman: "He's standin' in front of ya! Now how much you got, elf?"

Dania: "Err. . . How much is standard?"

Foreman: "Depends on the customer's attitude and my mood. Which is getting worse by the minute."

Dania: "I got 650. And silver."

Foreman: "650? Jesus. That, and two of those gems in your pocket you failed to mention, and we got a deal. And I want no argument."

Dania: \*Sigh\* "Done. Here. When do I get it back?"

Foreman: "Call tomorrow, and not during mealtimes! I'll see you then and not before. Good day!"

Meth Crystal also went into the main city, but as he was new there, he had no trouble getting in through the gates. He took the opportunity to inspect the set-up, then wandered in his own way to an open-air market. The merchants were slow-eyed and mostly kept their wares out in the open, so it was obvious that there weren't many thieves in the city. Nonetheless, if they were anywhere they would be here, so he walked around, looking like a dupe, until he felt a light touch at his belt.

Meth: <Whips around and grabs urchin> "Well, hello!"

Urchin: "I didn't do anythin, mistah! I brushed agains' ya! I'm tellin tha truth, honest bless my soul I didn't never do anythin' wrong!"

Meth: "Well, of course! I wouldn't care to finger you for anything like lighting, scraper! But here! <Gives urchin 2 coppers> Surely such an enterprising little mouse will know where to find rats, hah?"

Urchin: <Crafty look creeps onto filthy face> "I dunno sir. Rats have lots o' holes, sir. Go everywhere, they do."

Meth: "I see, I see. . . You know, rats and mice just don't go together well, because the rats are so much bigger."

Urchin: "Naw, they go just fine, mistah. Mice can run!" <Attempts to run>

Meth: "NOT so fast, there. . . I suggest that you not run away from me, as rats can run too, but they don't like chasing mice and it can make them quite angry. <Starts rubbing a copper and a silver together between his fingers> Now. . . the education of the young is very important, I fully realize, but I was hoping that this once you could educate me."

Urchin: "Next to 887 Ridge Way, under the lid. Say 'Bentwick is a fairy.'"

Meth: "But we already knew that. Well, I had better be running along, and so had you." <Gives copper>

Urchin: "Hey!"

Meth: "I don't throw good silver to untalkative runts, my good fellow. Now do you want me to call the watch to get a cutpurse?"

Urchin: "Fuck you and your bleedin' silvah!" <Runs>

Meth wandered about the market a bit more, purloining himself a new belt buckle, and then made his way over to Ridge Way. The address was a small building in a grungy area of town; it smelled like strong perfume and other, more repugnant odors. The door was locked and barred from within. In an alley beside the house, behind a fence, there was a sewer entrance under a heavy steel plate; rungs set in the walls allowed easy descent. Meth went down the ladder, and when he reached the bottom, a crossbow bolt whizzed past his ear and clanked into the wall.

Meth: <Ducks> "Hey, is that Bentwick? You, sir, are a fairy."

Dark Brooding Figure: "Who are you?"

Meth: "I are Meth Crystal, and I are peeved with you."

Figure: "Shut yer mouth. Where'd you get the password?"

Meth: "From somebody who knew it themselves. And where did you get such a big crossbow?"

Figure: "Mum gave it to me for me birthday, for bein' such a good boy. Alright, I guess you pass."

Meth walked past the person, who is a smallish man with a big crossbow. The sewer tunnel goes on for a few more yards, then enters some kind of basement or undercity chamber. Inside, there are about 6 urchins and an older man.

Meth: "Greetings, honored elder! May a hardbat never come across your tommyknockers! I wonder, dear memsi, what a dreamer like myself would do if pressing a hold with his edge so fine? I realize your ground may not grow grass, but surely your mind is fertile."

Fagin: "Huh?"

Meth: "Where's your guildmaster?"

Fagin: "Don't have a guild. Got smashed. Driven out of the old home, all executed by his Lordship."

Meth: "Ho! How did that happen?"

Fagin: "Lieutenant Jeryson, or JELLY'S SON if you prefer. Damn fanatic, and one with half a brain in his head. Would his thrice-goddamned father jerked off that night instead."

Meth: "I think I met this person once. Dark, flaming eyes, looks like he got a buttplug stuck in him somewhere?"

Fagin: "Aye. No guild. I'm trying to find a way to prevent these poor lost souls from falling into disorganization and infamy, but the gods know it's hard on an old man."

Meth: "I see, yes. Would you mind, then, if I were to do business in your city, old master?"

Fagin: "Naw. What's your business?"

Meth: "I sell recreational herbs and other pharmaceuticals, of high quality and worth. Care for a wholesale deal?"

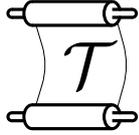
Fagin: "Naw. And none to my boys, they'll lose their edge. The future of this city lies in their hands."

Meth: "Then perhaps they'd best wash them sometime. Be seeing you!"

*"City adventures are fun. They don't threaten your life so much as your purse."*

## XXXVI

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 5th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 4th level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 4th level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



THE GM finally got some drinking rules together. Everybody rolls a d20 against constitution, with a drinking bonus determined by constitution, size, and general personality. Size was a new stat; those who assigned their characters height and weight read it off the table for their race; others rolled for it. Dania was the smallest person in the party, a Size 6 half-elf (4' 9", 80 lbs.) Kortul was a Size 15 human (6' 3", 220 lbs.) What kind of life you lived also affected matters—Meth had a bonus much larger than his size and constitution would dictate, while Naverro's was truly pitiful.

Topash left the city fairly quickly, as he had no great desire to be there, and his talents were much needed elsewhere. The vampire's reign had done a great deal of damage to the world, even this far away, and it needed help to repair itself. Pockets of imbalanced nature were everywhere; they were isolated now, and small, but could not be allowed the chance to grow and spread their influence. This occupied him for a long time; strangleweed and vampire blossoms, horribly mutated animals, and other unpleasant things were everywhere. While he was on a deer path, tracking a pregnant doe, he ran across someone else—an oldish person with a bow and arrow.

Person: "Ho."

Topash: "My greetings, most respected elder. I am Topash Raycin, of the brotherhood of the green wood."

Person: "And ahm Hubert. Ah have a farm over yonder."

Topash: "Your care for the earth has been noted by those on high. But what brings you away from your holdings? The green is endangered, and no place should be left unwatched at this time."

Hubert: "Ahm gettin' dinner. Move off my path, son."

Topash: "Certainly. Have mind of the fragility of the worlds bounty, and the blessings of the highest ones will be with you."

Hubert: "Yep, yep." <Moves on>

Topash: "Hmmm..." <Follows him silently>

Hubert moved along the path rather clumsily, Topash passing without a trace behind him. Hubert shot a rabbit; Topash left him at that point and resumed tracking the doe. He was not a poacher; the world could not stand any human hunters at this time, and all necessary steps would have to be taken to keep them out of the world.

Kortul hated the city. It stank of people jammed so close together that they lived off each other like leeches. The wilderness wasn't any better; everything normal was there, but it was all wrong in some way. The animals were too quiet, the soil too dry, and the leaves too dark. It was probably the wizard that hid behind all the illusions. It would be better soon, now that he was dead. Meanwhile, Kortul decided to stay out of the unnerving wilderness and inside the city, where it was ugly but he knew what to expect of it.

It was still early in the afternoon, but Kortul decided to get a drink in the inn and consider his future. Things were not going well at all. He had not made his name great, or collected mighty tales to tell his kinsmen when he

returned, or gotten the wealth to start a house and buy a wife. Just one, he was still young; just not getting any younger. Adventuring did not seem to be such a good way to get wealth; but being in an army was no position for a free man. Sickening, officers thinking they can order people, and men let them think that. No option.

Kortul: (But why am I here, parading around with those people? Nerve-wracking idiots, too loud or cowardly or just stupid. Or all of that. Going alone would almost be more sensible, except you need a wizard and a priest along to take care of things unsuited to the blade. But why this wizard, and why THAT priest?!? Could hardly imagine worse. Yes, could; no one here steals from anyone else. \*Sigh\* Cannot go home, I am Kortul son of Korgur, of clan Hurilsti, and will not return defeated! Will not allow this to wear me down; will survive enemies AND allies, no matter what.)

As the afternoon wore into evening, other patrons came into the inn. They were mostly dull and boring people, ants of the hill. Kortul sat and watched for a while; no one came near his table, as he was big, scarred, and obviously in a foul mood. He eventually stomped out and went down by the river, to one of the bars there. He shoved his way to the bar and ordered ale; no one objected, at least not after they got a look at him. He drank it and left, repeating at a second bar; this time he was rewarded.

He shoved a small, bald-headed man in strange clothes out of his way, and the man spun about and fell into a fighting stance. Strangely, he did not draw a weapon, and appeared unarmed.

Person: "I request an apology of you, filth."

<A space clears in the crowded bar, patrons look in with excitement>

Kortul: "<obscene gerund>" <Throws flagon at person>

Person: "Heeee-Yoga!!" <Dents Kortul's helmet with his fist>

Kortul: <Punches monk, with gauntleted fist>

Much sound and fury, signifying nothing. Eventually, the monk is laid out and Kortul feels much better. His armor is badly dented, though.

City Guards: <Walk in> "Here now, what's all this, then?"

Kortul: "Disagreement. ALE!!"

Guard: "You look slightly familiar. Have I arrested you before?"

Kortul: "No. Saw at Ethilia, with lordling Bentwick."

Guard: "And what would you be doing with his lordship, you?"

Kortul: "Discussing succession."

<Silence>

Guard: "I would not speak of such things, if I were you. Who was at fault here?"

Kortul: "Him."

Guard: "Of course. Men, get him to jail. As for you, disturbing the peace of our community is a serious offense. Stop it."

Kortul: \*Grunt\*

Kory and Razuli found each other by chance, and not wishing to pass on this golden opportunity to drink each other senseless, retired into a quiet, respectable tavern and proceeded to give the place atmosphere.

Kory: "Yes, we'd like a table, and tell me, sir, what do you serve here?"

Tavern Master: "We serve beers of all kinds, ale, mead, white wine, red wine, purple wine, green wine, whiskey and rum, sirs."

Razuli: "Hows about rum?"

Kory: "A drinking contest with RUM? We'll kill ourselves!"

Razuli: "You've got a point. But your hat covers it."

Kory: "Oh, har-de-har. Now go get us some purple, and lets get ON with this!"

Razuli: "Purple haze..."

Kory: <Starts playing Hendrix> "God, I wish Dania were here. She's so much fun to annoy."

Razuli: "Nah, I think she's just fine where she is."

Kory: "And where is that?"

Razuli: "Either howling at the moon or in the temple of Gothard. BARKEEP!!"

Kory: "Hmmm... Check this out."

They look out the window, and see Navero across the street. He is being dragged by a frantic middle-aged woman into a house.

Razuli: "Well, you knew he'd find somebody sooner or later."

Kory: "She has about as much chance with him as she does with me! He's probably curing a disease or something pure like that."

Barkeep: "Sirs?"

Razuli: "Two flagons of purple."

Kory: "And make it your best, I must insist!"

<Round 1 \*Ding!\*>

Kory: <Rolls a 3> "Oh, yuck! This is not a class establishment at all! I insist we take our business elsewhere!"

Razuli: <Rolls a 5> "C'mon, theres some nice-lookin' ladies waitin' outside. Winner gets first pick!"

Kory: "You're on. In fact, what are you on?"

Razuli: "I swear officer, none of it's mine! It's Meth's!"

<Round 2 \*Ding!\*> (Drinking is at -2)

Kory: "Aw, fuck you." <Rolls a 12, barely makes it>

Razuli: "Bard, just what is your orientation, anyway?" <Rolls a 6>

Kory: \*Pffhthllough!\* "What? Just what are you implying?"

Razuli: "I was gonna go get the women outside. Hey, look..."

Navero comes out of the house. The woman is thanking him profusely

<Round 3 \*Ding!\*> (Drinking is at -4)

Kory: "Gee, he's quick. Young lovers, so full of passion, but no staying power." <Rolls a 9, makes it>

Razuli: "And how wou' you know?" <Rolls a 1>

<One of the painted women outside approaches Navero>

Whore: "Hi, cutie."

Naverro: <Looks around> “Huh?”

Kory: “Bwa-ha-ha ha!! Good luck, lady!”

Razuli: “Yer gonna need it!”

<Round 4 \*Ding!\*> (Drinking is at -5)

Kory: “Like gettin’ water outa a rock!” <Rolls a 4, makes it>

Razuli: “Or sense outa a bard!!” <Rolls a 6, makes it>

Whore: “Are you looking for a friend, little one?”

Naverro: “Uh, I have friends. Don’t you have any friends?”

Whore: “Not tonight. Could you be a friend for me?”

Naverro: “Well, yes! I want to be a friend to everyone!”

Kory: <Momentarily too hysterical to talk>

Razuli: “Hey, shuld we go rescue him from her nefariyus clutches?”

<Round 5 \*Ding!\*> (Drinking is at -7)

Kory: “What?! Sctop THIS?! Are you outa yer MIND?!” <Rolls a 7, barely makes it>

Whore: “Oh, that’s nice! I want to be everyone’s friend too.”

Razuli: “Oh god, thish is tooo much.” <Rolls a 7>

Naverro: “Why don’t you have any friends here? Hey, I see some of my friends over there! Would you like to go meet them? Then we can all be friends together!”

Whore: <Blanches a bit> “Them? Those two laughing in the window?”

Kory: “HI!! O god, we bedder get ou’ there!”

Razuli: “Yea. Pay da barkeep an’ I’ll ge’ out there.”

Kory: “No, yu pay da barkeep! You startud dis!”

Razuli: “ME!?! Fuc yu, and yer instermunt! You go’ mor money!”

Kory: “You wer loosing! I culd see it, wooda had yu under tha table in no time flat!”

Razuli: “Quit breathin’ on me!”

Naverro: “Hello. Is there a problem?”

Razuli: “Oh, Hi, Nav!! Nah, no poblms.”

Kory: “Hoo wuz that ladee I saw you wit?”

Naverro: “Why are you talking so funny? Have you been DRINKING?!”

Razuli: “Nah. Were jus. . . real happee to see ya, das all.”

Naverro: “Oh, that’s good. Hey, where did she go?”

Kory: “Who, dear Naverro?”

Naverro: “Didn’t you see her? She said she wanted to be friends, but now she’s left. What happened?”

Razuli: “Uh, kid. . .”

Naverro: <Looks confused>

Razuli: "Yu tell 'im."

Kory: "Ahm not gonna tell 'im, YOU tell 'im."

Naverro: <Looks more confused> "Is something wrong?"

Razuli: "AHM no' gonna tell 'im, YOU tell 'im."

Kory: "Ok. Nav... I'll try ta' pu' dis gentle. She's a diseased hoar."

Naverro: <Looks confused, then shocked; Turns bright crimson; Turns and silently runs out of the tavern>

Razuli: "Reel gentle."

Kory: "Yea, bu' did yu slee his FACE? Ha ha hA ha HA..."

Barkeep: "Excuse me sirs. Have you decided which of you will be paying for your refreshments?"

Razuli: "Nah, we ain't finish' yet. BRINGEM ONN!"

Barkeep: "You are finished, sirs. Nunzio?"

Kory: "Wait, wait, sheesh sum pleeple ar so implatient..." <Forks over cash>

Barkeep: "Thank you, sir. Goodnight."

Our sodden comrades-in-arms went staggering down the avenue, filling the night air with joyous song. People avoided them, and they didn't much care. After knocking over a vendor's cart and pissing on a noblewoman's silk dress, they were suddenly brought to a halt by a great flash of light.

\*POOF!\*

Paladin 1: "Here now, here's some of them!"

Razuli: "Where how who aw shit"

Paladin 2: "You are a shame to the cause of good and order, the highest elements of the universe! You have wasted our time and energies on a pitiful practitioner of tricks, hardly worthy of notice, and so distracted us from our great quests!"

Kory: "Wha?"

Paladin 1: "Do not call us unless it is something worth our efforts!"

Paladin 3: "Yea! He was a total wimp, and didn't even have any good magic items! We were killing another bunch of Demogorgons when you called us into this shithole!"

Razuli: "Look, we dinna mean to, it jus' slipped out, you jus' herd it all wrong, and..."

Paladin 1: "WHAT! You insinuate that we make ERRORS! Do you detect evil on him?"

Paladin 2: "No."

Paladin 1: "Damn!"

Paladin 3: "Anyway, you little wimps better not..."

Paladin 2: "I detect evil on him, though!" <Points out random person>

Paladin 1: "Hah!" <Cuts random person in the street into tiny little pieces>

Kory: <Jaw drops>

Paladin 2: "No, the one on his left."

Paladin 1: "Ah yes, I see! Sorry!" <Reduces a second random person to a fine red mist>

Razuli: "Uh, we didn' meen anything, yer studlinessesess!" <Huge grin of true desperation>

Paladin 2: "I detect evil on several people here! Why, it's a virtual nest of bad vibes! Look! There, in those government buildings! There are evil people in positions of power!"

Paladin 3: "Hey, it's a waste of time. This is a stupid wimp dungeon."

Kory: "Look, don' kill everyone! Thas EVIL!"

Paladin 2: "But killing evil is good! That is our great mission!"

Razuli: "Uhh..."

Paladin 1: "The town people here either willingly live with evil, and thus are evil themselves, or are in ignorance of it, and thus must be punished for their lack of alertness."

Paladin 2: "Something... MUST... BE... DONE!!! Besides, as long as we're here..."

Kory: "Onlee priestss and palasins can just detec' evl!!!"

Paladin 3: "Hey, we can we kill 'em for not being paladins! How much experience could we get for nuking a city?"

Paladin 2: "But nuclear devices are so tacky."

<Kory & Razuli sneak off>

Paladin 1: "Silence! It is not the way! We must be more selective!"

Paladin 3: "C'mon! Just nuke it from orbit! It'll get everything real quick and we'll get gobs of experience!"

Paladin 2: "I must say, he has a point. Just going through by hand will be terribly dull."

Paladin 1: "But we must! We're paladins!"

Paladin 3: "Oh yeah, I forgot why they're so boring..."

Meanwhile...

Kory: "Say, do you think this would be a good time to leave town?"

Razuli: "Mmmmaybe, maybe. What do you say we mosey on back to the inn and calmly discuss it with the others?"

Kory: "Certainly. After you, sir."

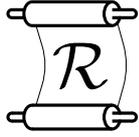
Razuli: "Thank you."

<Both sprint screaming off into the night>

*"shit Shit SHIT SHIT! \*SHIT!\* \*SHIT!!!\*"*

## XXXVII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 5th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 4th level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 4th level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



AZULI and Kory quickly found their way back to the Inn of the First Son, but were nonetheless quite sobered up by the time they arrived. It was late, so several party members were on hand to hear the distressing news that Those Who Were More Than Two And Less Than Four had returned, angry with the party and with everyone in general. Obviously, something drastic would have to be done to remedy the situation.

Dania: “They’re HERE?!?!?”

Razuli: “Yep. Here and talking about ridding the world of this nest of evil.”

Dania: “WHAT nest of evil?! This is an ordinary city!”

Meth: “Where else would you find a nest of evil?”

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Dania: “Aww... Find Naverro! Find Kortul! Get everybody and lets get out of here before all hell breaks loose!”

Kory: *<Watching out door, as many many guards approach rapidly>* “I think we might be a little late on that, dear.”

Meth: “I think maybe we should just go out this way...” *<Drifts towards back windows>*

*<Entire party tromples over Meth running through back windows.>*

Dania: “Get the horses! Get everybody’s! Wait, get some better ones if you can! SHIT! We left a lot of our stuff in our rooms, Meth, climb up and get it!”

Meth: “You stepped on my foot, magic-user...”

Dania: “Will you DO it!”

Kory: “Dania, Dania, don’t panic. If anything attracts attention it’s small blonde magic-users throwing a fit. I’ll go!” *<Climbs fire escape>*

Razuli: This inn has a fire escape?

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Stable Boy: “Hey, what are you doin’ down here?”

Dania clobbered the stable boy over the head with her staff. Razuli stuffed him into the rafters. Kory moved from room to room, throwing packs and bundles and stuff out of the windows. Razuli and Meth catch and throw into saddlebags, while Dania picked out and saddled the seven best horses.

Topash: “Oh, hello, I was just...”

Razuli: "Pack that!" <Throws saddlebag into Topash's face>

Topash: "Ah, let me guess: was it the governor, or his wife?"

Dania: "Worse! Hurry!"

Kory: "Ah!" <Guardsmen burst into room>

Lieutenant: "Aha! Men, get around the back! I'll take care of this one!"

Kory: "Like hell you will! Bye!" <Jumps out window>

Dania: "Get on! Forget your fucking pack and MOVE!"

Razuli: "Awright, already! Jeezus!"

Guardsmen come running around the corner, are nearly rode down as Dania charges off into the night. The others follow, hanging on to their various possessions as they go.

<Explosion in the distance>

Razuli: "See ya, sucOOMPH!!" <A pike is swung into his path, and he is knocked from his saddle to the ground>

Guards: "Keep him down! Get the others!" <Several guards sit on Razuli, who has had the wind knocked out of him and is putting up a rather feeble fight>

Kory: "SHIT! Magic-user, get back here!"

Dania is already halfway down the street by now.

<Explosion in the distance>

Lieutenant: "Brown, to the rear! Melling, Scord: front!"

Two guards leap in front of Kory's horse, waving their spears and frightening it. It bucks, then Kory is knocked off by the one who went behind him.

Topash: <To horse> "Forgive me, but it is for us now." <Rides in and grabs Kory>

Razuli: "HEY!"

Guards: <Rush Topash, bringing their long weapons to bear>

<Explosion in the distance>

Dania: "GET OUT OF THERE!!"

Topash: <Rides out>

Kory: "We'll get you! Hang in there!"

Razuli: "Aw, fuck you."

Lieutenant: "Ha! Rogers! Get the mounteds out of bed! You there, haul that one to the Kings Street square! The rest, come with me!"

Razuli is disarmed, knocked about a bit, and hauled off.

Dania: <Riding towards religious area> "Fuck it, you lost a horse!"

<Explosion in the distance>

Kory: "A horse! We godamn lost a party member!"

Dania: "I know, I know! Where will they take him?"

Topash: "Given the chaotic situation, who knows where justice will be dealt?"

Meth: "I'd bet they wouldn't take him anyplace public. There's probably a real ugly mob scene developing right now."

Kory: "And we were seen with those assholes... Knowing penis-breath he WILL take him someplace public. Head for the nearest square!"

Elsewhere...

Kortul: <Sees an M-1 tank go past> (That thing looked very familiar...)

\* BOOM!! \*

Kortul: (Oh, I remember now.) <Runs back towards the inn>

Elsewhere...

Naverro: "Father, why is the ground shaking so much? Master Jorot didn't predict any such thing for today."

Priest: "I realize that... It must be something else... Wait! Three souls are at the base of it, but their intentions are unclear... their spirits appear so white as to actually be BLACK, blind and blinding... and they bring strange devices with them..." <Naverro sneaks off> "...strange and destructive things unaffected by magical powers, indeed nearly invisible to them... and they... Oh! OH! It's THEM! Acolyte! Get back here! Where are you!"

<Naverro runs out of the temple and back towards the inn>

Elsewhere...

Razuli: (Hey, waitaminute... GRONK!)

Gronk: "Gronk?"

Razuli: (Gronk! Come rescue me! Good boy!)

<Explosion in the distance>

Gronk: ??? (Gronks are not known for their high intelligence.)

Razuli: (Follow the ring! Come here!)

Gronk: "Gronk!" <Runs out of stables, starts running after Razuli>

Kortul: <Razuli's Gronk runs past, amid general hubbub> Hmm... <Follows>

Razuli: <Is carried into square by guardsmen; A large mob has gathered there>

"They blew up my house!"

"Their beast tore up the cemetery!"

"They took a buzz-saw to me 'usband!"

"They killed my daughter!"

"They trompled through my petunias!"

"Hey, wasn't HE with 'em?"

Large angry mob suddenly focuses all of its attention on Razuli.

Razuli: (Aw, shit! GRONK!)

Gronk: "Gronk!" <Speeds up>

Peasant: "Evenin', officers and friends. Would you happen to be takin' this one to justice, then?"

Guard: "We were, unless you think that somethin' else ought to be done."

Razuli: "He doesn't!" *<Is clobbered by Guard again>*

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Guard: "He do have a mouth in him, which I get kind of tired of."

Razuli: (GRONK!!)

Gronk: "Gronk!"

Peasant: "Well, seein' as how things are, perhaps we could take him off your hands and let you get on with more important matters."

Razuli: (\*GRONK!!!\*)

Gronk: (Gronk, already!)

Elsewhere...

Naverro: *<Steps out of an alley, and is almost run over by a horse>* "Ah!!"

Dania: "Naverro! Get on a horse, we're getting out of here!"

Naverro: "Where's my horse?"

Dania: "These are better!"

Naverro: "Where's Kumquat?"

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Dania: "NAVERO!!! MOVE YOUR LITTLE *<censored>* *<censored>* AND *<censored>* GET IT IN GEAR!!!!"

Naverro: *<Wordlessly climbs on one of the horses; It fidgets>*

Kory: "Have you seen Razuli anywhere?"

Naverro: "No, but I thought I saw his Gronk running that way."

Dania: "Fine! We go that way! *<Rides off>*"

Naverro: "But it might not have been his... I mean all Gronks look the same..."

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Topash: "Naverro, it may be our only chance of finding him. Shall we?"

Kory: "Yes! Here we come to save the day! Yee-HA!" *<Rides off>*

Meth: "I knew I should have just gotten stoned and stayed in bed."

Everyone else rides off after Kory. Except Naverro. He does not have his accustomed gentle mare for a mount, but in fact a spirited stallion. It objects to his riding it, and Naverro is not adept at calming horses. After some struggle, it gallops off in a random direction with Naverro clinging to it like a sack of velcro.

Naverro: "STOP!!!"

Elsewhere...

Town Person 1: "What do we do with him?"

Town Person 2: "Hang him!"

Razuli: (GRONK!!!)

Gronk: "Gronk!" *<Approaches the square>*

Town Persons: “Boil him!” “Flay him!” “Chop his fingers off!” “Burn him to death slowly, starting with his balls!!”

Razuli: (\*\* GRONK!!! \*\*)

Gronk: (Here!)

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Razuli: (Get me outa here! Now! Somehow!!)

Gronk: ???

Town Person 1: “String him up so he can’t get away! Then we’ll decide!”

Razuli is dragged to a lamp post. A noose is put around his neck, and he is placed atop a tall rickety stool. The rope is pulled until he has to stand on tip-toe.

Town Person 3: “I know! Lets play pinata! First to knock him off wins!”

Town Person 4: “Wins what? I’d rather watch ’im burn.”

Razuli: (Gronk, get OVER here! DO SOMETHING!)

Gronk: ???

Kortul: *<Walks up to the square, astutely notes Razuli’s presence; Also astutely notes over 100 blood-crazed citizens waving many weapons; Pauses to ponder the ramifications of the situation>*

*<Explosion in the distance>*

Priest: “Excuse me, I am a priest of Gothard. Can you tell me what’s going on here?”

Kortul: *<Considers how silly the situation just got; Clobbers the dumb priest over the head and moves towards Razuli>*

Elsewhere...

Dania: “Shit, he’s not here! Navero! Shit, where’s NAVERO!?!”

Kory: “Shit, I don’t know, but somehow I am not surprised.”

Topash: “My, a lot of fertilizer is being spread around here. Say, everyone is running that way. Why don’t we follow them?”

Kory: “Excellent idea! CHAAAAARGE!!”

Elsewhere...

Navero: “SLOW DOWN!! AAHHH!” *<Gallops on a bucking horse into a square with over 100 blood-crazed citizens waving many weapons>*

Town People: “Who is that?” “Get the reins!” “Gods, what an idiot.” “Hey, that’s MY horse!”

Razuli: “I pray to you for the first time in my whole life, and this is what you get me. Fuck you, very much.”

Gronk: “Gronk?”

Razuli: (Gronk, get over here and bite through this rope!)

Kortul: *<Ducks into square and runs towards Razuli; Razuli doesn’t see him>*

Gronk: *<Ambling its way over to the rope, its leg knocks the stool out from under Razuli>*

Razuli: (GRONK!! STAND TALL!)

Gronk: *<Does so; Razuli is able to stick out one foot and plant it on the Gronk's nose; He is now hanging against lamp post, with just enough weight on the Gronk not to break his neck>*

Naverro: "Hey, Razuli! Go that way, horse!"

*<Explosion in the distance>*

The horse decides that its had enough of this and tramples a citizen.

Razuli: "Glekkk..."

Gronk: (Getting tired, master.)

Elsewhere...

Topash: "Oh, the people were all running towards the nearest gate. I suppose they would, wouldn't they?"

Meth: "Lord, who would stay?"

Dania: "Argh! Ok, do we find them or run and hope they catch up?"

Kory: "We must find them! Don't abandon party members! Besides, think of all the wonderful opportunities we'll have to show our true mettle."

Topash: "I think we already showed much of our true mettle in creating this situation. But until we are placed in real danger, our comrades should not be abandoned."

Dania: "Right. Where?"

Topash: "At the center of all the chaos and disruption. Where else would one of our party members be?"

Meth: "You're more likely to find the Paladins there."

Kory: "So look for a minor pocket. There's bound to be one around here somewhere."

Dania: "Yea. Right. What if the guards spot us?"

Kory: *<Rides off>* "Oh, they're much to busy right now. So..."

Off we go, into the wild blue yonder!

Off we ride, into the night!

Looking for our id-i-ot friends,

And maybe a very small fight!"

Elsewhere...

Kortul: *<Draws sun sword, chops Razuli down>*

Razuli: "Gasp!"

Town Person: "Hey! Wha' tha hell you doin'! HEY!" *<Mob turns from Naverro to Kortul; A sun sword draws attention nicely>*

Kortul: Shit... *<Throws Razuli on Gronk>* "Run, idiot!"

Razuli: (Go, Gronk!) *<Rides bumpily out of the square>*

Kortul: (Hundred to one odds... could be worse. But not by much.) *<Runs; He is not a fast runner, unfortunately>*

Naverro: "HORSE!! Stop it!!"

*<Explosion in the distance>*

The horse becomes more cooperative. Navero is somehow able to guide it past Kortul slow enough for him to mount.

Kortul: "That way!"

They pass Razuli on the Gronk. Razuli is getting a very rough ride. Also cross paths with Dania.

Dania: "NAVERO!! Where the fuck did you disappear to!"

Navero: "Uh. . ."

Kortul: "Wizzerd, SHUT UP! Out of town, NOW!"

Dania: "Where did. . ."

Mob: *<Running up, waving torches and axes and clubs>* "KILL THEM ALL!!"

Kory: "That's my cue! Bye!" *<Rides off>*

*<Everyone follows>*

The (finally) combined party rode off, after a short pause to shift Navero to another horse. Razuli somehow acquired a horse in the chaos, and we rode for the city gates. In the great press of fleeing citizenry, accompanied by exploding buildings and screaming missiles, there would have been little a guard could have done to keep order, even if any were there. I'm sure they would have liked to have gotten us, but there were other and more pressing demands on them. So, we happily put yet another town behind us and continued on the road to adventure.

*"We're getting good at fleeing in blind terror."*

*"Yeah. We even got out with most of our possessions."*

*"And it is such fun to watch Dania panic."*

## XXXVIII

**Naverro**, male human cleric, 5th level

**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level

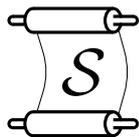
**Razuli**, male human fighter, 5th level

**Kortul**, male human fighter, 5th level

**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 4th level

**Topash**, male elven druid, 4th level

**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level



NOW was falling outside of the city. The party was not in good humor as we rode out of Propyla. Nobody pursued us this time; the crowds of fleeing citizenry were much larger than at any of the other towns that we got blown up, and nobody really noticed us in the crowd. Looking back to Propyla, we could see much of it was burning, and most of the big buildings were gone. The governor's mansion was a surprising exception, but it was missing one wall, which I suppose made up. We quickly made tracks, and by dawn were well enough away to stop, rest, and tell everyone what had happened with The Three. This being done, the question came up of what to do next; would it be safe to go for yet another town? Or would one or more governments have us on their officially-wanted lists? You'd think that \*somebody\* would be really mad at us by now...

We had managed to fling all our possessions onto the horses before we left (although some was lost along the way) so equipment loss wasn't critical. We had also managed to leave the inn without paying for the rooms. However, we hadn't had much money left to begin with, and the hasty departure had only worsened matters. We sat down to discuss what to do. Then, a subtle change came over the land; a brook now flowed beside the road, the snowfall stopped and was replaced by a dense fog, and the trees grew tall and became more colorful.

Naverro: "Huh?"

Razuli: <Vanishes>

Topash: "The balance seems to be shifting."

Person: <Walks out of bushes> "Hail, brave adventurers!"

Kory: "Hail? This is fog, and where'd it come from?"

Person: "I understand your natural confusion. The fundamental nature of the universe just been altered. Before, the almighty DM was he called Jeff, but he has been replaced by the Roger. The world is different, as a new mind lies at the center of creation."

Naverro: "Who are you, sir?"

Person: "I am a protector of the woods, where I am known as Norrin. I would know your business in my lands."

Dania: "Your lands? We're in the middle of a plain!"

Norrin: "I'm moonlighting. You appear to be adventurers in need of cash."

Kory: "Is there any other kind?"

Norrin: "Well, I know of a dwarf cave near here which has been overrun by monsters, and they need someone to clear it out. I was thinking of taking the job, if only I could find a party to join me..."

Dania: "Dwarves? You wanna crawl into some Dwarf-hole?!"

Kory: "Well, he could try a..."

Topash: "Kory, behave."

Dania: "And shut up."

Kortul: "Mines?"

Norrin: "Yes, they mine silver, tin, and lead there."

Dania: "Are there any dwarves inside?"

Norrin: "No."

Dania: "Fine. Let's go. They'll pay, though."

Topash: "Which way is it?"

Game Master: You can't see any landmarks in the fog.

Dania: "Get to high ground so we can see out of it."

Game Master: You climb a little hill, but still can't see out.

Kory: "Let's go back to the road and keep riding."

Game Master: You can't find the road.

Kory: Ok, I go climb a tree and look!

Game Master: You can't find a tree.

Kortul: I walk out of the fog.

Game Master: Ok, Kortul mysteriously vanishes.

Party: We all walk out of the fog.

Game Master: Okay! You're all on the same road you were on before, near a little bridge over a creek. The road branches to the left, and a signpost says that way is the way to the dwarf mines. A smooth dirt road leads off into the hills.

Topash: "Gee, I wonder if the Orb of Spheres is there too."

Navero: "I thought it was winter. Where's the snow?"

Game Master: Driving past you in freezing blasts. You're all real frigid.

Kory: I am not! "Well, shall we go?"

Dania: "Yes. How much were the hairballs offering, anyway?"

Norrin: "Negotiations didn't go that far."

Dania: "Hmph."

We rode up the road, past rolling streams and fields of blue grass. Snow cats gambolled about, listening to the blue grass. They did not attack, so we let them be. The road went up into the hills, and then sharply turned downwards into a rocky valley which smelled vaguely of smoke and iron. A very short, wide person with a beard leaped (sort of) from behind a tree.

Dwarf: "Halt and be recognized!"

Norrin: "Hail! We are brave adventurers, and have come to offer to rid your mines of their invaders."

Dwarf: "Adventurers? Harrumph! Well, go on down, hang a left, go to the door and ask to see Korgurindin."

Kory: "Ok! C'mon, let's get this over with."

Dania: "Yes."

The party rode down into the valley, which was nicely sheltered from the wind above, to a collection of squat, sturdy buildings. There weren't very many - only enough to make two streets, one crossing the other, but there were a lot of dwarves about. Most sat on rocks or under trees, and obviously had very little to do; they eyed us with obvious distaste. Some of us eyed the dwarves back, with even more distaste. We turned left at the intersection and rode up to a door in a tall building. This was the only door sized for humans, so we guessed it to be a meeting place for non-dwarven guests.

<Knock, knock>

Voice: <From inside> "Who's there?"

Kory: <Grin...> "Adventure!"

Voice: "Adventure who?"

Kory: "Ah'd venture to say you should let us in!"

Dania: "Oh, shut up! We're here about cleaning out those mines. Is what's-his-face in?"

Norrin: "Korgurindin."

Dania: "Yeah, him."

Voice: "Uh...sure."

A youngish-looking dwarf opened the door and let us in. The inside of the building had normal-sized furniture, and other conveniences for large people, but the decor was still rather Spartan. We sat down to wait while the young dwarf went to fetch Korgurindin, who turned out to be an older dwarf with spectacles. He explained the situation to us.

Apparently, someone or something had found a sort of magic device which could charm a dwarf into servitude. They came up from below, from deep in the earth, with monstrous servants, and attacked the deeps of the mines, killing or charming the miners. Many of the charmed dwarves were sent back into the upper reaches as spies and infiltrators, and successfully disrupted the dwarves' attempts to defend their home, so they were driven out. The main entrance to the mines was located at the opposite end of the surface "town", and had been sealed up with a large oak door. Some spies had been sent in through other entrances, but none had come back out. It was finally decided that outside help would have to be sought. The local rangers were asked to go in, but were reluctant to do so, caverns not being their forte; they promised to keep a look-out for anyone with skills more suited to tunnels.

Dania: "Great, great. How much?"

Korgurindin: "Well, I think 75 gp for each of you would do."

Dania: "WHAT?! You little hairball, that's robbery! 500!"

Korgurindin: "We suffered a great deal by our loss. I think 100 would be acceptable."

Topash: "Dania, calm yourself. I understand we may be fighting your kin, and that you do not wish them slain; this will make the task much more difficult, and makes your offer rather unreasonable."

Korgurindin: "Hmmm, yes. Uh... hows 150 each as a fair price, provided no dwarves are harmed?"

Kory: "I dunno about that..."

Norrin: "Perhaps, uh... 300 apiece, minus weregild?"

Korgurindin: "Well... yes, maybe. Would you like to see an entrance?"

We were escorted out into the valley by a pair of dwarves, to a small gap in the rock we wouldn't have noticed otherwise. Beyond, a narrow and winding crack went downward into the earth. It was wide enough for Kortul to squeeze through, but barely. We went in quietly as we could, Meth first, followed by Dania and Norrin.

Meth: "Hey, there's an ugly guy down there. I think it's a guard."

Dania: "Where about is he?"

Meth: "Oh, maybe 14 paces ahead of you."

Dania: <Casts Sleep>

Norrin: "Good. Alright, let's go."

Down at the bottom, we could see a small door, which was ajar. On the other side were two snoring Bugbears. We tied them up and looked around. We were on a wide ledge carved out of the cliff, on the south side of a ravine; at the bottom, a strong river flowed. To the west, we could see more carved stone, windows and doors, and a bridge across the ravine. The ledge ran no further east than where we were. Many torches provided dim light. There was some argument over what to do with the Bugbears, but eventually soft hearts prevailed and they were left tied and gagged. We went westwards towards the bridge.

Norrin: "Where would the chief of operations be? In the town?"

Meth: "Probably not, unless he's civilized or something. That'd be the first place to look, anyway."

Kory: "He probably has all his troops in the built area. I suggest that we go elsewhere. Of course, that assumes that this place is organized, which it may not be."

Naverro: "Do we go across on the bridge? It looks wobbly."

Kortul: "Bad place to get attacked."

Meth: "Shouldn't we go before someone notices us?"

Dania: "Yea. Let's go over the bridge. If they attack us, fine."

We crept westwards toward the bridge; all was quiet. The bridge was sturdily built, but looked like it had been fought on; several posts and supports had been knocked out. We started across, Kortul in the lead, when a long rubbery arm reached from under and grabbed his leg.

Kortul: "Ha!" <Stabs the arm>

Dania: "Trolls! Nav, get some oil out! How many?"

Kory: "Oh, no more than 20 or 30. Fight quietly, we don't want to attract attention."

Three Trolls come out from under bridge. One attacks Kortul, the second Naverro, and the third Norrin.

Naverro: "Ahh! Go away!" <Misses>

Kortul: <Chop! An arm drops in the river>

Dania: <Magic Missile's Troll 2>

Topash: <Slashes Troll 2 with Scimitar>

Meth: <Stabs Norrin's Troll in the back> "Gee, this is weird."

Kory: <Plays battle song> "Oh? How so?"

Meth: "Usually, the monsters ambush us with overwhelming numbers and surprise, but these just came out for a straight fight. Like, really unusual."

Norrin: <Misses his Troll> “Well, I guess these things happen.”

Troll 1: <Bites Kortul, attempts to grapple and fails>

Troll 2: <Gets Navero in a bear hug, squeezes>

Troll 3: <Claws and bites Norrin>

Navero: “Gliik!”

Dania: “Drop him!” <Magic Missile on Troll 2>

Kortul: <Hack Hack Chop Chop>

Topash: “So much for a straight fight. Let go of him, please, we have spent rather a lot of money on him.”  
<Misses>

Meth: <Critical strike—double damage> Gee, do you think I just might have given our illustrious DM an idea?

Kory: Yes. Now hush, or start talking about how everything is really hard, and that we’ll never possibly survive.

Norrin: Good idea! Oh wail in agony and torment and torture...

Dania: Don’t forget gnashing of teeth.

Troll 1: <Kicks Kortul in the balls>

Troll 2: <Turns and drops Navero in the river>

Troll 3: <Throws Norrin into Kory, both nearly fall into the river>

Kortul: \*Thud!\*

Navero: \*Splash!\* “HELP!”

Dania: “Shit!” <Magic Missiles Troll 2>

Kory: You would have to remind him he’s god, wouldn’t you?

Meth: Hey, I didn’t mean to...

Norrin: Well! Any bright ideas of our own?

Topash: <Throws a rope down to Navero> “Someone go help Kortul.”

Troll 1: <Jumps up and down on Kortul>

Troll 2: <Claws Dania and Topash>

Troll 3: <Bites and claws Meth>

Kortul: “RRAAAHHHHH!!!!” <Swings twice, criticals once; Troll 1 splattered>

Kory: “Uh-oh, they’re in trouble now! Ho Ha Ha Guard Turn Parry Dodge Spin Thrust!” <Wounds Troll 2>

Norrin: “Of course, every bit will grow, you know.” <Wounds Troll 3>

Dania: “Yuck.” <Magic Missiles Troll 2> “Someone get some oil out.”

Navero: \*Blub\* <Navero can’t swim very well to begin with, and his mace and armor have dragged him to the bottom of the river>

Topash: “I believe we should take care of these two first.” <Swings rope to where Navero should be>

Meth: "Oh, die already." <Backstabs Troll 3>

Troll 1: <Twitches a lot>

Troll 2: <Backhands Topash, almost knocking him in; claws Dania, bites Kory>

Troll 3: <Claws Meth, misses Norrin>

Topash: "Navero!"

Navero: <Finds the rope, starts climbing>

Kortul: <Barrels into Troll 2's gut; Kortul is a big man, and manages to knock it off the bridge>

Dania: "Great! One left!" <Magic Missiles Troll 3>

Norrin: "It looks pretty wobbly right now." <Critical strike>

Meth: "So this just might..." <Backstabs, it falls> "Hey!"

Troll 1: <Twitches a lot more>

Troll 2: <Bites at Navero on its way past>

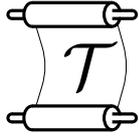
Troll 3: <Twitches not very much at all>

The trolls were burned (what didn't drip into the river) and wounds cleaned and bandaged. Nobody came running at the sounds of the fight, which was a bit of a surprise but we decided not to mention it. Perhaps the people who had taken over the mines felt they were secure enough not to put sentries in the town itself. Navero was sopping wet of course, but didn't catch cold in those cold caverns (we forgot mention it again) and so after healings for all we continued on our merry way into the northern caverns.

*"The world seems a much simpler place now."*

## XXXIX

**Navero**, male human cleric, 5th level  
**Dania**, female 1/2-elven MU, 4th level  
**Kortul**, male human fighter, 5th level  
**Kory Silvertongue**, male elven bard, 4th level  
**Topash**, male elven druid, 4th level  
**Meth**, male ? thief, 3rd level  
**Norrin**, male 1/2-elven ranger, 6th level



THE Troll mess was cleaned up, and we continued to the north. There was a ledge on the northern side of the bridge, widened to permit safe travel. The ledge ran east from the bridge. There was a large entrance there before us, and a door at the far eastern end. The door seemed the best place to start, so we quietly walked down to it and listened. No sound came from beyond, so we opened it a crack to reveal a small dark tunnel leading downwards. Navero lit a lantern and we went down, Norrin in the lead.

The tunnel went sharply downwards, occasionally so sharply that steps had been carved out of the stone. We surmised that this probably led down into the mines themselves; there were many noises echoing up from down below, most of them shouting and clanking. It sounded like a large battle was taking place.

Norrin: "Very strange. Do you think they're under attack from below?"

Dania: "They should worry about attack from above."

Topash: "They may not, if they think the dwarves are helpless."

Navero: "But they aren't, they called for help from us. Oh, I heard that the races who live down there don't, uh, cooperate much."

Dania: "Yeah. They may not think the dwarves would get any help."

Kory: "Now how much do you think we can count on that?"

Kortul: "Hmph."

Norrin: "Well, whoever has the charming item won't be down there. They'll be up here, where it would be useful. Let us go back and look elsewhere."

We went back west, then continued north from the bridge. This led to a large, natural-looking cavern with a flattened-out floor. There had once been a storeroom here, but it was mostly cleaned out. Several entrances branched off in all directions. We went north.

The northern tunnel wound irregularly, obviously a natural gap that had been widened some. Also, the ceiling was only 6 feet high, so most of us had to stoop. We went generally northwards for about 40 feet, until the tunnel opened out into a room. Inside, we saw several small humanoids lying peacefully on the floor; they looked like Kobolds or Goblins, and looked dead. We shot one with an arrow; they were indeed dead. We decided they weren't worth looking at, and went back.

The other entrances from the storeroom led to other looted rooms; a couple had Gnolls or Bugbears or things camped in them asleep, but we didn't bother them. We decided to go look back south in the Dwarvish town. We walked back to the bridge and southwards into the town. As we passed the first building, we saw two dwarves sitting in the doorway; they were armed with a knife and a hand axe, respectably. They did not leap to attack, but just sat there with blank looks on their faces.

Dania: "Watch it, they'll surround us."

Kory: "Right. All both of them."

Dania: "There are more down here, idiot! And they're charmed slaves. They'll all do exactly as they're told."

Topash: "Oh, you dwarves there; were you told to attack elves?"

Dwarf 1: "Nope. Said, 'Capture dwarves, kill goblins and hobgoblins,' they did. Nothing about elves or humans."

Dwarf 2: "And we do everything they tell us, we do."

Norrin: "There are goblinoids coming up from below?"

Dwarf 2: "I guess so."

Dania: "Who are 'they', and where are they right now?"

Dwarf 1: "Can we tell them that?"

Dwarf 2: "Never said we couldn't. Maybe they'll get the charm stick away."

Dwarf 1: "Ok. Orgar and Hirisk are in the old meeting hall at the west end. Hirisk has the charm stick. He's a priest, and can make zombies. Made some from our dead."

Kory: "Yuck! How tasteless. We have to get that thing."

Dania: "Yea, yea. Have they looted your treasury?"

Dwarf 2: "Ain't tellin'!"

Topash: "Right. I suggest that we not walk up main street, but approach in a slightly more subtle way."

Kory: "No! Let's charge right up main street, singing and cheering and dodging lightning bolts."

Norrin: "We can go through some of these buildings and sneak in a back way. I most humbly recommend it."

Dania: "Right. Let's go."

Navero cast a Silence 15' on himself, so we were absolutely quiet. We moved into a building; it seemed to have been someone's house, but it had been looted and stripped. We went from house to house, going west to the two-story building we assumed was the town hall. There were a lot of dwarves around, but they did not stop us. Our progress was good, until we got to a house right next to the hall. Inside, there were seven dwarves in bloody plate mail. Navero turned off the Silence so we could discuss what to do.

Norrin: "They are probably undead. Dispelling them would not be a good idea; they will run out and their maker will notice."

Navero: "They must be put out of their misery. They cannot be allowed to go on in this way."

Topash: "Yes, I agree. They must be returned to their earth, but silently."

Kortul: "Right."

Navero cast Silence again, and the party moved in and stomped them all into the earth. The one with glasses proved exceptionally tough, but they weren't much trouble. Everyone got a Cure Light, and went to a window in the side of the hall. Inside was a corridor going northwards, with doors on the sides; we could faintly hear some arguing at the other end. We went in the window, went down to the end of the corridor, and looked out. Inside was the main meeting hall, with a big table and some chairs. There was a gigantic ape in a cage, lots of stuff spread out on the table, and two people standing and arguing. One was a big man in full plate, with a gigantic broadsword, and the other a robed, clericly type of great ugliness. Navero cancelled the Silence.

Navero: <Casts Hold Person on the fighter in plate>

Dania: “Bolt!” <Lightning bolt on the priest>

Kortul: <Moves into room, shoots priest>

Kory: <Sings battle song>

Norrin: <Moves into room, pulls out bag of dust>

Meth: <Is at the back of the party>

Topash: <Draws his scimitar and tries to move up front>

Fighter: “Urk!”

Priest: “What is this?” <Casts Flame Strike in corridor entrance; Gets Navero, Dania, and Kory>

Dania: <Drops>

Navero: “OW!” <Casts Hold Person on Priest; it doesn’t work>

Kory: “You bastard! Prepare to suck steel!” <Leaps into the room>

Topash: “Ah-ha!” <Casts Heat Metal on the fighters plate>

Kortul: <Draws Sun Sword, charges forward>

Meth: “This is not going at all well, is it?”

Topash: “Well, I think one of them is out already, and the other should follow fairly soon. I hope.”

Norrin: <Throws bag at priest; misses, and dust sprays over the wall behind him> “Damn it!”

Fighter: “Urk!” <Plate mail is growing very warm>

Priest: “Die!” <To Kortul; Kortul drops>

Meth: “Uh-oh.” <Smears something on a dagger and throws it; it misses>

Navero: <Cure Serious on Dania>

Topash: <Casts Heat Metal again> “Hadn’t someone better try to take him out?”

Norrin: “This may take a little time.” <Shoots priest twice>

Dania: “Oww...”

Kory: “HI-YEEEEAAH!” <Leaps over table to attack priest>

Fighter: “URK!” <Plate mail is very hot; Burning smell fills room>

Priest: <Waves his hand at Kory, who takes 18 hit points damage>

Kory: “Ow!” \*Thud\*

Navero: <Casts Hold Person on Priest, it doesn’t work again>

Meth: <Throws another smeared up dagger; this one hits> “I’d say we’ll have nothing to worry about in a few minutes, boys and girls.”

Dania: “Fuck a few minutes! STORM!” <Great crackling out of staff, huge forks of lightning strike priest>

Priest: <Wobbles, then falls>

Fighter: “Aggg..” <Toasted smell fills the room>

Dania: “Check on everybody.”

Kortul was not dead; he had made his saving throw and a wisdom check and was merely stunned. The fighter was dead; roasted inside his plate mail. After everyone was bandaged up and healed, we searched the room for interesting things. The fighter had a cloak, his sword and armor, and a ring; the priest had bracers, boots and a pair of rings, along with a wand which we suspected was the “charm stick.” A few things were scattered about the table, along with maps of the complex and other stuff dealing with the dwarves. Kory and Meth found an entrance down to a vault, with a great deal of gold; Navero insisted that none of it was to be taken.

The gorilla in the cage was identified as a carnivorous ape; it was probably trained to attack. Topash had trouble communicating with it, as it was almost intelligent enough not to be an animal, but he eventually got the message across that we weren't going to hurt it. We then let it out and it went running away.

The main entrance to the mines was north of the town hall; we went up to the door and knocked, and were greeted by about 60 armored dwarves with big crossbows aimed at us. After we revealed that the attackers were dead and we had the charming device, they asked us to go down and try to un-charm the dwarves. Neither Navero nor Dania could figure out how the wand worked, but a dwarf told us the priest renewed the charm every day, so we assumed it would wear off of its own. Korgurindin took possession of the wand himself, and congratulated us on our success.

Korgurindin: “Impressive, if I do say so myself. Not a single one of the people killed, and all of our wealth still in the vaults. You impress us with your honesty, and have our gratitude.”

Dania: “Fine. Can we have our money?”

Korgurindin: “Ah, yes. 200 each.”

Dania: “300.”

Korgurindin: “300 each, as agreed upon. I hope you will feel free to stay and rest from your labors for a little while, there should be rooms for people your size in Stranger's hall. My servant will show you there.”

Dania: “Nah, lets just get.”

Topash: “We would be delighted to accept your hospitality, of course. Come along, Dania.”

We rested for a while in Dwarf town, healing and identifying and dividing up treasures. We didn't get too much money, but enough to make us happier than before. The dwarves destroyed the wand. The magic items:

- Unidentifiable Silver Ring (went to Topash)
- Unidentifiable Gold Ring (to Kory)
- Ring of Warmth (to Navero)
- Boots of Elvenkind (to Norrin)
- Bracers of Defence, AC: 6 (to Dania)
- Broadsword, +3 (Nobody had proficiency in broadsword.  
Sold to the dwarves and divided up.)
- Plate mail, +1 (to Kortul)
- Cloak of Flying (to Kortul)
- Candle of Invocation (Chaotic Evil. Destroyed.)
- Potion of Vitality (to Meth)
- Philther of Love (to Meth)
- Scroll of Create Food & Water (to Navero)
- Scroll of Entangle, Shillelagh (to Topash)
- Scroll - Protection from Cold (to Norrin)

We rode out again the next day. As we got to the road, a subtle change came over the land again; the blue grass and snow cats vanished, and snow began to gently fall once more. Norrin left to return to his forest, and Razuli appeared.

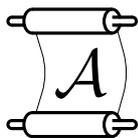
Razuli: “Hey, where the hell have you all been? I got teleported into King Mangit-tun’s harem and had myself a good ol’ time. Wizzerd, nice bracelets! I thought of you often. Hey, where do we go now, kids?”

Kory: “Good to see you again, sir! Now everything is the way it should be.”

Dania: “I liked it better the other way. Let’s go.”

*“Do we still have all that money and stuff we got?”*

## XL



LAS, while the adventures of Navero and his friends continued, there wasn't enough time for all of them to be recorded for posterity. The party went from first up to ninth and tenth level, and the campaign ran for three years, real time. There is simply too much to tell.

While a full retelling isn't possible, here is a selection of the better moments from the latter years of the campaign. They are not in any particular order.

So, without any further ado...

### THE LAST PLAYER CHARACTERS: SERGA TERATIS, LAO TSU

We had gotten out of the dwarf mines and asked a friendly friar we met if he knew where the Orb of Spheres was. He said he had heard it was in this evil temple to the east (which just happened to be an enemy of his own religion, as it turned out.) We went over to investigate, and while we were camped in the woods outside the temple grounds, a huge hairy hill in banded mail walked up to our campfire.

Hairy Hill: "Hello!"

All elves: "AHHH!" <Assorted weapons drawn>

Dania: "WHAT IN GODS NAME IS \*THAT\* THING?"

Hairy Hill: "Aw, cute little elf-persons. Can I sit down here?"

Navero: "Uh, who are you?"

Hairy Hill: "My name's Serga. I won't eat you."

Dania: "...uh, sure, fine. Just stay over there."

Serga was a half-ogre fighter with a huge sword and not much cash. The player illuminated us on his background. Once upon a time, there was a baby. It was much worse than other babies: for one thing, it was larger. It came in the wake of an Ogre raid on a human village. The mother died in childbirth, and her family left it out to starve. A kindly and sickeningly good elven mage who lived nearby took in the repulsive little foundling, and tried to raise it as best she could, teaching it manners and social graces, as it was obvious the child was going to have a rough life. Serga moved out on coming of age, and tried to open a restaurant; it was a spectacular lack of success. Taking some advice shouted at him to heart, he decided to put his talents to work in a more suitable way, and became an adventurer.

Serga did not get treated well by the elves, who regarded him with much distaste (the humans thought he smelled, but were mostly indifferent.) We went on to the temple, and were attacked by a pair of Slaad.

The Sladd were tough; one got killed after a lengthy battle, and then the other vanished. Seconds later, a delayed-blast Fireball went off in the middle of the party. Dania, Kortul, Navero, and Kory made their saves and dived out of the main blast radius for half damage. Razuli and Meth failed, and were both killed. Serga failed his save, took the blast at ground zero, and lived. The Sladd reappeared, and Serga jumped it and hacked it bits and then jumped up and down on the bits until they didn't even go squish any more. Pretty good for a 3rd level character.

After it was over, Navero healed Serga's wounds.

Serga: "Hey... you did something \*nice\* for me... No one's ever done anything nice for me..."

Navero: "Well, uh..."

Serga: "FRIEND!! THANK YOU!!" <BIG hug>

Navero: "Urkkk!" (Ever been hugged by a half-ogre?)

Serga: "Oh, sorry."

Navero (after a short break to heal a collapsed lung) chipped out an epitaph for Meth and Razuli in a rock and gave last rites for the bodies.

Meth's ghost: Say, dearest dungeon master, what will happen when Navero gets a whiff of the remains of Meth's wonderful lungs?

Game Master: <Evil grin> Gee, I don't know. Make a save vs. poison, Navero.

Navero: <Flubs it, of course> "What's that funny smoke? Err..."

Meth's ghost: I have succeeded in my life's quest to get Navero stoned!

Game Master: Yes, all the gods are very impressed. You are now the new demi-god of illegal pharmaceuticals.  
<Navero's head gently implodes and he wanders around hallucinating>

Inside the temple, we found a monk named Lao Tsu, Ken's replacement for Meth Crystal. Lao was from a far eastern land, and had suddenly appeared in this part of the world, and had no idea why he was here. Lao and Navero almost immediately got into an argument.

Lao Tsu: "As Confucius say, 'Grasshopper is to sparrow as falsehood is to zen.' War and fighting have place."

Navero: "But war is something to be avoided! No one is happy when people are getting killed and in pain. We should help each other."

Lao Tsu: "Help others? Impediment to the path to true self. All move towards their own destinies, as sun to west and smoke to sky."

Navero: "But a person alone cannot succeed at accomplishing anything of great value. A society is made up of many people working together."

Lao Tsu: "Why this stress on accomplishment? What is to be accomplished that will not be balanced? No; your karma is your only concern."

Navero: "But we should at least try to do good for people. If we don't, the world will be pulled the other way by evil people."

Serga: "You sound right... But you sound right... Maybe you're both right!"

Navero: "But we can't both be right."

Serga: "Well, he says he comes from someplace else, far away. Maybe he's right over there!"

After all this, we went through a LONG dungeon crawl culminating in a fight with Dania's old master from Swamp Keep. He had the orb, so we waxed sorely pissed and sent it off to the snake lords.

## **KORY SILVERTONGUE'S REVENGE**

After Razuli and Meth died, Kory remained as the party's sole clown. He did not like the position very much; people kept telling him to shut up, especially Dania. Tiring of this party and especially of its resident witch, he got a potion which rendered him immune to alcohol from an alchemist, and dosed himself with it when we had another drinking contest. Naurally, he had no problem drinking the other party members under, except for Navero, who did not drink. Navero got drugged milk. Each party member got a different form of his revenge, depending on how well they had treated him.

Serga got a hallucinogen. He wandered about the town in a happy daze, bowing to the pretty ladies and remarking on what a lovely shade of paisley the sky was.

Topash had mostly ignored Kory. He woke up in a tree.

Lao got sewed into his gi, with a plentiful supply of itching powder.

Kortul woke up with his armor on backwards. It was flexible enough for him to get out of, but it wasn't easy. Immediately after, he went looking for Kory to give him a piece of his mind.

Kortul: *<Stomping down the street, sees Serga>* "Where's the bard?"

Serga: "Hmm, hmm hm hmm... Oh, hi! With those antlers I almost didn't recognize you. They're very nice."

Kortul: (???)

Serga: "But I do think the tentacles and melting eyeballs are a bit much."

Kortul: *<Almost, but not quite, smiles>* "Hmph." *<Resumes stomping>*

Dania woke up naked and tied spread-eagle in front of the main doors of the main temple of Gothard. The words 'Used Virgin' had been painted across her... you know. It was still quite late at night, so there were only a few pedestrians out on the street. Her only hope was that the watch would be told before a priest noticed...

Priest: *<Walks out of the doors>* "Hello. I am a Priest of Gothard."

Game Master: Dania, make a saving throw vs. magic at -4.

Dania: *<... makes it!>* "Hi! Cut me down. Please?"

Priest: *<Cuts her down>* "Will there be anything else?"

Dania: "Do I have to make another saving throw?"

Game Master: "Nope. You can do whatever you like."

Dania: "... Oh, hell. It's vacation time."

Navero had been nice, so why he got what he did is a mystery to me.

Navero: *<Wakes up tied into a bed with two naked nubile young females>*

Female: "Hi, tiny heiny."

Navero: "Huh? AAHHHH!!!"

Out in the streets, Serga is told by someone that his good buddy friend Navero is in terrible danger, and needs to be rescued at this address. Serga charged into the perfumed and sumptuous house, stomped on the bouncer, and charged upstairs to save his dear friend from imminent doom.

Serga: "I'll save you! I'll save you from these... beautiful young women?"

Females: *<Stare in shock and horror at Serga>*

Navero: "HELP!"

Serga: "Where are your shining white vestments, o holy priest?"

Navero: "Help, help, they were going to..."

Serga: "You're kinda cute. Where'd you get that whip?"

Female: “NO! NO! There are SOME things I will NOT do! HARRY YOU BASTARD I’M GONNA...”  
<Stomps out>

Navero: <In a fit of Herculean mania he rips his bonds apart, grabs a blanket and breaks the 1-minute mile getting out of the area>

Serga: “Wow! I never knew he could run that fast. I guess he was really inspired.”

Kory Silvertongue was not seen again for a long time. We heard lots of rumors of an obnoxious elf with golden eyes, singing hilarious songs about a bunch of bumbling idiots wandering around getting into trouble, and people would remark that we bore a startling resemblance to them. We, of course, knew nothing about these people, but if you could just give us the current whereabouts of that stupid bard...

## MORE RUST MONSTERS

We were going through a dungeon. Kortul had picked up a cursed bastard sword, and everyone was pretty beat up. Serga was at the front of the party to soak up damage (he had a new suit of plate armor) and opened a door into a room with polished stone walls. Serga couldn’t see anything, so he opened the door all the way, to reveal a Greater Basilisk that had been hiding behind the door.

Basilisk: <Looks at Navero, who naturally fails his saving throw>

Serga: “RAAARRGHH!!” <Charges in, kicks the basilisk in the throat and gets a strangle hold on it’s neck>

Party: <Everyone rushes in and starts beating on the basilisk>

Basilisk: “Hey, leggo! You’re not supposed to do that!”

Serga: <Slams basilisks face into the polished, reflective wall> “Look at that, you &@ \$#&@&!” <It doesn’t work; He contents himself with strangling the thing>

Dania: “Ok, I got a scroll that’ll work for Navero. Wait a second...”

Navero returned to the land of the living to find a half-ogre staring into his face with a worried look.

Serga: “Are you alright?”

Navero: “I think so...”

Serga: “Good! Priest-friend!” <Hugs Navero>

Navero: “Urrkkk!” (Ever been hugged by a half-ogre in PLATE armor?)

Serga: “Sorry.” <Serga never hugged any of the elves; Dania was real good at making things go \*BOOM\*, but she’d probably break like a twig...>

There was nothing in the room, so we continued on.

Game Master: Ok, you open the door onto the next room, Serga. Inside, you see two rust-colored creatures with long feelers and propellers on the ends of their tails. They see you and bound towards you happily.

Serga: Those sound like... “NO!!!!” <A panicking half-ogre backpedals through a party of elves; I shall leave the sound effects to your imaginations; The door is slammed>

Kortul: <Shucks armor, goes in with cursed sword; The rust monsters eat it, and Kortul gets 100 xp. for clever thinking>

Dania: <Goes in with her staff to beat the rust monsters to death so we can get through; They cry piteously and hide in the corners> “Aww... I can’t do this. How are we gonna get through here?”

Kortul: "Tie them up."

The rust monsters were eventually tied up and fed an old battle axe, and we went through the room safely. They seemed happier, and so did we.

## THE COLLECTED FUMBLES OF NAVERO

Actually, Navero fumbled far too often for there to be any sort of comprehensive list of all the times he flubbed it. It's not that Navero had poor ability scores—they're quite good, actually—but somehow he managed to fumble to-hit rolls and saving throws more often than the rest of the party combined. This was always a source of great confusion to him. I did very well when rolling for Kortul, so it obviously wasn't ME. As a result, failed rolls of any sort came to be almost synonymous with poor Nav; even when he succeeded, it was usually a mixed blessing. I think that Navero's few critical hits should illustrate what I mean.

*<A fight with a lot of gnolls in a big dungeon>*

Navero: "Go away you evil nasty smelly icky things!" *<Fumbles>*

Game Master: *<Roll roll...>* Navero, roll to hit yourself.

Navero's first ever critical hit.

Game Master: Ok... you hit yourself in the, um...

Navero: Let me guess. The groin.

Game Master: Yes. For double damage.

Navero: *<Drops with a shriek and hears no more; The gnolls don't attack him, as they are too busy laughing; Serga came over and killed them>*

Serga: "Are you alright, priest-friend?"

Navero: "Eep!"

Serga: "Maybe you should stay out of the front lines."

Dania: "Well, we keep telling him that. You ok, Nav?"

Topash: "Ah, Navero. He of the Bulging Backpack, with his mighty mace of self-destruction. I feel ever so secure with him around. *<Breaks into song>* A grazing mace, how high the shriek..."

Much later. Navero has been drained by a vampire, but a spreading empire has declared his religion illegal, and he must seek a restoration outside of the faith. The only ones available are some priests of Poseidon, who charge a bundle.

Priest: "Well, how do you feel? Do you feel the power of the god flowing through your every fiber?"

Navero: "I feel seasick..."

Game Master: Navero, roll less than your constitution on a d20 to avoid nausea.

Navero: *<Rolls a 20, of course>*

Game Master: Navero, roll to hit the high priest of Poseidon.

Navero's second ever critical hit.

Game Master: Oh, my... Well...

Dania: Bazooka-barf!

Topash: Right into his face!

Game Master: Yep. Then he turns to his assistant and throws up on him. The assistant then looses it, and they both collapse very sick.

Naverro: "Ooog..." <Wobbles out>

Naverro's third (and last) critical hit was not nearly so interesting; he hit an Umber Hulk in the arm and crippled the limb. Of course, he was 8th level, and if your character doesn't begin to show \*some\* signs of competence by that point...

## THE WIERD DRUID

Our DM was pretty good with NPC's. At one point we were conscripted into an army, and got stones embedded in our foreheads; they were some kind of mind control mechanism. We escaped the domain of the controlling wizard into the domain of another wizard (Duke Desmond, actually. He nearly killed us, as we weren't about to call on THEM.) and the stones ceased to function. We then fled into the wilderness to try and find a way to get rid of them.

We were wandering down a path, very upset with life in general, when we heard something scuffling in the bushes. Kortul went to investigate.

Kortul: <Jumps out in front of an old druid dragging a body away>

Druid: "Oh, hello, you startled me! I, eh, I was getting this man, uh, you see, cause he has this strange stone in his forehead, there, and Oh you have one too, uh, hum."

Topash: "Hail, father, we are travellers who have unfortunately been taken and controlled against our will, by a man who implanted these."

Druid: "Oh, mind control, yes, I see. Would be likely. Would you all like to come to my house while I have a look?"

We all went to his house. It was a small wood dwelling in a clearing, with a large garden and many beautiful flowers. The Druid took the dead body inside while we waited outside. Serga admired the flowers and butterflies, Topash communed, and Naverro petted the Unicorns, which ran away from Dania. Then we were invited in. The body had been laid on the table, with the head cut open to reveal that the stone was a spike driven deep into the lower centers of the brain.

Topash: "That looks serious, father. Do you know how it might be removed?"

Druid: "Well, just pull it out, my boy, don't be an ass."

Dania: "He means without killing the patient."

Druid: "What? Oh, you mean for you, yes... Hmm... Let me look in my books, so many things in books. Look, here's a recipe for making a tasty soup from the tail feathers of a roc, a diamond, and 12 feet of twine... Hmm... removal, removal..."

Dania: "Maybe that book over there titled 'Secrets of the body.'"

Druid: "Oh, yes. Hmm... Ah, here is an account from Geriatrix the younger on the surgeons of the eastern continent. You might give them a try. This is more up their alley, I believe."

Kortul: "Long trip."

Druid: "Yes, they do live rather a long ways away."

Naverro: "Is there anyone here who might know?"

Druid: "Hmm. . . nope, no I don't think so."

Topash: "Well, I suppose we'd better go, then. Perhaps on the way over we can make some soup from the tail feathers of a roc."

Druid: "From WHAT?? Yuck! Why would you want to do that?"

## NAVERO HEALS THE SICK

Naverro would often go out into any town we stayed in at night, to heal the sick and comfort the dying and otherwise waste spell points on the NPC's. One particular town we stopped in was a real rough sea coast town, where we had already been attacked several times; Kortul had also killed a young nobleman who insulted him, and we weren't sure when the body would be discovered.

Naverro: *<To assembled group>* "I'm going out for a while. I'll see you in the morning." *<Leaves>*

Topash: "Should we let him go out alone?"

Dania: "Right. I'll follow him and make sure he's alright." *<Leaves>*

Topash: "I'd better go as well." *<Leaves>*

Serga: "He's my friend! I better go." *<Leaves>*

Kortul: "Hmmm. . ." *<Leaves>*

And so, Naverro went walking down the rough avenues of the town, with the rest of the party trailing behind him single file to make sure he didn't get hurt. Sure enough, he was soon accosted by three rakish young gentleman.

Rake 1: "Well, hello! A man of the cloth! Or is it a choir boy?"

Rake 2: "So hard to tell. Shall we have him sing, then?"

Naverro: "Greetings, sirs! I am acolyte Naverro of the Correct and Unalterable Way, here to spread the devotion and aid those in need. I come in all humility to your fair town to honestly help as my faith allows. Who might you be, gentlemen?"

Rake 1: "We \*might\* be just about anyone, might we? But we are, I suppose, in some need of, ah. . . curative magic?"

Rake 3: "I do think so. Will you come drink with us, boy?"

Naverro: "Certainly! I have some water right here!"

Dania: *<Walks up>* "Sure, we'll come with you! Right, Nav?"

Rake 3: "Oh, I see you are quite devoted to your charges, dear cleric. Is this your little girl, then?"

Rake 1: "Little girl? Are you blind? Do not her outstanding characters and virtues leap out to the eye? I would hardly call this one little, my good friend."

Rake 3: "Oh, I must apologize, dear. . . lady."

Dania: "Right."

Naverro: "Doesn't anyone want any water?"

Rake 2: "Well, there is one thing. The girl."

Rake 1: “Ah, yes. Oh, gentle preist, we have a great need of you. A woman, in our acquaintance, is ill with some... chemical imbalance, and suffers o most mightily. We have tried to \*comfort\* her in her hour of \*great\* need, but alas, I fear she needs you.”

Rake 3: “Oh, she needs you o so very much.”

Naverro: “Where is she?”

Rake 1: “She awaits upstairs at this inn. Go to her, mighty priest. Let your holy staff do its work.”

Naverro: “I will. It was good of you to tell me. Thank you.”

Upstairs at the inn, one door is ajar. Inside, in a dimly lit room, a woman lies on a bed. She is nude, and breathing very heavily, thrashing about on the bed like a wild animal.

Naverro: <Looks in> “Hello?”

Woman: “Uhhhhhrrrr...” <Looks to door, eyes Naverro hungrilly>

Dania: “Looks serious, Nav. Think you can handle it?”

Naverro: “I’m afraid I must. There are no others here who can.”

Woman: “I feel... hot... whats happening uhhrrRRR...” <Starts clawing Naverro’s garments>

Dania: “That’s for sure. Good luck, Nav.”

Naverro: <Uses staff of curing to cure poison>

Woman: “Uh... what?! AHH!! Get out!” <Slams door>

Naverro goes back downstairs, Dania laughing to herself behind. In the inn common room, one of the rakes greeted them.

Rake 2: “Uh... I’m sorry. Jeofri gave her something, he said it’d be fun, and we, uh, took her up, and, uh...”

Naverro: “Uh, I think I see. It was a very bad thing you did.”

Rake 2: “Yes, holy father.”

Naverro: “Uh... don’t do anything like it again.” <Leaves>

Outside...

Naverro: “Hey, he called me holy father! Can he do that?”

Dania: “Why not? Sure, he’s older than you, but you’re the cleric.” You just hit 8th level, remember?

Naverro: “Wow...”

## A MEMORABLE CONVERSATION

While on a long boat trip to the eastern continent to look into the small matter of surgery, the characters finally got a chance to sit down and relax for the first time in about 4 levels. We were sitting up in Dania’s cabin, except Naverro, who was curled up in his own bunk. Naverro was seasick for the entire trip. (Why do people come up with spells like Gorgar’s Spell of Tactical Nuclear Devestation, but no Cure Seasickness?) At this point, the party had shrunk to Naverro, Dania, Kortul, Topash, and Serga.

Topash: “. . . we’re past pirate waters, and the Sea Dragon is dead, and the captain says we’ll be there in 2 or 3 months, smooth sailing.”

Dania: "Two or three months with nothing to do. Shit."

*<Pause; Everybody sits and stares at each other>*

Dania: "Haven't had that for a long time."

Topash: "Nope."

*<Longer pause>*

Serga: "Why did you become an adventurer, Topash?"

Topash: "I'm not. I travel with you because it is convenient, an excellent way to discover sources of imbalance."

Serga: "You mean adventures?"

Topash: "Well... yes, I suppose."

Kortul: "Which makes you adventurer."

Topash: "Well, yes. Hmm... Why are you an adventurer, Serga?"

Serga: "Not much else I can do for a living. I tried opening a food place, but it didn't work."

Dania: "Ha! Don't doubt it; they'd probably think there were eating people, or, er..."

Topash: "Tactful this evening, aren't we?"

Dania: "I'm sorry..."

Serga: "Never mind, it's ok. I'm used to it. What I really want is to get a nice house somewhere with a garden, maybe a gardener, with flowers and butterflies, and lots of nice songbirds."

Dania: "Somehow, I can see that. You'd probably have the house sized to you, of course."

Serga: "Well, I'd keep some normal furniture for guests. I wouldn't make you sit in a chair sized for me, little magic-user."

Dania: "Thanks. I'd feel like a kid again."

Topash: "Why are you out here, doing this?"

Dania: "Hmm... Well, when I started, I'd gotten kicked out of home by my father. He caught me in bed with a Drow. So, I just want enough money to buy a castle bigger than his. The best revenge is living well."

Topash: "Did you like your father?"

Dania: "No. He was a paladin for the Paths of Light, and he was always somewhere else, killing dragons or something. I got a Holy Avenger for my 16th birthday. I think I dissapointed him, he wanted a son. Mom ignored me; she was always either diddling in magic or dancing in the woods with her flaky relatives. Mom and dad didn't get along too good."

Serga: "That's sad! Didn't they spend time with you?"

Dania: "Not much."

Topash: "So that's all you wish to do? Just do well enough to spite your parents? Surely you must have some long-range goals, a household, children..."

Dania: "Children? Me?! I don't think so. I'd probably be a lousy mother. Sometimes I think I'm too much like my own mother, and I can't see myself devoting myself to some kid. Besides, what would you guys do without me, huh?"

Kortul: "Go out, have fun without you?"

Dania: “Ha! I can just see myself, 8 months gone, running after you guys, ‘Hey! Wait for me!’ Damn, I’d miscarry on a horse.”

Kortul: “Hmph.”

Dania: “What about you?”

Kortul: “Simple. Get money, get fame, make my name. Go back, set up a house and start family. Raid, or farm, or herd, as needed to live. No intention of adventuring permanently. Only masochists go out, get beat up for a living.”

Topash: “This is just a means to an end.”

Dania: “That’s kind of sad. What about us?”

Kortul: “Want to get married?”

Dania: “WHAT!?”

Kortul: “Me neither.”

Topash: “Why don’t we declare this a group marriage and go live at Serga’s?”

Kortul: “Only one woman.”

Dania: “Hey, I don’t mind.”

Serga: “You sure?”

Dania: “Uh, well, er, uh. . .”

Kortul: “Ha!”

Dania: “It’s not funny.”

Topash: “Would Navero perform the ceremony?”

Dania: “I kinda doubt it. He is a little less. . . uh, he’s a little less than he was when we first met, but he’s still kind of innocent.”

Topash: “Yes. . . So much has happened.”

Dania: “Yeah. Remember when you tried to get Kory out of that trapper?”

Topash: “Yes. Remember when Meth Crystal drugged the Night Hag?”

Serga: “When did that happen?”

Dania: “Long time ago. I don’t think you ever met him.”

Serga: “Well, he died, but that’s all I ever saw of him. Are you still mad at Kory?”

Dania: “Huh? No, not much.”

Serga: “I just want to find out what he put in my drink. Maybe bounce him off a wall or two.”

<Pause>

Dania: “What are we gonna do?”

Kortul: “Get out of latest mess. Go back. See what next mess is.”

Dania: “What do you think these surgeon people will do?”

Topash: "No idea."

<Pause>

Dania: "What about when there aren't any more messes?"

Topash: "We'll make some more, just like always."

Kortul: "Take care of that when needs be. Getting late."

Dania: "Yeah. Good night, all."

Topash: "Good night."



## Player Character Gallery

### **Navero, Priest of the Correct and Unalterable Way**

9th level human cleric Neutral Good (Survived)  
5'9", 160#, curly brown hair, big blue eyes, 21 years old at campaign's end. Died 3 times, resurrected 3 times. Only character to ever be resurrected. Sweetest person in the party, everybody took care to look out for him. Some possessions: Staff of Curing; Ring of Truth; Mace +2

### **Dania Couliari**

10th level 1/2-elven (wood) magic user Chaotic Neutral (Survived)  
4'9", 80#, straight dirty blonde hair, green eyes, 47 years old at campaign's end. Impressive vocabulary. Screams to get attention or to make her feelings known. Has been most hated and most loved party member in the campaign. Only woman. Some possessions: Staff of Thunder and Lightning; Bracers of Defense, AC 4; Ring of Levitation

### **Rourk Ravensbane**

3rd level drow cavalier Chaotic Good (Killed by Vampire)  
5'2", 120#, dead white hair, red eyes, 168 years old at time of death. Affectionately known as "Helmet head" due to his reluctance to remove his helmet. Bloody arrogant, a very good drow. Some possessions: Two Bastard Swords, Plate Mail of Great Ornament

### **Rizudo/Razuli**

5th level human fighter Chaotic Neutral (Killed by a Sladd)  
6'0", 175#, straight brown hair, brown eyes, age unknown. Prime party irritant until Kory showed up. Made many crude sexual jokes. Coined term "Helmet head." Did some of his best material when with Kory. Some possessions: Longsword +1, +4 vs. Reptiles; Ring of Gronk Control

### **The Assassin (name unknown)**

1st level drow assassin. Left game almost when it started.

### **Kortul, son of Korgur**

9th level human fighter Chaotic neutral (Survived)  
6'3", 230#, long straight black hair, brown eyes, 31 years old at campaign's end. Seldom spoke, then in clipped sentences. Sneered a lot. Strongest and ugliest person in party until Serga showed up. Some possessions: Two-handed Sun Sword; Cloak of Flying; Ring of Free Action

### **Arlor**

4th level dwarf thief Neutral (Killed by undead poodles)  
4'7", 135#, brown hair, black eyes, age unknown. Lost and confused most of the time, a quiet personality who did not get on with all the bitching normal to the campaign. Some possessions: Standard Lockpick Set; Standard Leather Armor; Short Sword

