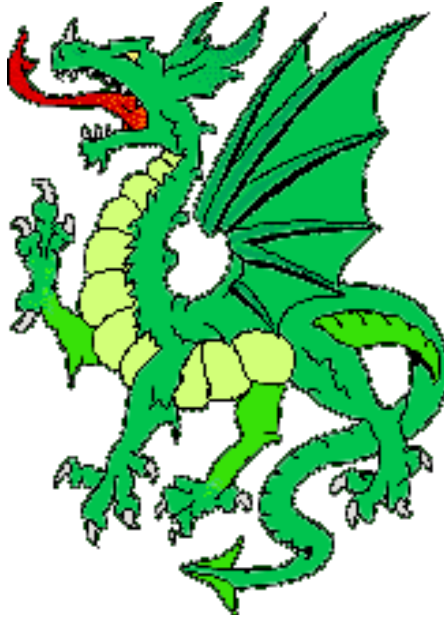


The Adventurers: Book One



by Thomas Miller

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Introductions



Date: 11/4/569 C.Y. (Common Year)
Time: Evening
Place: The Green Dragon Inn, in Fax, on the Wild Coast
Climate: Cold

Winter was fast approaching. The place was Fax, on the Wild Coast far to the south and east of the city of Greyhawk. Cold winds blew a chill throughout the town, but within closed doors people were gathered in warm homes and taverns. Inside one such place, much of importance was taking place...

In a dim, candlelit corner of the Green Dragon Inn, a rather unusual assortment of individuals was gathered, in response to a mysterious summons. They had all been waiting for a while at a large wooden table, and some were certainly getting anxious.

The summons had come in different ways for different members of this group - some of them had received letters, while others had been told to meet here by strange, hooded messengers. A couple of the people at the table had heard rumors and showed up here tonight on a whim, to find that their advice had been correct. Something was indeed brewing at the Green Dragon Inn. Some of those gathered had already started talking amongst themselves.

(silver-haired elf in purple robe): Greetings! I am Ged, a priest of Boccob.
And who might _you_ be?

(stocky dwarf in chain mail): I am Mongo Thunderhead, youngest of the Clan Thunderhead and a great warrior!

(very tall, rough-looking elf): You may call me...Belphanior.

(powerfully built half-elf, in hides): Well met, sir! I am Peyote, he of the forests. This fellow to my right is Sir Halbarad, also a traveler of the woodlands.

(Halbarad, a woodsman in greenish-brown leather): Pleased to make your acquaintances.

(gigantic human warrior, in hides, unshaven): Hmph. I am Krug.

Mongo: Boy, are you ever. What do you do for a living?

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Krug: Kill things.

Mongo: Oh.

Also seated at the table were a figure in a shadowed black cloak, who had not said a word yet, and a nondescript human in old leather armor, who every so often ordered another mug of ale for himself. Suddenly, a portly human, dressed in priestly robes, tripped near the table and fell on his face.

(priest): Ouch! (getting up) Hey! Are you guys here for the mission that I've heard about?

Belphanior: Maybe.

Ged: Who are you to ask us this?

Priest: I am Rob, wandering healer and inventor. Pleased to make your acquaintance, yes I am. (dusts himself off and starts shaking hands with some of the others)

As the group made small talk, an elderly man approached slowly. He surveyed the group, with a slight nod of approval, then pulled up a chair for himself. He was thin and looked quite bedraggled.

(old man): Greetings, noble adventurers. I am Cassius, he who took steps to gather you all here.

Belphanior: Why have you done this? I trust that you have some reason?

Ged: Quiet, fool. Pray continue, friend Cassius.

Cassius: I have need of a capable and multi-talented group of individuals to transport something to another place for me. As I have business here every day, I cannot do it myself; thus, the need for all of you.

Krug: Cashus, huh? I hope you have lot of money, Cashus, if I am to work with fools such as this (gesturing to Rob the priest).

Ged: The everpresent element of greed manifests itself...

Halbarad: Truly.

Cassius: You will have to travel west and south, to Courwood, in the southern reach of Celene. There will be a hazardous patch of forest, as well as some light hills and plains. You must allow nothing to hinder you, for a close friend of mine in Courwood has need of that which you will be carrying.

Belphanior: Which is...?

Cassius: (pulls a dull metal tube from his cloak; it is about a foot long and three inches in diameter) This is your cargo. It has no intrinsic value but is very important to my associate in Courwood. Upon completion of this mission you will each receive two hundred coins of gold for your trouble.

(nondescript human, unidentified as yet): We'll take half of that in advance.

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Ged: Have you a name, greedy one?

(human): I am Peldor, swashbuckler supreme. I'm sure that you'll be thankful that I'm along on this trip.

Belphanior: Two hundred gold? Is that ALL?!?

Krug: Two hundred gold fine with _me_.

Cassius: As an advance payment, I will provide horses for you all to use on your trip...which will be returned to me when you are done, of course.

Peldor: Of course.

Ged: (eyeing Peldor with a wary look)

Cassius: Who will be the carrier of this cargo?

Peldor: I'll take it!

Halbarad, Ged, Mongo, Peyote: NO!

Mongo: I'll carry it, thank you.

Cassius: Very well. (hands the tube to Mongo) Here it is...

The tavern was silent, for four mean-looking ruffians were making their way toward the table. They were dressed in dirty clothes and carried swords and crossbows. Arriving at the table, they drew their swords, and one raised a crossbow.

Peldor: (to DM) I unsheath one of my daggers and prepare to throw it.

Mongo: Uh-oh.

Ged: What is the meaning of this nonsense? Who are you people?

Ruffian#1: Nobody move!

Ruffian#2: (shoots Cassius in the chest)

Mongo: Hey! (stands up) What'd they do that for? (draws sword)

Peyote: (to DM) I loosen my sword in its sheath.

Halbarad: (to DM) Ditto.

Krug: (also stands up) Grunt. (downs last of his mug of ale)

(unidentified shadowy figure): (whispering to itself)

Suddenly, the room began to fill with fog, especially in the immediate area of the ruffians. Some of the adventurers present didn't waste any time taking advantage of this opportunity...

Peldor: (missing from table)

Halbarad, Krug, and Mongo: (draw weapons and move to engage opponents)

Krug: Good! A fray!

Ruffian#1: (swings at Halbarad, misses)

Krug: (hits one, ruffian#2) Die scum! (rolling very high damage for his two-handed sword, he slays his opponent) Hah! First blood to me! Cashus is avenged!

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Belphanior: (scores a minor cut on ruffian#3) Tell us who sent you and we might let you live!

Ruffian#3: Never, dolt! (hits Belphanior) Surrender or die, that's what you can do!

Belphanior: Ouch! Fuck!

Ged: (off to the side, preparing a spell)

Peyote: (trying to decide which spell to use)

Rob: I cower in the corner.

DM: Ok.

Halbarad: (swings and hits ruffian#1, who collapses, dying)

Peldor: (hits with his backstab attempt, finishing Belphanior's opponent)

That's the first of many victories you'll owe to the might of Peldor!

Ruffian#4: Aaa! (swings a mighty blow at Mongo, but it bounces harmlessly off of his chain mail)

Mongo: Oof! Bastard! Let me show you how it's done! (Mongo got the worst initiative roll and goes last, but nails his opponent with a critical hit, slaying him instantly)

DM: Mongo, that's...a head critical. His head flies off to the left.

Belphanior: (to DM) Can I catch it?

DM: Why? Oh, why not? Make a Dex check.

Belphanior: (makes it easily) I've got the head!

Ged: That's sick. (to DM) Forget the spell. I think things are well in hand now.

Rob: Hey guys! Cassius is dying!

Ged: (takes a look at the wound) Hmm. Poison most foul!

Cassius: (with his dying breath) Belegard! Seek Belegard...in Courwood!

Ack! (expires. His skin is covered in oozing sores, an effect of the poison on the bolt.)

Ged: Is he beyond healing?

DM: Dead as a doornail.

Mongo: (surveying the tavern) Awfully quiet in here all of a sudden...

Rob: Shouldn't we contact the authorities?

Ged: It would be the right thing to do...

Belphanior: I think we had best leave, now, before things get any worse.

Halbarad: Much as I hate to agree, that would be the best option at this point.

Peldor: I search his pockets.

DM: Whose pockets?

Peldor: All of them. All the dead people.

Peyote: (to shadowed person, who is still sitting in the corner as if nothing had happened) Our thanks, stranger. I, for one, noticed you create that fog, which methinks aided us to defeat those slayers.

(shadowed one): You are most welcome, priest of the forest. I would like to join this quest, if I may.

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Peyote: Certainly, my fine fellow!

Ged: (to DM) I cast detect evil. Does the shadowed one radiate any aura?

For that matter, do _any_ of them give off such an aura?

DM: No...not quite.

(shadowed one): Have a care whom you accuse of wrongdoing, elf...

Halbarad: We have dallied here long enough.

Mongo: Yeah! Let's split!

The party exited the Green Dragon Inn, and found, conveniently enough, a number of light horses saddled outside the tavern. Fortunately, they had all of their possessions with them, and were able to leave the city fairly quickly. In a place such as Fax, though, the city guard (if it could be called that) was always slow to respond and slower still to ask any questions. It was getting late as the group rode out of the city at a quick pace; they headed southwest, toward the city called Courwood.

THE PARTY THUS FAR:

Belphanior, a high elven warrior

Ged, a grey elven priest/mage

Halbarad, a human ranger

Krug, a human warrior

Mongo, a dwarven warrior

Peldor, a human thief

Peyote, a half-elven warrior/druid

Rob, a human priest

(unnamed), a mage

Fun in the Wilderness



The party has been riding for about four hours since they left Fax. They are riding on a well-used trail through some plains, and are headed in a southeasterly direction. Halbarad, the ranger, is riding about a hundred yards ahead to scout the terrain out.

Mongo: Maybe this Belegard character can tell us what's so important about this tube.

Belphanior: Let me see that. (examines the metallic tube) Whatever it is, it's pretty light. Hmm. No openings.

Peldor: I bet I could get it open.

Peyote: Whoa! Dude! Halbarad returns!

Halbarad: (riding hard) Riders approach!

Krug: Hmph.

Ged: How many?

Halbarad: Six, and they appear to be brigands of some sort.

Peldor: No mere brigand is a match for the mighty Peldor! I draw my sword and await these brigands.

The six men approach on the path. They are dust-covered and look mean.

Belphanior: I put on a mean face and stare at them.

Peldor: Do they have any obvious valuables?

Ged: Greetings, noble ones. How goes it?

Soldier#1: Greetings, wanderers. (pauses) You had best be camping soon, for only the well-armed travel by night without fear of robbery...

Mongo: I am well-armed.

Krug: Yuh. My arms seem well to me.

Soldier#2: Doubtless such experienced adventurers as yourselves have nothing to fear from any highway bandits.

Ged: Well, fine then. Good night to you! (rides on)

Soldier#1: Take care, travelers.

Peyote: Later dudes. Peace.

Peldor: I'll take the rear.

Halbarad: I shall go scout out a campsite somewhere up ahead. (rides on)

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ahead of Ged)

Soon after, a suitable camping ground is found, and the group settles down about fifty feet off the road. Halbarad builds a fire, since it is getting colder every minute, while Peyote and Belphanior wander off to gather firewood. Ged and the unknown mage are studying their spellbooks, while Rob the priest prays quietly near the fire. Mongo has taken it upon himself to demonstrate his cooking proficiency (of which he is quite proud) by adding herbs and spices to the rations that the party is eating. Peldor is out wandering, supposedly to find more firewood. Krug is busy eating his rations (raw). When the fire is burning high, Halbarad goes to find yet more wood.

Mongo: These may be just iron rations, but they'll be the best damn iron rations that anybody ever had!

Ged: (looking up) Don't you touch my food! I'll have my meal without any strange seasonings, thank you.

Mongo: If you want to be without the benefit of these many delicious, mouth-watering spices, fine.

Krug: Fine. Munch munch.

Peldor: (returns) Here's a dead squirrel, Mongo, can you make it taste better? (to DM) I try to slip the carcass into the soup pot.

Mongo: Hey! Stay away from my kitchen!

Krug: I'll eat it. Give it here.

Suddenly, a number of snarling creatures appear around the campsite. Without any warning, they rush in, attacking at leisure.

Krug: Wolves! (fails to be suprised and draws sword)

Wolf#1: (tries to bite Krug but misses)

Wolf#2: (bowl Mongo over, clawing and biting successfully)

Wolf#3: (bites Ged successfully)

Wolf#4: (bites and claws Rob successfully)

Wolf#5: (claws Peldor successfully)

Wolf#6: (barrels into unknown mage, knocking him over but only scoring with a claw attack)

Wolf#7: (goes for the soup, ignoring the characters)

DM: Now that everybody has been suprised, roll for next round's initiative.

Krug: (hacks wolf that attacked him, inflicting a major wound. The wolf tries to limp away, blood pouring out of its side)

Peldor: (stabs his wolf with a dagger, having no time to unsheath his sword. The wolf is scratched but continues to attack)

Wolf#1: (retreating)

Wolf#3: (fails to bite Ged)

Wolf#4: (bites Rob again. Rob is hurting badly by this time)

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Rob: Help! I club it with my mace (fails to hit the wolf though)

Wolf#2: (attacks don't get through Mongo's armor)

Mage: (tries to put some distance between his attacker and himself. A long tear in his cloak shows a glimpse of jet-black skin to a few who happen to see.)

Wolf#6: (chases mage)

Wolf#5: (bites Peldor)

Ged: Taste steel, foul vermin! (manages to hit his attacker with his mace, and rolls maximum damage, braining it)

Wolf#3: (dies)

Peldor: A lucky roll, no doubt.

Mongo: Do I have time to draw my sword?

DM: (rolls for chance) Nope.

Mongo: Then I use the cooking pot I had in my hand and try to club the wolf.
(rolls) Yes! (rolls maximum damage, killing the wolf) I knew it!
The pot is mightier than the sword!

Halbarad, Peyote, Belphanior: (returning) Oh shit! (drop firewood)

Round three commences, with the three fresh fighters charging those wolves who are left. The melee ends soon thereafter, as might be expected when 60% of the party's heavy hitters suddenly join in. All wolves are dead or have fled. Everybody but the cavalry and Krug is wounded, and Rob and Peldor are in pretty bad shape. Ged commences healing on Rob, who is able to use his own healing spells on others once he is feeling better.

Ged: Say, friend mage? (to the unknown wizard) You wouldn't perchance mind taking off your hood, would you?

Mage: I'd rather not.

Mongo: What manner of being are you? You're not _evil_, are you?!?!?

Krug: Evil?

Peyote: Yeah, man! What's the deal here anyway?

Rob: Inquiring minds want to know. _I_ want to know.

Mage: Oh all right! (pulls back hood. He is a drow elf.)

Krug: Hmm.

Ged: You must have powerful magic indeed to fool my detection spell.

Halbarad: Have any of you considered that maybe he is _not_ evil?!?

Mage: _I_ have...

Peldor: Nobody is innately evil.

Belphanior: Some of us just have to work at it...

Ged: Hmph!

Mage: I am a renegade from my homeland and do not follow such ways as you might have come to expect from the drow.

Ged: What is your opinion of the mass acts of evil committed by drow everywhere? Well?

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Mage: Let's just say that I take a dim view.

Halbarad: Well, there's no reason not to let him stay with us. After all he
did assist us in that tavern.

Peyote: Agreed. Like, absolutely.

Krug: Uh-huh.

Mongo: You can't judge him by race, that wouldn't be fair.

Mage: Another thing. I am not a "he" or a "him". My name is Alindyar
Rillsifane, late of the clan Rillsifane, and I would prefer to be
referred to as such.

Belphanior: Okay, whatever you say, Such.

Krug: Uh.

Ged: Touchy, are we? I'll be watching you, dark elf...

Krug piles the wolf bodies away from the camp, and the fire is built up high with all the firewood found nearby. The party sets up a defensive position with two on watch at all times. Despite all their worries and precautions, nothing else bothers them this night. Morning dawns on an exhausted and bedraggled party. They eat a cold breakfast in relative silence, some eyeing others suspiciously. About an hour later, after feeding and watering the horses, they pack up and ride on. They have a crude map of the area, and decide to save time by cutting through the nearby forest. This idea thrills some but scares others. After about three hours of boring riding, a group of eight suspicious-looking men approaches from the other direction.

Peldor: Suspicious-looking? Like me?

Brigand#1: Ho there! Do us a favor and get off'a yer horses, yep!

Brigand#2: At'll save us a'trouble o' havin' to knock yers off!

Brigand#3: We'll take the cash, the horses, and the armor, an' I do mean
now!

Ged: You have got to be kidding! Go about your way or suffer dire
consequences indeed, fools!

Brigand#4: As you will, mate. Attack! (the brigands begin to ride for the
party. Initiative is rolled.)

Peldor: (throws dagger, hits brigand...#8. Critical hit, location turns out to
be right eye)

Brigand#8: Gack! @\$#&%*! (dies right there on his horse)

Ged: (magic missiles bandit#1)

Bandit#1: Yie!

Belphanior: I stand up in my saddle and prepare to tackle the nearest
mounted bandit.

DM: Oh really? Make a STR and a DEX check then.

Belphanior: (rolls twice, both are under his stats) Okay!

DM: ...

Brigand#5: (tackled by an airborne Belphanior, he is knocked from his

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saddle onto the ground)

Brigand#2: (swings at Halbarad, hits for a minor wound)

Brigand#3: (swings at Peyote, misses)

Krug: (kills brigand#7 in a single blow) Snort!

Brigand#4: (swings at Mongo, hits for 1 hp)

Mongo: Ha ha! You'll have to do better than that! (swings sword and deals a serious blow)

Brigand#6: (headed for Alindyar) I'll take out this wimp! (swings but misses)

Alindyar: (since he didn't get interrupted, his spell is completed in a successful manner)

Phantasmal force: (looks like a small winged demon) Aaaaaa! (the image attacks brigand#6, who, having an INT of 7, fail to save and suffers much illusionary damage)

Brigand#6: Aaaaaa! (flees, pursued by the demon-image)

Halbarad: (to DM) Say, you don't know the penalties for mounted melee, do you? Because I have riding proficiency and don't get penalized...

DM: (not really prepared for questions like this at this juncture)

Halbarad: (swings and hits brigand#2 easily with his axe, killing him)

Peyote: (swings and misses brigand#3) Bogus, dude!

Brigand#4: Run away! Run away! (he and the others still living flee)

Belphanior: (wrestling with brigand#5 on the ground, works in a dagger attack and dispatches the bandit) Hah!

Ged: Somebody get those fools!

Phantasmal force: (returns to Alindyar)

Ged: Phantasmal force, eh? Hmm.

Belphanior: ...

Halbarad: Let them go.

Krug: (beats his chest and lets out a scream of victory, a la Tarzan)

The party rests for a bit and heals their wounds as the DM contemplates mounted combat. Halbarad uses his animal handling skills to calm the horses who are jumpy, talking and cooing to them.

DM: The horses are jumpy from the excitement. After all, they've never seen mounted combat either.

Halbarad: I use my animal handling skills to calm them. I talk and coo to them.

Ged: Coo?

After ten rounds, the party resumes their journey. They are briefly harassed by eight kobolds at a later point, but the kobolds flee when challenged, instead of fighting.

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Belphanior: I shoot the last one in the back with my bow as he flees. (makes roll, kills the kobold)

Krug: Nice shot.

Ged: Boccob will not forgive you your sins in the afterlife, o killer of the defenseless...

Peldor: Boccob? Prove that this Boccob exists, mage.

Ged: Grr...

At this point, the party reaches the Suss forest. The forest seems dark and foreboding. Thick gnarled trees stretch up into the sky. The noises of the forest - birds, squirrels, and the like - can be heard. The forest teems with life.

Peyote: Say, this forest verily teems with wildlife.

They decide to camp right outside the forest. Many more precautions are taken this time, to the extent of Halbarad trying to talk to the nearby forest creatures (alas, something he cannot do yet). For some reason, nothing bothers the party this night, much to their surprise. The next morning they enter the forest, still heading southeast. The place grows dim as they progress deeper into it. Wildlife becomes scarce, and shadows abound. There could be things watching the party from a hundred different directions. At one point, a strange monkeylike creature is seen regarding them from a high perch. For no apparent reason, it bounds away through the trees, before Belphanior can shoot it with an arrow. The party stops for a late lunch; ahead of them, the ever-scouting Halbarad reports a "very foreboding" area.

NOTES: This was the episode that made famous Mongo's proficiency with the cooking pot (he wanted to take a weapon proficiency slot for it). Also, note the lack of deeds from Rob (his player missed this session) and the beginnings of Belphanior's bloodthirsty streak, and the manner of dialogue (hippie?) used now by Peyote's player.

THE PARTY THUS FAR:

Belphanior, high elf fighter?

Ged, grey elf priest/mage

Halbarad, human ranger

Krug, human fighter

Mongo, dwarf fighter

Peldor, human thief

Peyote, half-elf fighter/druid

Rob, human priest

Alindyar, drow elf mage

Betrayal



The party enters the foreboding area of the Suss Forest, which is even more dark and dismal than the previous parts. Its most distinguishing feature is an abundance of webs; the ground, trees, and branches overhead are covered with sticky strands of spider silk. Several skeletons litter the ground nearby, encased in webbing; one of these is prominent due to its plate mail which gleams in a few exposed spots.

Peyote: Spiders, dude. It's gotta be spiders. We search the area.

Halbarad: Carefully, of course.

Ged: (casting light) I need somebody's staff to put this light on.

Alindyar: Here. (hands over his wooden staff)

Peyote: Fire it up, dude.

Ged: (lights the staff)

Peldor: I draw my sword. (to DM) Can I search any of the skeletons on the ground, without being noticed?

Belphanior: (to DM) I look up, into the trees. What do I see?

DM: Spiders. (to all) Suddenly a number of webs drop onto you from the trees above. Everybody roll initiative rolls, adding your DEX bonuses; any above 5 are caught in webs. (we use a d10, minus reaction bonus; low numbers go first, high numbers go last) And, the spiders are now landing on the ground to attack you all. They are giant spiders, in this case about most of a foot in diameter.

Alindyar: (rolls a 7, and is webbed) Hmm.

Belphanior: (rolls a 2, and dodges free of the webs) I charge out among the spiders!

Ged: (rolls a 3, escaping the falling webs) (begins spellcasting)

Halbarad: (rolls an 8, and is webbed) I must have tripped on a root or something...

Krug: (rolls a 3, and is not webbed) Urg! Krug smash spiders!

Mongo: (rolls a 9, and is webbed) Shit!

Peldor: (rolls a 1, easily escaping the webs) Hah! Peldor, quickest of the quick! (to DM) I search the nearest body.

Peyote: (rolls a 6, but his reaction adjustment pulls it down to a 5; not webbed) Whoa, man! I defend myself from any spiders that may be

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nearby me now.

Rob: (rolls a 10, and is webbed)

Peldor: (headed toward nearest body, is faced by a spider) I attack! (hits spider with a truly lucky blow - maximum damage! The spider splats all over the ground) There! I've done my part! (to DM) Now I search the bodies.

Belphanior: (swings, rolls a fumble) ...

DM: Belphanior, your sword bounces off of the ground and lands in a stray web nearby. Two spiders close in on you.

Belphanior: ...!

Krug: (swings his huge sword, cleaving a spider in two) Hurgh! Look like oatmeal!

Ged: (lets magic missile fly, at the spider stalking him) Die, hairy fiend! (rolls 4 on the 4-sider)

Spider#5: (blasted by the spell, now seriously wounded) (bites at Ged but misses. Could be attributed to trauma.)

Peyote: (swings but misses) Uh-oh.

Spider#6: (bites at Peyote, but misses)

Spider#7: (goes for a random webbed target...a dice roll chooses Mongo)

Mongo: Wait! I try to break out of the webs with my great strength!

DM: You're getting there, but not in time. (rolls) The spider bit you, take 2 hp and make a save.

Peyote: Poison most foul, dude.

Mongo: (a dwarf with a high CON, he has no problem saving against poison and easily makes the roll)

Spider#2: (bites at Belphanior but misses)

Spider#3: (bites Belphanior but doesn't get through his clothing; this is how we describe near misses, given the AD&D system...)

Belphanior: Whew! (waves hands and chants, sending a blinding spray of color at his opponents. They waver at least momentarily.)

Peyote: Gnarly!

Ged: (still trapped in webs of course) Hey! I didn't know he could do that! What gives?

Alindyar: Methinks we have another mage in the party...

Belphanior: Heh!

DM: Round 2...

Krug: (gets first action, except for Peldor, who is searching one of the old webbed skeletons nearby; Krug has weapon specialization and thus gets 3/2 attacks in melee with his two-handed sword, and this is his round to have two attacks. By the way, Mongo also is specialized, in his longsword) I come to help, dwarf! (moves to attack the spider

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that bit Mongo; swings twice, hits twice)

Spider#7: (splat)

Mongo: Thanks, pal.

Krug: Welcome. (heads off toward someone else's spider)

Ged: (swings mace at his wounded spider, barely hits, finishes it off)

Belphanior: (stabs one of his two opponents, wounding it badly. Neither of the two is moving though.)

Peyote: (slices at spider#6, wounding it)

Spider#6: (misses Peyote)

Peldor: (pocketing something, turns toward the melee)

DM: Round 3...

Peldor: (attacks Peyote's spider from behind, but misses) Whoops!

Krug: (kills spider#2, the one that Belphanior did not wound yet) Ock!

Belphanior: (swings, finishes off spider#3, the one he wounded) (to DM)
I collect some spider guts, while they're still fresh.

Spider#6: (turns and bites Peldor!)

Peldor: (barely makes his poison save)

DM: Hmm...that spider's poison sacs must have been low today.

Peyote: (hits spider#6, killing it) There you go, guy! Sorry about that bite.

Peldor: No problem. (to DM) Can I scavenge the spider's poison sacs?

DM: Not without a chance of getting scratched and poisoned...

Peldor: Err...okay.

Belphanior: Hey! I'll try!

DM: The spider is too crushed to have any poison sacs left. In fact, all of the spiders are.

Ged: (carefully cutting webs off of those who were webbed) I could use some help here!

Peyote: Certainly, my most wizardly friend! (moves to help)

Peldor: I'll help too! (to DM) Can I pick their pockets as I cut them free?

DM: ...no.

Peldor: Oh. Well, I'll help anyway.

Mere minutes later, the entire party is free, if a bit sticky.

Halbarad: We search the entire area.

Belphanior: I recover my sword.

Peyote: And the trees too, man. I climb into the trees where the spiders made their humble abode and search there.

DM: Okay. On the nearby ground you find a dull steel battleaxe, an old, broken two-handed sword, a dagger with a dirty gem in the pommel, a large bone, a dented helm, two iron spikes, a dead rotting rat, a

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rusted and rotten crossbow, a moldy arrow, and a large gem (to Peyote only) In the trees, there is a rotten sack containing some silver coins, a ring, and a dull dagger. What do you want to do with this loot? (Being an honest fellow, Peyote doesn't steal any of it, and brings it all down from the tree.)

Ged: We also search the bodies.

DM: Okay, one is a skeletal human in rotted robes; he has a scroll case, a holy symbol, and three silver coins. A second skeleton is that of a dwarf in plate mail, he carries a dagger. The third corpse is a goblin, he is still fresh (still has meat) but has no loot. The last body is a very old one, it crumbles upon examination, leaving a small sack of gold coins behind.

Ged: Let's take all the good stuff and store it in a sack.

Peldor: I'll carry the sack!

Mongo: No, _I'll_ carry it.

Halbarad: (to DM) I search through the dust of the last corpse.

DM: (to Halbarad) You find a ring...

Halbarad: Hey everybody! We got this also! (tosses ring into the pile of "good" stuff that is forming.)

Ged: Boccob thanks you, noble one. He will thank you even more, surely, if that ring is magical.

Peldor: And even more if you get it, right, elf? I would have kept it...

Halbarad: Boccob is welcome, priest.

Peldor: Boccob is puny! Puny, I say!

The party divines the following magical items: the battleaxe, the scroll (inside the scroll case, of course; it's a priest scroll), dull dagger from tree, ring from dusty corpse. Halbarad takes the battleaxe, for now; Ged gets the scroll, and the dagger and ring are put along with the coins and the dagger w/gem, gem, and ring from tree (all nonmagical of course).

The party continues through the forest for a couple of days. The dark part of the place, so to speak, seems to be past. They do encounter a pack of giant ants, but Alindyar gives them some of his iron rations, and they ignore the party and eat the food. The next day, they find a river which is supposed to flow out of the forest, and follow it. Near the edge of the forest, a giant turtle crawls out of the (slow-moving) river. Despite Mongo's desire to cook it for the party, they leave it alone, and continue on their way. The river must be crossed, and they do so by building a makeshift bridge out of logs. The next morning, Halbarad finds a strange footprint, and nearby an old, long unused path... he follows it using his ranger skills, to a point where it deviates away from the river, their intended course. Discussion ensues, but is soon punctuated...

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DM: A trio of large, furry creatures amble from the old path toward you

They carry huge axes and don't look friendly.

Halbarad: How tall are they?

DM: About 8' or so.

Peyote: Bugbears? Most evil dudes...

Ged: I retreat to the rear of the party.

Alindyar: Likewise.

Rob: Yeah, me too! (trips on a root and runs into a tree) Ow!

Mongo, Halbarad, and Krug form a front line of defense, with Belphanior and Peyote behind them as a secondary line of either spellcasters or sword-swingers (whatever is needed), and the other three in the rear. Peldor is nowhere to be seen. The bugbears close in and initiative is rolled. The order of events:

Halbarad: (slices at bugbear#1, hitting for what seems like a good amount of damage) Take that, ape!

Bugbear#1: (laughs) (hits Halbarad, a truly hefty blow) Ug!

Halbarad: Ouch!

Mongo: I think they speak your language, Krug.

Krug: (swings at bugbear#2, misses) Fuck! Shut up!

Bugbear#2: (hits Krug, scores an unprecedented 11 hp of damage) Die puny human!

Krug: Urk. (keels over, at an even 0 hp)

Bugbear#3: (hits Mongo, and like his companions, does serious damage)

Mongo: Shit!

Peyote: (closer to the fallen Krug, steps over him to the front line)

Belphanior: (stops spell casting to drag Krug's bleeding body out of the line of fire) Here priests, heal this man!

Rob: (begins spell casting to heal Krug)

Ged: Heal? (magic missiles bugbear#3) Take that, oversized ape!

Bugbear#3: (laughs at the smoking hole in his hide) Hk! Didn't hurt!

Alindyar: (in the interest of saving his magic, throws a dagger, but misses by a long shot)

Mongo: So I get to go last again, huh? (swings sword at bugbear#3, but misses) Damn! Shit! @\$&*#%!!

DM: Round 2...

Krug: (alive, but unconscious, has been moved away)

Halbarad: (swings, misses bugbear#1) Crap!

Bugbear#2: (smashes Peyote with a deadly blow)

Peyote: (suddenly down to 1 hp) I retreat...

Belphanior: (yanks Peyote back and rushes up to fight his opponent) I'll

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take care of this mess! (swings and misses) Err...okay, maybe not.

Bugbear#1: (misses Halbarad)

Bugbear#3: (hits Mongo with a glancing blow)

Mongo: (down to 3 hp and goes last in this round) Fuck! FUCK!

DM: Do you want to retreat?

Mongo: Hell no!

Ged: (no more offensive spells in his mighty 1st level arsenal.. :) I think we're in big trouble folks...

Rob: (only has healing magic on hand) I unsling my mace and run around the others, to try and hit one of the bugbears.

DM: Okay, roll.

Rob: (misses) Uh..

Alindyar: (does nothing)

Mongo: (swings at bugbear#3, twice, since this is the 2-attack round of his 3/2 attack capability with the longsword specialization) A 16! A _20_!!!! YES!!! (dual blows, one a critical hit...)

Bugbear#3: (dies, cut in half at the waist)

A cheer goes up from the party...

DM: Round 3...

Bugbear#1: (hits Halbarad) Grunt!

Halbarad: (now seriously hurting) I think about backing up...

Peldor: (in position behind bugbear#1) Here comes Peldor to save the day!

DM: (to Peldor) Make another move silently check, Peldor.

Peldor: (passes with no problem) (attacks with a backstab) (hits with longsword for double damage)

Bugbear#1: (collapses)

Belphanior: (attacks simultaneously with bugbear#2) (hits bugbear#2 at the same time as the monster hits him. The bugbear shrugs off the minor

cut, while Belphanior is direly wounded...)

Belphanior: (down to -1 hp) Ack! (falls)

Peyote: Heinous!

Ged: Well, at least _somebody_ hit the killer bugbear. His sacrifice was not in vain.

Peldor: (to DM) I try to look in Belphanior's pockets.

Halbarad: (attacks the remaining bugbear, but misses) I retreat and bind my wounds.

Belphanior: Yeah! I bind _my_ wounds too!

Ged: You can't bind your wounds, fool. You're _dead_!

Belphanior: Oh yeah.

Peldor: I'll bind his wounds for him.

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Peyote: I cure some light wounds on Belphanior.

Mongo: (attacks bugbear, hits, inflicts mighty damage) Hey! I'm on a friggin' roll here!

Alindyar: (throws a dagger at the bugbear, perchance hitting it and causing the final damage necessary to send it to its maker)

Peldor: (has filched a few coins from Belphanior's pouch) I search the bugbears.

DM: Bugbears don't have pockets...they have no treasure except their weapons. These were _poor_ bugbears.

Ged: Do their weapons look to be of good quality?

DM: Not quite. They are rusty and not well maintained.

Rob: (heals Peyote) Have some healing!

Peyote: Thanks guy.

Halbarad: Maybe we should track their path and find out where they came from. Maybe they have a lair...

The party, recognizing the need for much rest and relaxation, makes camp and goes nowhere for another day. They manage to heal their wounds, to a large degree. The choice as to whether or not to go down the side trail or continue on their mission comes to a vote. Six vote to follow the side path, two vote not to, one abstains. The party sets off on the trail, with Halbarad in the lead. After a half hour of hacking through tangled undergrowth, they find something...

DM: Halbarad finds a strange footprint in some dirt nearby the path.

Halbarad: What kind of footprint?

DM: It has three clawed toes in front, plus one in back...it's a fairly shallow print, and the foot isn't more than half a foot in length.

Peyote: No denizen of the forest made _that_ print, dude.

Halbarad: I look for more nearby.

DM: There are several.

Halbarad: I follow them.

Party: (everybody else) We follow him.

DM: About two hundred feet nearby, you come upon an old, run-down hut in the middle of the woods. The undergrowth has all but covered it, and it is barely visible. The door is slightly ajar.

Belphanior: I listen at the door.

Peldor: I sneak around the back and look for any windows etc.

DM: The windows are overgrown. Belphanior hears nothing.

Belphanior: I draw my sword and open the door.

DM: You see...nothing. The small hut is empty. The dirt floor is covered with rubble and dust...there are signs of recent disturbance though...

Belphanior: I search for hidden doors under the rubble.

DM: Aha! You find a small square hatch in the floor.

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Mongo: I lift it up.

Belphanior: I have my sword ready in case anything comes out...

DM: It's too heavy to lift by yourself.

Several characters, working in unison, are able to pry open the trap door. Underneath, there is a floor about 20' down, but no stairs or ladder. The chamber is cut from the hard ground itself; the walls look like hard-packed clay.

Alindyar: I tie a rope around the trapdoor (it is heavy and open and will serve as an anchor, won't it?) and lower it down into the darkness.

Belphanior: I light my lantern, and shine it down to see what I can see.

DM: You see a large, squarish room below, with several exits.

Belphanior: I hold the lantern with my feet and shimmy down the rope.

Mongo: Hey! I go next!

Alindyar: I go next.

Ged: I go last.

Finally, everyone is down the rope except Ged and Krug.

Ged: (looking around)

Krug: (at opening, peers down into the room. The others down there are beginning to explore the area.) To DM only: I cut the rope and attack Ged.

DM: !

DM: (to Ged only) Hey, heads up. Krug has cut the rope and is now advancing on you, sword drawn, smiling...

Ged: !!!

The next segment takes place out of the view and hearing of the rest of the party in the room below, except that the DM rolls a d10 for each of them, ruling that a "0" indicates that that character saw Krug cut the rope. Alindyar the drow gets the roll, so the DM passes him a note telling him what he saw. He says nothing for now.

Ged: (thinks it over for about two seconds. He knows that even if he is able to fire his magic missile, it won't stop the warrior.) Uh... can I try to tackle him and knock him into the open hatchway?

DM: Mm...sure. But you'll have to roll to hit him, at a -2 penalty (really trying to be fair here)

Ged: I have nothing to lose. (rolls a 20). Omigod! It worked!

DM: Okay. you tackle him with all of your hundred pounds. Krug, roll below your DEX to avoid falling in the hole.

Krug: (rolls a 19, not of course below his DEX) (both he and Ged fall in the

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hole and land on the pavement below. More rolls for any possible saves indicate that, as appropriate, Krug took the brunt of the falling damage, while Ged managed to land on top of him.)

Halbarad: Who cut the rope, dammit?!?

Mongo: Hey! What's going on up there!

Ged: He cut the rope! He attacked me!

Krug: No I didn't.

Ged: You did too!

Krug: Did not!

Ged: Did too!

They start to close on each other to fight, oblivious of the others...

Halbarad: I restrain Krug.

Ged: Restrained, eh? I attack him!

Mongo: (bashes Ged over the head for subdual damage, knocking him out)
Quiet, elf!

Krug: Knocked out, eh? I move in and stab Ged!

Belphanior: (bashes Krug for subdual damage, also ko-ing him) I for one
want to know what the fuck happened up there.

Peyote: Most uncool, man.

Mongo: Tie them both up and we'll talk to them when they wake up.

Belphanior: Just watch 'em carefully and keep a good distance between the
two.

Rob: I have one more healing spell...

Peldor: I slap Ged to wake him up.

Ged: (wakes up, even as Krug is awakened nearby) Wuzzat?

Halbarad: We're only going to ask you this once, guys. Who cut the rope?

Ged: He did.

Krug: _He_ did.

Belphanior: This is getting nowhere.

Alindyar: I saw it. It was Krug.

The party thinks this is a joke until they see that the DM is backing
up Alindyar too. Tempers flare...

Mongo: What the hell did you do that for, Krug?

Krug: Fuck you.

Mongo: Hey! We never attacked you. What do you want anyway?

Krug: Come over here and I'll show you.

Mongo: Huh?! Stay away from me, you @\$%*&!!!

Krug: Ha. Coward! You're no warrior! You're a mere stub of a man!

Mongo: I draw my sword!

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Krug: You wanna fight, stub? Ha ha!

Mongo: Let's get it on, motherfucker!

Belphanior: Let them fight!

Alindyar: Aye, now that the battle is more evenly matched.

Halbarad: No! (to DM) Do I have a chance to intercede?

DM: Not until next round, they're going at it pretty fast right now.

Halbarad: Okay.

Krug: (attacks Mongo, gets initiative, but misses...)

Mongo: (attacks Krug, near end of melee round, hits, rolls 8 on the d8 plus strength bonus for a total of 13 hp. Krug was at only 2 hp, so now he's at -11...truly dead, so to speak.)

Ged: Err...

Mongo: He's dead!

Belphanior: And good riddance!

Halbarad: Hmm. Guess it's too late now.

Peldor: I search his pockets...

The party rests, heals, decides to explore the dungeon a bit before they camp. The loss of Krug is mourned only briefly, and his body is left covered with a blanket. Peldor gets his pocketful of coins.

NOTES: To this day, I don't know why Krug's player turned on the rest of them. I think that the players may have been having minor sideline arguments that led to the attack, I'm not sure, and the guy's long gone. Maybe he had a date that night, because he left but didn't seem to be that mad really. I don't think he was a die-hard gamer at heart and was getting sick of the game. In any case, Krug was never dealt with beyond that point, and life went on.

THE PARTY THUS FAR:

Alindyar, 1st level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 1st/1st level high elf fighter/mage (CN)

Ged, 1st/1st level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 1st level human ranger (NG)

Mongo, 1st level dwarf fighter (CG)

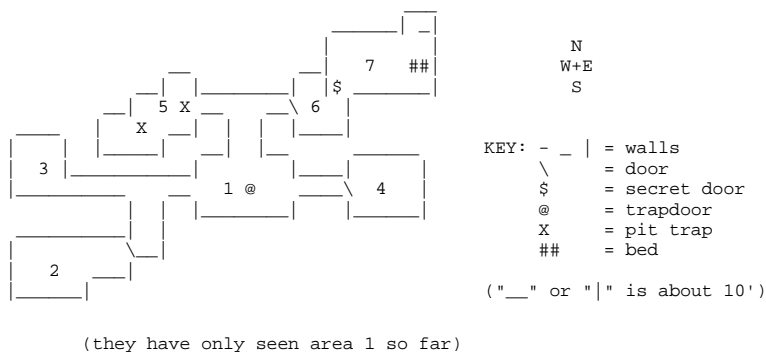
Peldor, 1st level human thief (CN)

Peyote, 1st/1st level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 1st level human priest (LG)

The Dungeon

The party, having camped for a two-day period, has memorized spells and rested. They now believe themselves to be ready to explore the bizarre dungeon complex they have found in the middle of a forest, thus:



The horses are tied outside the hut, with a day's supply of food and water. The ceiling in this place is about 12' high, except in area 1, where it extends to 20' or so. The walls and floor are hard-packed clay, and the occasional tree root is visible. The place is musty and smells like fresh earth. The party opts to check the western exit from the first room...

Halbarad: We need a marching order here.

Peyote: Yeah guys. What's it gonna be?

Belphanior: I'll volunteer to go in the front!

Mongo: Me too. I don't want to miss any of the action.

Halbarad: Okay then. I'll take the second rank, with Rob. Peyote, you take the rear, with Peldor...

Peldor: Naturally!

Halbarad: ...and the two magi will stay in the middle.

Ged: Who died and put _you_ in charge?

Mongo: He's trying to protect your puny self, mage!

Peyote: It's cool. This makes sense.

Alindyar: We should be okay as long as you march in front of Peldor.

Ged: (to DM) I watch my back. If that thief touches me, it'll be a fiery death

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for him.

Rob: I am not able to fight. Why did you put me in the second rank?

Mongo: Don't worry about anything, son. We'll take care of anything that attacks us. You worry about healing us afterwards.

Rob: (unconvinced, he pulls out mace for security)

Peyote: Chill out, man.

Halbarad: Let's go.

The party moves westward, but almost immediately the path forks to the south. A door is visible down a short corridor. To the west, the passage seems to open up into a room. They continue west, saving the door for later. They find a room full of rotted and splintered furniture. There are scratches on the walls, and the once-ornate couches, chairs, and tables here have obviously been smashed by someone.

Belphanior: I search through the splinters for hidden treasure.

DM: (rolling) No treasure, but you get some splinters in your hands...

Halbarad: Let's try the door to the south then.

Peldor: Is it locked? Is it trapped?

Belphanior: (listening at the door) I don't hear anything...

Mongo: I open the door!

Beyond is a nearly empty room. In the southwest corner is a pile of coins of some sort.

Peldor: Let's get those coins!

DM: You hear a clicking sound from the area in front of the coins.

Belphanior: A trap? Nah...couldn't be.

DM: It's getting closer...

Belphanior: I swing my sword in circles in front of me.

Mongo: I draw my sword.

DM: (rolling) Mongo, something whizzes by your head.

Mongo: Yikes! Dammit, what is it?!

Belphanior: I knew I should have brought that bucket of paint...

Rob: Invisible...

DM: (rolling) Mongo, you take a hit. It feels like a heavy mace.

Mongo: Fuck this! (swinging wildly in front of him) (nicks something)

Belphanior: I doff my cloak and toss it over in that direction.

DM: The cloak catches onto something...

Mongo: I tackle the something! (rolls high, tackles the invisible enemy) Get it! Chop it! Kill it!

Belphanior: (manages to hit the downed, invisible opponent)

DM: The struggles cease. Whatever it is has stopped moving.

Mongo: I feel it. What does it feel like?

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DM: It's made of bones. A skeleton maybe.

Belphanior: I take the skull.

DM: It's attached...

Belphanior: No matter, I'm a strong guy. I rip it off.

DM: Okay...upon severing the skull, it becomes visible. It's a bleached white, typical skull. This particular specimen is very old and worn.

Peyote: It's not cool to play with dead things.

Halbarad: I see if the skeleton has any rings on its fingers. (upon searching, he finds that this is indeed the case)

DM: The ring is plain-looking, and the skeleton is dead indeed.

Halbarad: I try it on so we can confirm its function. (he puts the ring on and turns invisible, then takes it off a second later)

Peldor: Well, that's nice. Now gimme that ring.

Ged: Wrong answer. Put it into the pile.

Peyote: Yeah, the pile.

Halbarad: Why didn't the skeleton turn visible when it hit him?

Alindyar: I have heard tell of such rings. Some of them, according to legend, render the wearer invisible even when he is attacking. Could it be one such as that?

Peldor: Let me wear it, and I'll attack Ged, and then we'll know.

Ged: Quiet, greedy fool.

Halbarad: We get the silver and go back to the main room, and then into the east passage, with the door.

DM: Okay, there were 78 tarnished silver coins in the pile. The door is locked.

Peldor: No problem. (rolls, he can discern no traps, then he tries to open the lock, successfully) Can I hear anything behind the door?

DM: Nope.

Mongo: Step aside, thief. There could be trouble. (opens the door)

Beyond this door is a fair-sized room. There are four rotted corpses chained to the east wall. As the party files into the room, the bodies begin to stir and stand up.

Ged: Puny zombies!

Belphanior: They're chained to the wall. You know what that means, don't you?

Peldor: Target practice!

Halbarad: Distasteful.

Peyote: Most uncool.

Ged: (taunts the monsters further)

DM: The zombies walk toward you...their chains are old and rusty, and as they pull on them, the chains break.

Rob: Aaa! Back, foul creatures of the night! (tries to turn them, but rolls an

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18) Eh?

DM: Rob, your faith is definitely waning. They continue onward.

Rob: grumble...

Ged: Well, now _I_ try. Turn back, O ye denizens of the dark! Go back whence ye came, I say! BEGONE!!! (he is successful, but is only able to turn two of the four zombies)

Peyote: I wish I could do that.

Rob: Ya don't say...

Mongo: Well, enough of this mumbo-jumbo. I attack!

Belphanior: I second that motion.

Initiative is rolled, not that it matters much, since the zombies are going to attack last anyway. Nevertheless, Mongo gets the worst possible initiative roll, and will attack about when the zombies do.

Zombie#1: (cowering in a corner)

Zombie#2: (likewise)

Belphanior: (slices a zombie, opening its chest to the world)

Zombie#3: (stares down at the opening in its stomach, looks back up at Belphanior, and grins)

Halbarad: (has drawn his weapon but isn't in any position to attack right now) Peyote! Peldor! Watch the rear for surprise attacks!

Peyote: Right on, man. (turns around)

Peldor: Hm. Peldor is not one to waste his time hacking away at gutless ghouls anyway!

Ged: (thinking about a magic missile)

Rob: (gets his mace ready)

Alindyar: (wondering what good fog is against zombies)

Mongo: Die, you fucker! (hacks at zombie#4, hits and lops one of its arms off)

Zombie#3: (gropes at Belphanior, doing significant damage with its rotting claws)

Zombie#4: (swings at Mongo with its remaining arm, clubbing him over the head)

Belphanior: (badly wounded) Can I get infected from this? I retreat.

Halbarad: (moves up to take his place)

DM: Round 2...

Halbarad: (hits zombie#3, killing it) See! They CAN die!

Mongo: (first attack misses, second one hits at the same time that the zombie hits back)

Zombie#4: (dies with its head cleft)

Mongo: (seriously wounded now) Groan...

Rob: Who needs healing?

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Belphanior: Urk!

Rob: (heals Belphanior with two spells. Mongo declines healing for now, since Belphanior is much more direly wounded.)

Belphanior: Much better! (looks around) I pick up that severed arm and put it in my backpack.

Halbarad: We search the chamber for treasure.

Alindyar: I use my esteemed elven abilities to, perchance, detect any hidden doors or passages.

Ged: Someone needs to put those other two zombies out of their misery.

Mongo: I'll do it. (sees to it. Although Mongo is good in alignment, he realizes that this is the right thing to do, as whoever animated the zombies obviously did it for an evil purpose.)

Peldor: I see if the zombies still have any pockets.

The room is empty, and no treasure is to be found. The party goes back into area 1, to head north, but they are met by a wandering monster of some sort.

DM: A small red monster is walking towards you.

Mongo: Oh really? I move to intercept the little guy.

DM: Okay, roll initiative.

Mongo: (goes last yet again) Fuck!

Little Red Monster: (swipes and bites at Mongo, hitting with one claw and the bite)

Mongo: Agh! You're toast now, shithead! (swings, hits) Hah!

Belphanior: I stay out of this. Let Mongo finish it off.

Mongo: Yeah! Let me!

DM: Round 2...

LRM: (slices Mongo twice with tiny razor-sharp claws)

Mongo: (swings, gets a solid hit for maximum damage)

LRM: (giggles)

Ged: Maybe I should cast detect magic.

LRM: (hisses at the party)

DM: Round 3...

LRM: (bites Mongo, who is now down to 1 hp) hiss!

Mongo: Shit! Fuck! Shitfuck! I flee! (runs back)

LRM: (chases Mongo as he retreats)

Belphanior: I move to stop it. (hits the thing with his sword)

LRM: (turns on Belphanior)

DM: Round 4...

Belphanior: (hits it again, for 7 more hp) What's the deal here?

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Alindyar: Perhaps 'tis a magical beast...

Ged: Yea! Where did that magic weapon go?

LRM: (chomps Belphanior's leg)

Peldor: C'mon, you wimp! It's just a little red monster!

Halbarad: I use the magical axe we found to hit the monster. (he rolls, hits, and kills the thing) Hmm. Most passing strange.

LRM: (carcass melts away into nothingness)

Peyote: Far out!

Alindyar: (calling upon his knowledge of monsters) Methinks it was some kind of sub-demon. Perhaps it was left on this plane by accident.

Mongo: That thing almost killed me and you're calling it a freakin' accident?!

Halbarad: Well, it proved vulnerable to this fine axe (eyes the axe lovingly)

Ged: (casts two healing spells upon Mongo) Well that's it folks. I'm out of healing magic.

Peyote: I still have some. Let us probe on...

The party goes into the north leg of the place. The passage splits in a T-shaped intersection, and they go to the west, into an open room.

Mongo: Hey! This place is empty! (falls in a pit) AAAaaa...

Belphanior: (looks down into now-opened 10' deep pit. Mongo is sprawled unceremoniously across the bottom of the pit.) Hey Mongo! Are you hurt? Are you dead?

Mongo: (not too damaged; his chain mail seems to have saved him from more than just bruises) Get me the @\$%&* out of here!!

Halbarad: I throw a rope down to him.

They pull their comrade out of the pit, and carefully advance further into the room. Peldor finds a second pit trap and springs it without anybody falling into it. The room is very dusty, but otherwise empty. The group heads to the east, to area 6. They find a locked door.

Peldor: (checking for traps) A trap! There is a small needle on this door handle. Poison! (uses a small hammer to flatten the needle, rendering it harmless) There, the door is open. Don't all thank me at once.

They enter the room. It is an ancient study, with many books all over the place lying in pieces. The wall is lined with shelves, many of them broken or sagging. Very few of the books here are even close to salvageable. They cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from styles of furniture to poorly written fiction.

Halbarad: We search all of the shelves for hidden trinkets etc.

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DM: (checking) (to Ged) One of the shelves seems to be in somewhat better shape than the others. It is in the northeast corner.

Ged: I examine it more closely. Is there anything behind any of the volumes? I cast a detect magic spell and look around the room.

DM: Nothing in this room is magic, but you do find that the shelf is loose.

Ged: Hey Mongo! Come over here and help me with this.

Mongo: What?

Ged: Let's see if we can move this shelf.

Mongo: (applies great strength, pulls shelf out. There is a plain door behind it.)

Peyote: Good job, Ged.

Halbarad: There are no knobs...

Belphanior: Push it! (reaches out and pushes the panel inward)

DM: You smell an awful stench...

Beyond is revealed an old bedroom. There is a closet containing a number of rotting garments, a dusty old chest, a dresser and a mirror, a huge collapsed bed, and a worktable. A pentagram is cut into the floor in one place. Something under the bed is moving...

Belphanior: I go over to the bed and lift the sheets with my sword.

DM: A grimy hand swipes out at your blade. The bed shakes violently as a number of gray-skinned humanoids swarm out from underneath it. They approach the party as a pack, attempting to surround them.

Ged: Egad! Ghouls! Foul abominations, I command you to LEAVE! (he rolls much too high, and fails) Aaa! Oh shit.

Rob: (turning also, he manages to turn four, who promptly flee, but there are still ten left.)

Belphanior: We're fucked for sure now.

Mongo: What use are babbling priests anyway?

DM: Round 1...

Halbarad: (he and Rob have moved around to better protect the others)
(slices at ghouls with the magical axe, wounding it grievously)

Belphanior: (slices ghouls, injuring it)

Peldor: (moving around Rob to try and engage some opponent in melee)

ghoul#1: (scores on Halbarad with a claw and a bite)

Halbarad: (fails to succumb to the ghoul's cold touch)

ghoul#2: (bites Halbarad on the arm)

Halbarad: (fails save, falls to the ground paralyzed) Damn!

ghoul#2: (preparing to eat Halbarad) hiss!

ghoul#3: (claws Belphanior for a minor wound)

Belphanior: Hah! Your foul attacks will not stop me, vermin!

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ghoul#4: (bites Belphanior)

ghoul#5: (only a claw gets through to hit Mongo)

ghoul#6: (misses Mongo on all 3 attacks)

Mongo: (saves easily) You fuckin' cannibals! Stay the hell away from me!
(swings his sword and decimates ghoul#5, splitting its slimy head in half)

Rob: (swings his mace, hits ghoul#7 for a light wound)

ghoul#7: (bites Rob)

ghoul#8: (claws Rob)

Rob: (fails 2 saves, paralyzed, at 1 hp, falls) Urk!

Peldor: (defending Rob's body) (critical hits ghoul#8, killing it) Stay away, ghoul! Only I may loot his body!

Ged: (blasts ghoul#2, who is ravaging Halbarad's inert form, with a magical missile) Eat this, monster!

ghoul#2: (recoiling) Sss!

Alindyar: (preparing his wall of fog but lacking a good target)

Peyote: (staying out of combat because he has the only healing spells left, he casts entangle on the ground where a large number of the monsters are standing) (ghouls#1,2,9 are rooted, literally, to the ground and scream in frustration) Be one with the earth, vile things!

DM: Round 2...

ghoul#3: (claws Belphanior twice)

Belphanior: (cuts ghoul#3's chest open, dripping green fluid all over himself as the ghoul dies) There!

ghoul#10: (claws and bites Belphanior, putting him into the negative hp zone...)

Belphanior: ... (keels over)

ghoul#4: (claws Mongo)

Mongo: (saves against the paralyzation)

Peldor: (slices the wounded ghoul#7, killing it) Die, bitch!

Ged: (whips out dagger) Being out of spells will not stop me!

ghoul#6: (claws and bites Mongo)

Mongo: (saves, fails, paralyzed) Dammit! Why do I always attack last?

Peyote: (rushes forth and attacks ghoul#10, wounding it and driving it back from Belphanior's body)

Alindyar: (follows Peyote in and surrounds ghoul#10 with the wall of fog, then he and Peyote drag Belphanior's body back from the front lines)

DM: Round 3...(remaining are Peyote, Alindyar, Ged, and Peldor; they face ghouls 10, 4, and 6 plus 1, 2, and 9 who are entangled)

Peldor: (charges forth to attack ghoul#6, hits) I'm a thief. This isn't in my contract, you know. I hope I'm getting paid extra for combat...

Peyote: (healing Belphanior) Sure, sure. Whatever you say.

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Alindyar: (stabs at the fogged-up ghoul#10, somehow hits)

ghoul#4: (swipes at Ged, hitting with a claw)

Ged: (bashes at the ghoul with his mace, to little effect)

ghoul#6: (hits Peldor with a claw and bite, wounding him badly)

Peldor: (fails save, paralyzed) Well, I guess I won't be looting the paralyzed party members...

ghoul#10: (wanders out of the fog) Rrrrk!

DM: Round 4...(Peyote and the 2 magi vs. three ghouls)

Peyote: (hits ghoul#10, killing it)

Ged: (misses ghoul#4)

ghoul#4: (hits Ged with a claw, sending him to -1 hp)

Ged: Uh-oh! (incapacitated)

Alindyar: (throws holy water onto ghoul#6, who shrieks at the pain)

ghoul#6: (running around screaming)

DM: Round 5...

Peyote: (hits ghoul#4, killing it)

ghoul#4: (claws and bites Peyote simultaneously as he kills it)

Peyote: (fails save, paralyzed) Rude deal, man!

Alindyar: Err...(stabs at ghoul#6, perchance rolling a 20!)

ghoul#6: (dies...it only had 5 hp to start with and just happened to be the last one left)

Alindyar: (looking around at the decimated party) It seems that I am in a unique situation here...

Alindyar, to his credit, does not take advantage of the comatose and paralyzed party members (some others definitely would have). Instead, he binds the wounds of all who are badly off, and blocks the door into this room, and makes sure that there are no more ghouls under the bed (the four who were turned ran under there though). He pours oil into their lair and holds a lantern ready in case they recover before some of the paralyzed party members do. Soon enough, at least some of the party can move again, including Peyote, who uses healing magic on those who are direly wounded. Those who use bows dispatch the ghouls in the pit with missile fire. The pit and the room are searched...

Halbarad: Check the bookshelf, and the closet, and the dresser. You, Peldor, you get to work on that chest. Also we examine the bed, and lower Mongo or me down into the ghoul pit to search for treasure. Rob, you check the worktable.

DM: The chest is solid iron...

Peldor: So? I still check for traps.

DM: The bookshelf contains a few old tomes, nothing exceptional though you

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do notice an archaic cookbook.

Mongo: Yeah! Grab that!

DM: ...most of the stuff in the closet is rotten and torn. There is one worn-out yet intact robe, and another is full of ants.

Peyote: I check the pockets of all the robes. Not the one with the ants though.

DM: You find two small topazes and a paring knife in one pocket. In the dresser are rags and shreds, and a black pearl.

Peldor: (to Halbarad) Don't forget to check behind the dresser and the mirror.

Halbarad: We look there.

DM: ...Behind the mirror, set into the wall, is a lockbox, containing a wand. The bed is well-made, but old and fragile. Nothing is to be found there. On the worktable is some old equipment and a number of potion bottles:

- a) (clear) marked "excellent"
- b) (yellow)
- c) (green)
- d) (blue)
- e) (red)
- f) (black) marked with skull & crossbones
- g) (purple) marked "humans only"

Peldor: (disarms trap and unlocks chest) Okay, it's open. What do we see?

DM: You find a sack of gold, another sack of small gems, a ring, a scepter, a short sword, and two potions.

Peldor: (checking for false bottoms, finds one) Aha! Nothing can be hidden from Peldor!

DM: Under the false bottom, you see a ring and a scroll. There is also a large iron bolt holding the chest to the floor.

Halbarad: That explains why the ghouls didn't take the chest...

Mongo: What about in the pit?

DM: There are a lot of bones, that's it. Apparently the ghouls stayed under the bed most of the time...it stinks something fierce.

The party rests here (despite the stench, it is the safest room in the place) for fully three days. Ged, Rob, and Peyote heal the others and themselves at their leisure, while Ged casts magic detection on all the things they found. The worn robe, the shortsword, the two potions, the ring and scroll, wand, and bottles a, d, e, and g are magical. Only a single incident of note occurs...

Rob: I open the green potion bottle.

DM: It's bubbling now...

Rob: Okay, I drink it.

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DM: What?!?!?!?

Halbarad: !

Peldor: !

Ged: (muttering) You fool!

DM: It's acid, Rob. Save.

Rob: (saves, barely, against death)

DM: Okay, Rob, you saved. You were obviously able to pull the bottle back in time. So only your lower lip is gone. That'll be...3 hp of damage.

Belphanior: Three whole hit points? For a LIP? Come on!

Rob: AAAAA!

Peldor: Oh well.

Ged: I'll heal him, since he can't get the verbal components right anymore to cast his own cure spell.

Rob: (blubbling)

They leave the dungeon and travel for the next several days through the forest, with no significant encounters except four ghouls, who don't last long. Peyote and Halbarad do their best to get the party out of the forest safely. About a week after the dungeon, the group emerges in a plains area, across which they peacefully ride for two days. In the late afternoon of the second day, they reach a river and take a moment to rest. Riders approach...

Man#1: (dismounts) You made good time. We had trouble keeping up with you. Now that we're all here, why don't you just give us the tube and we'll all be friends. After all, we wouldn't want any trouble, now would we boys? (The others laugh, and dismount)

Ogre: (puffs his chest out proudly) I is Korg!

Ged: Any relation to Krug?

Man#1: Korg here likes to eat troublemakers. Now I _know_ you all are not troublemakers.

Belphanior: Bank on it, pal.

Halbarad: Leave us be, or suffer the consequences. I warn you only this once.

Man#1: Fine. We will take what we want.

DM: Round 1...(there are two men, four orcs, and the ogre)

Belphanior: (slices man#2, killing him) What a wimp!

Mongo: I want the ogre!

Halbarad: (to the orcs, in orcish) I am Halbarad, better known to your kind as Sharku. Prepare to meet Gruumsh. (attacks, kills orc#1 with a single blow)

man#1: (hits Belphanior, for minor damage)

orc#2: (misses Halbarad)

Peldor: (hits and kills an orc) Hah! We told you not to fight!

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orc#4: (attacks Peyote, inflicts a minor wound)

Peyote: (wounds orc#4) Whoa.

Alindyar: (casts phantasmal force toward the ogre) Have a demon!

Ogre: (bats at the illusion with his huge mace) Ugh!

Ged: (magic missiles man#1, wounding him) There, fool!

Rob: (attacks orc#4 but misses)

orc#5: (hits Rob for near-fatal damage)

Ogre: (attacks Mongo, but misses) Stand still, dwarf, and I crush.

Mongo: Die, O enemy of dwarves! (stabs ogre in one leg for serious damage)

DM: Round 2...

Peldor: (looking around him) (backstabs orc#5, whose back is turned as he faces the prowess of Rob)

orc#5: Urk! (dies from damage overdose)

Halbarad: (attacks orc#2, hitting and killing it) Die, wretch!

orc#4: (flees)

Halbarad: I chase him down...(pursues the orc)

Rob: (bonks man#1 with his mace)

Peyote: Spare him, so that we may question him!

Belphanior: (stabs the man, too late to hear Peyote's cry. The guy is slain)
Uh...sorry.

Ogre: (hits Mongo for heaping damage) Korg smash puny dwarf!

Mongo: (uses both attacks on the ogre, one hits) Dammit!

DM: Round 3...

Peldor: (moving fast, he is already in position to backstab the hulking ogre, and does so, delivering the coup de grace)

Mongo: Hey! I was doing fine by myself.

Peldor: You're welcome.

Halbarad: (returns)

Ged: What happened to the orc?

Halbarad: (holds up a pair of bloody ears)

Mongo: Oh.

Peyote: (to Ged) When he was a child, an orc tribe killed his family. Now he is sworn to destroy any orcs who knowingly commit an evil act.

Ged: I see.

The party gains a grand total of 39 gp and 121 sp from the attackers. No clues are found as to who wants the scroll tube so badly. They go on for a couple of hours, after binding wounds. They reach the Celene border by dusk, and ask for the whereabouts of Belegard and Courwood. They camp on the plains overnight, unmolested by anything. The next day, they ride on to Courwood, and find Belegard in the affluent section of town, in a manor.

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They inform him of what has transpired over the last few weeks; he regrets the loss of Cassius, and surmises that rivals of his are after the tube as well. He never does tell the party what's in it, but he does pay them, in cash, that day, and also sets them up for a week in a fine tavern, near several places where various party members can train (Courwood is a big city).

The Loot (magical items only are listed):

battleaxe +?

scroll (cure serious wounds & spiritual hammer)

ring of water breathing

dagger +?

ring of invisibility

robe of protection +?

shortsword +?

2 potions of healing

ring

scroll (magic missile, levitate, burning hands, taunt)

wand of magic missiles

potion a (determined to be invisibility), d (determined to be extra-healing), e (undetermined), and g (undetermined, but they were offered 500 gp for it)

Alindyar gets the robe of protection and the wand

Belphanior gets the unknown ring and the mage scroll

Ged gets the ring of water breathing and a potion of healing

Halbarad gets the dagger and the potion of extra-healing

Mongo gets the axe and a potion of healing

Peldor gets the shortsword and potion g

Peyote gets the ring of invisibility

Rob gets the priest scroll, the potion of invisibility, and potion e

...training, where appropriate, is forthcoming...

THE PARTY THUS FAR:

Alindyar, 2nd level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 1st/1st level high elf fighter/mage (CN)

Ged, 2nd/1st level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 2nd level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 2nd level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 3rd level human thief (N)

Peyote, 1st/1st level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 2nd level human priest (LG)

Belgar & the Mine



The party is in Courwood, in southern Celene. After completing their previous mission, they have been resting and/or training for the last three weeks, to good effect. Some of them are now more proficient in their occupations. They have been wondering what they will do next, but life does go on, as we shall see...

Mongo: (inside the Shiny Shield armor shoppe, looking at several suits of plate mail) Hmm.

Clerk: Those are fine, fine armors there, sir. Our armorer built each one by hand, and labored long and hard at the forge.

Mongo: (possesses the armorer proficiency) Some of these are good, but others are shoddy! Maybe you have more than one armorer, eh? What I am really interested in is a suit that will fit me. Do you have any of those?

Clerk: (thinking) Give me a minute here. (goes into back)

Mongo: (tapping foot impatiently)

Clerk: (returning with a wheeled cart that holds a smaller suit of plate)

Here is just the thing, sir! It is a finely crafted suit of plate, and just your size...

Mongo: (examining it) It seems okay...wait! This won't fit me!

Clerk: Alas, we may have to custom-design one for you.

Mongo: Whatever. Just get a start on it. I don't have all day.

Clerk: Well, I never!

Mongo: Never what?

Clerk: (grumbling) Let me get your measurements.

Mongo: Hey! Watch it there!

Clerk: Okay...we'll need two weeks, and that will run you...let's see here...three hundred gold coins.

Mongo: A WEEK? I need it in days, man!

Clerk: Well, we could rush it, for four hundred, and have it done in a week maybe...

Mongo: Okay, fine. Just do it. I'll be back. (leaves)

Outside the armorer's shoppe, Mongo is approached by a cloaked man.

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cloaked man: Hey, aren't you one of those adventurers who came into town recently?

Mongo: None of your damn business! But, why do you ask?

cloaked man: I am Belgar (shakes Mongo's hand). I know a place where you can find treasure, riches beyond your wildest dreams. Do you think that your group might be interested?

Mongo: Hmph. Dunno. Let's go ask them.

(later, at the tavern)

Halbarad: So, Belgar, why don't you go to this treasure trove all by your lonesome? Why do you need _us_ to do it?

Belgar: Well, I think that there are some nasty creatures hiding out around that area. If I go there by myself...well, I don't think I would last too long. I was thinking of serving as a guide for a party strong enough to survive. I am not afraid to go there, as long as I have help in case of attack.

Peyote: Sounds killer.

Belgar: So, are you interested in this?

Ged: That depends. What do _you_ want out of all this?

Belgar: An equal share of anything found, that is all.

Mongo: Can you fight?

Peyote: Nine ways, then?

Peldor: Maybe less, before it's over...

Ged: Quiet, you greedy, murderous fool!

Belphanior: Where is this place you speak of?

Belgar: 'Tis about one day's journey to the southwest. It is an old mine of some sort.

Halbarad: What do you all think?

Mongo: Shit yeah! Let's do it!

Ged: Of course we'll go. There will surely be much evil to be vanquished there.

Peyote: Good deal.

Belphanior: Sure. What else do we have to do?

Rob: Uh.

Alindyar: Fine with me.

Peldor: Treasure? Riches? Of course I'm in!

Belgar: Okay then. When shall we leave?

Mongo: I've got some new armor on order that's gonna take a week or so to be built...

Halbarad: So be it. We leave in one week.

The next week is spent in preparation for the exploration of the mine. This time, the party members have sufficient money with which to buy

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equipment and weapons, and they arm themselves well, buying plenty of rations, water, oil, rope, torches, etc. Ged, somewhat unraveled by his recent experiences with undead, makes a stop at the local temple of Boccob and procures several flasks of holy water, leaving a most generous donation in return. Rob spends most of the week praying for better luck than he had last time. Belphanior works to transcribe the spells from his scroll into his spellbook, with some success. Alindyar stays indoors and behind a locked door for practically the entire week, to avoid drawing attention to himself and the party. Halbarad buys the raw materials necessary to fabricate himself a score of fine arrows, and does so (he has the bowyer/fletcher proficiency). Peyote spends the week in the wilds outside of Courwood, stating the need to commune with nature. Mongo anxiously awaits his new suit of plate mail, and samples the best food the city has to offer in the meantime. Peldor scopes out a number of potential homes and temples to rob, and tries (in vain) to find out more about his new magical sword.

After a week and a day, they are ready to go. They leave one morning on horseback, and travel across the plains, stopping for a midday meal and supper. They finish the latter meal near dusk and are within an hour's ride of the mine (according to Belgar). However, before they can mount up and ride on...

DM: A group of small, about four-foot tall green-skinned humanoids is approaching you with weapons drawn.

Mongo: (to DM) Being a dwarf, do I recognize them as goblins?

DM: (to Mongo) Yup.

Halbarad: How many are there?

DM: About a dozen...

Belphanior: Ho there, goblins! Yes, you! What do you want?

goblin: (speaking in broken common) You trespassing! Kill!

Peldor: Us? Traspassing? You must have us mistaken for someone else!

Belphanior: But won't you give us a chance to surrender?

goblin: (in goblin, to its comrades) Nice adventurerses... lotsof money.

Lotsof FOOD!

Mongo: (understands goblin language) They mean to EAT us!!!

Belphanior: Screw this. I hold my sword above my head and goad them on.

DM: The goblins rush the campsite...Round 1...

Belphanior: (steps out to meet a goblin, hits it and kills it in the blink of an eye)

Peldor: (retreating into the shadows, with the party in general between him and the goblins)

Peyote: (slipping on his ring, turns invisible, goes to lead the horses away from the battle before they freak out)

Halbarad: (slices a goblin, killing it) Foul things!

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goblin: (attacks Mongo, but its small sword bounces off of his plate mail)
Cursessss!

Mongo: It's good to know that it works...

goblin: (attacks Belphanior, missing as the agile elf dodges away)

goblin: (attacks Halbarad, scratching him with its sword)

Peldor: (easily backstabs a random goblin in the rear ranks, slaying it)

goblin: (attacks Mongo, misses)

goblin: (attacks Belphanior, inflicts a minor wound)

goblin: (attacks Halbarad, misses)

Alindyar: STOP! (pulls back his hood, exposing himself as a drow to the group of goblins, as he casts a wall of fog behind them)

Belgar: By the gods! A dark elf!

goblins: Aieeee!

Alindyar: (in goblinese...he and Mongo are the only ones who can speak and understand it) Small ones! Surrender at once or my smoke demon will come and eat all of you!

goblins: (making a morale check) (half of them flee, the closest ones, the rest, throw down their weapons in terror and lay down on the ground)

Belgar: (silently commending himself on his choice of a party)

Belphanior: I'll be damned!

Alindyar: Let us take their weapons and tie them up.

Halbarad: Fine by me. (starts collecting shortwords and daggers)

Belphanior: No! Kill them instead. They attacked us! (he raises his sword at one of the goblins, who wails in miserable terror)

Mongo: Yeah!

Ged: (interposes himself between the goblin and Belphanior) These creatures, miserable as they are, are under Boccob's protection. Leave them be.

Belphanior: I can kill them if I want!

Ged: There is always hope, even for the evil. Even for such as you.

Halbarad: They're more use to us alive. They can give us valuable information about their lair.

Peyote: Besides, they did surrender.

Alindyar: Truly so. Let them live. They are incapable of causing us further trouble.

Peldor: (going through the dead goblins in search of loot)

Belphanior: (grumbling)

Mongo: Oh, whatever. I'll tie them up. Tight as hell, though, that's for sure. (gets out rope, begins binding them in pairs, back to back. Peyote and Ged help.)

Rob: (uncoiling rope, gets it all knotted up) ...

Halbarad: We can question them later.

Belgar: Ask them about the mine. Maybe there are more of them in there.

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Mongo: (in goblinese, to goblins) This is your lucky day, guys. We'll let you live, but I want to talk to the leader. Which one of you little punks is the chief?

goblins: (all point to a certain one of their fellows) Him!

chief: (yells out after a few seconds) I is chief Gork. What you want from me?

Belphanior: (starts advancing on Gork with bloody sword drawn)

Gork: Aaaaa!

Mongo: (still in goblinese) Okay pal, here's the deal. Tell me where your home is, how many more of you hide out there, and if there are any guards, and where they are, and...

chief: Wait! Wait! Too much for me tiny mind. Home in old mine. Near here, yes. Many goblins there, no hurt you nice peoples. Talk to guardses, work deal, yes. (obviously proud of his skill at negotiation)

Alindyar: (snickers)

Halbarad: Well? What does it say?

Mongo: There are other goblins in the mine already. We will have to fight them, probably. (looks around) What are we going to do with all of these goblins?

Peyote: Leave them here, man.

Belphanior: I still say we should kill them all.

Alindyar: (has been watching Peldor pocket coins) You, rogue! How much have you pilfered? I think that you should share your loot with everybody!

Peldor: Oh all right. Here, they had a grand total of sixteen coins of copper and three of silver.

Ged: These are pretty weak goblins.

Mongo: Pretty poor goblins, if ya ask me.

Belphanior: If any more goblins attack me, I'm going to kill them no matter what the rest of you say.

Halbarad: Let us go.

They leave the goblins scattered about the area, tied together in pairs, and ride on. Soon they find the object of Belgar's tale: an old, run-down mineshaft in the side of a rather big hill. As they dismount and approach, a number of goblins charge out, brandishing spears and swords, howling...

Peldor: So much for a surprise attack.

Ged: (begins spellcasting)

Alindyar: (in goblinese) Stop! We wish to talk, not fight!

goblins: (ignoring him) Die! Die!

Mongo: There must be twenty of them!

Alindyar: (ponders the goblins)

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Rob: (to DM) Is there any chance that they won't attack us?

DM: Doesn't look that way, does it?

Ged: (launches a sleep spell at the mob; seven are put to sleep)

Belphanior: I draw my sword.

Mongo: Hey! Me too!

DM: Round 1...

Belphanior: (kills a goblin)

Peyote: (to right of Belphanior) Dudes! (swings, hits, wounding a goblin)

Mongo: (to left of Belphanior) I'm so slow. I always go last!

Peldor: (wounds a goblin that tried to sneak around the side of the three-person wedge) Take that, snakey!

Rob: Snakey?

Halbarad: (hits and kills a goblin)

Alindyar: (casting a spell)

Belgar: (meleeing a goblin)

Ged: (pulls out mace, bashes a goblin over the head, wounding it)

goblin: (misses Mongo)

goblin: (wounds Ged)

goblin: (misses Peldor)

goblin: (wounds Belphanior)

goblin: (misses Peyote)

goblin: (misses Mongo)

goblin: (hits Rob)

goblin: (hits Peldor)

Alindyar: (casts color spray toward one cluster of goblins, dazing about four) There you go.

Mongo: (hits and kills a goblin) Hah! Last but not least!

Rob: (misses a goblin with his flail)

goblin: (misses Mongo)

DM: Round 2...

Halbarad: (kills another goblin)

Belphanior: (kills another goblin)

goblin: (hits Halbarad)

goblin: (misses Mongo)

Belphanior: (to DM) I sneak over to the sleeping goblins.

Peldor: (wounds a goblin)

Mongo: (kills another goblin)

goblin: (misses Ged)

goblin: (misses Belgar)

goblin: (hits Mongo)

goblin: (misses Rob)

Thomas Miller

Rob: (swings his flail, rolls a 1, trips and falls)

Peyote: (kills a goblin)

Mongo: (second attack kills another goblin. The battle comes to an end all of a sudden.) Whew! (drinks thirstily from his wineskin)

Belphanior: (cutting throats of the sleeping goblins; no one notices until most of them are already dead)

Ged: Hey! What are you doing?

Belphanior: What does it look like I'm doing? (kills another)

Peldor: I'll help! (kills the last)

Ged: Slaying opponents in battle is one thing, but killing helpless and vanquished enemies is quite another! You, sir, are definitely not in for a pleasant afterlife!

Belphanior: (grins) Ain't I a stinker?

Peyote: Hey Ged, lighten up. We tried to parley. Besides, war is hell.

Halbarad: And Peldor, put their money in the treasure sack.

The party flees back about four miles, tired and wounded and not really in any mood to fight more goblins right now. Halbarad makes sure that they are not pursued. They have the priest-types heal their wounds, and Mongo cooks a delicious stew to warm up the cold autumn night (it is approximately 39 degrees F outside). Halbarad and Peldor, working together in a rare moment, make several forays to the mine entrance, to make sure that the goblins aren't sending a scouting party out after them. They observe that the creatures don't seem to want to venture out into the darkness. Also, the goblins set up a large bonfire in front of the mineshaft entrance and post four guards to watch for enemies. The two scouts return and inform the party of these things. Belphanior wants to borrow Peyote's ring of invisibility and go bombard the goblins' bonfire, and lair, with flasks of oil, but he is talked out of it. The party sleeps and rotates two members on watch every four hours. They plan to formally raid the lair in the morning.

Alindyar wonders to himself what right the party has to invade the goblins' very home in search of treasure. Even if they fight, he surmises, they are only defending their home from what they must surely perceive as an attack.

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NOTES: Alindyar and myself, the DM, had a discussion about the goblin issue during a dinner break. The irony of a drow having regrets about attacking someone's home, even if they are evil, is great. He concluded that many surface dwellers are as bad as the drow, who they would condemn in a heartbeat.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 2nd level drow elf mage (N)
Belphanior, 1st/1st level high elf fighter/mage (CN)
Ged, 2nd/1st level grey elf priest/mage (NG)
Halbarad, 2nd level human ranger (NG)
Mongo Thunderhead, 2nd level dwarf fighter (CG)
Peldor, 3rd level human thief (N)
Peyote, 1st/1st level half-elf fighter/druid (N)
Rob, 2nd level human priest (LG)

Goblins Galore; Trapped!



The party has been camped nearby the old dwarven mine all night long. Now it is morning, and they are ready to explore the place. Four large goblins guard the entrance, and the bonfire is now no more than a faint wisp of flame and a few embers. The party watches the place from the cover of some bushes about a hundred feet away. Their guide, Belgar, says that this is the closest he has ever gotten to the mine.

Halbarad: Okay, let's go over the plan once more. Belphanior, you and myself will be ready to fire arrows. Ged will borrow Peyote's ring of invisibility and sneak up to the entrance. Peyote will be ready with his bow as well. Mongo, you'd better stay back; in all that armor, you're about as quiet as an elephant.

Peldor: Give me that ring, and they'll all be dead before you can fire an arrow.

Mongo: No, you'll be outta here and we'll be stuck with the goblins.

Belgar: The goblins have been raiding the countryside, did I forget to mention that? They are responsible for the deaths of at least sixteen local villagers...

Belphanior: Let's get 'em!

Ged: (starts moving in, carefully, invisible)

Belphanior: (he and Halbarad nock arrows and sight their targets)

Peyote: (also with bow in hand)

Ged: (walking along the dirt trail, minimizing his chances to make too much noise, he is soon within twenty or thirty feet of the goblins)

goblins: (seemingly unaware of anything)

Ged: (casting a sleep spell)

goblin#1: Hey! What's that noise?

goblin#2: Sounds like chanting.

goblin#3: Coming from road there. (all of them look but don't see anything)

Ged: (lets the spell go)

goblins: zzzz...

Ged: (making hand signals to the rest of the party)

The party converges on the mine entrance. The goblins are bound and gagged tightly, except for one which Belphanior manages to kill before

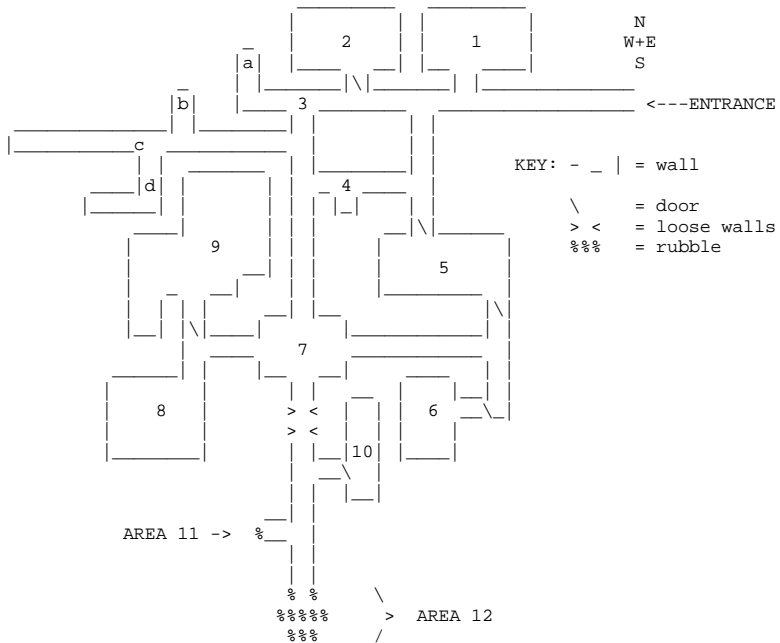
The Adventurers

anyone can stop him, and stashed about a half mile away, in a pile of dead grass. The party sees a 10' wide tunnel and assumes a marching order with Mongo and Halbarad in front, then Belphanior and Peyote, followed by Ged and Rob, then Belgar, with Alindyar and Peldor bringing up the rear.

Belgar: This is the place. The riches lie within!

DM: The ceiling is sort of low here - 6' at most. The walls and floor are carved from solid rock, and every so often, old wooden beams are visible, holding up the roof overhead. You are travelling westward.

Halbarad: We go further in...



DM: You see an open area to the right, and the tunnel continues to the left and ahead.

Mongo: We move into the room to the north.

DM: You see six goblins and six bunks. The goblins leap up to the attack, shrieking.

Mongo: We charge right in to meet them!

Alindyar: (to Peldor) Perhaps we should watch the passages to the west and south for a rear attack.

Peldor: Perhaps. (wanders westward)

Alindyar: (thinking)

DM: Round 1...

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Halbarad: (swings, hits, and kills goblin#3)

Peyote: (he and Belphanior have moved around to fight side by side with Halbarad and Mongo, respectively) Chaos, man. (deflects a goblin's sword)

goblin#2: (misses Peyote)

Belphanior: (slices at goblin#6 with sword, killing it) Ha-ha-ha!

goblin#5: (swings at Mongo, but his blow is deflected by the dwarf's excellent plate mail)

Peyote: (slashes at goblin#2 but misses) Whoops.

goblin#1: (hits Peyote for a minor wound) Die, elfkin!

Mongo: (first attack hits, kills goblin#5)

goblin#4: (misses Mongo)

Ged: (not sure if a spell is needed)

Rob: (looking about dazedly)

Mongo: (second attack hits and kills goblin#4 easily) Hah! That'll teach you to mess with Mongo Thunderhead! (in goblinese) There's no hope, goblins! Surrender now!

goblin#1: Never!

DM: Round 2...

Halbarad: (chops at goblin#2 with his battleaxe, caving in its head)

goblin#2: Urk!

goblin#1: Uh-oh!

Peyote: (swings, misses the remaining goblin) Dammit!

Belphanior: (moving around behind the goblin)

goblin#1: (in desperation, launches a desperate stab at Peyote, for which he rolls a 20...Peyote is wounded seriously) Yah!

Belphanior: (backstabs goblin#1, killing it three times over) Heh-heh.

Peyote: I bind my wounds.

Belphanior: (searching the room)

Meanwhile, Peldor has found a door on the right (area 2) and listened at it. Hearing nothing, he opens the door and enters the room...only to come face-to-face with six more goblins resting in their beds. They see him and leap up, yelling and cursing.

Halbarad: We search the bunks, and underneath them.

DM: You find a total of 11 sp and 3 gp.

Belphanior: I slice open each pillow, looking for hidden valuables.

DM: One of the pillows contains a small gem wrapped in cloth.

Halbarad: Good work. Now...

(loud noises are rapidly approaching)

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Halbarad: (brandishing sword, he goes out into the corridor, with the others close behind) What in the hell...?

In the main passage, Peldor is rapidly retreating back towards the main party. He is engaged in swordplay with three goblins simultaneously, and has a number of wounds. Other goblins are behind the front three.

Peldor: Hi guys! I'm back!

Peyote: Uh-oh.

Belphanior: More goblins! (charges toward the battle)

Alindyar: ...(looks at Halbarad and shrugs)

Peldor: (takes two more hits, and falls) I killed at least seven...

Mongo: I leap over Peldor and defend his worthless carcass!

DM: Leap? In plate mail?

Mongo: Sure! I'm a strong guy!

DM: Plate mail is heavy stuff, Mongo...

Mongo: Oh all right. I step over him, maybe on him, and engage the goblins.

DM: There are more noises from the passage to the south...(area 5)

Halbarad: I face that tunnel. What do I see?

DM: A wide door opens, and a large, fat goblin in a cooking apron comes out. He advances on you. Other, smaller goblins are behind him.

Peyote: I back Halbarad up.

Belgar: (looks around, not sure what to do)

Rob: (hefts his mace and waits behind both fronts)

Ged: (prepares a magic missile spell)

Alindyar: (waiting)

DM: Round 1...

Belphanior: (hits a goblin, with a 20. The goblin's leg is severed and it falls to the ground, dying.) Yes!

goblin: (attacks Belphanior, misses) Kss!

goblin: (attacks Belphanior, hits) Sss! Die, elf!

Belphanior: Not by your hand, lizard!

goblin: (attacks Mongo, misses) Kth!

Mongo: (slices a goblin, killing it) Yeah! Fuck yeah!

nearby...

goblin cook: (swings a nasty-looking cleaver at Halbarad, hits and scores a minor wound) Damn yer bones! When me hits ya solid, y'ull be ded!

Halbarad: (misses the cook)

other goblin: (hits Peyote, sending him to -2 hp)

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Peyote: Rude deal...(collapses)

Rob: (steps over Peyote's body to face the two goblins)

Alindyar: (drags Peyote back, binding his wounds)

Belgar: (watches)

Ged: (magic missiles one of the small goblins, wounding it)

DM: Round 2...

Belphanior: (kills another goblin) Little bastards!

goblin: (hits Belphanior)

goblin: (hits Belphanior)

Belphanior: (now at -3 hp) ...

goblin: (hits Mongo for a really minor wound)

Mongo: (two attacks...hits two goblins, kills two goblins) They'll call this the Day of the Mongo!

nearby...

Halbarad: (hits the goblin cook, with a 20...critical hit...the cook's arm, complete with cleaver, flies off to the left.)

other goblins: (hesitate for a moment)

Alindyar: (steps forward and launches the color spray into the mass of goblins)

goblins: (all five are rendered unconscious)

Halbarad: Hmm...I kill them.

DM: Round 3...

goblin: (hits Mongo)

goblin: (misses Mongo)

goblin: (hits Mongo)

Mongo: (misses a goblin) Fuckit!

Ged: (lacking further offensive spellpower, he readies his flail and approaches)

Alindyar: Allow me. (readies wand and moves behind Mongo)

DM: Round 4...

goblin: (misses Mongo)

goblin: (hits Mongo)

Mongo: Grr...that does it! You little shits are TOAST! (slashes at both goblins, killing one and seriously wounding the other)

Alindyar: (launches a magic missile from his wand, frying the goblin that Mongo wounded)

DM: All of your adversaries are defeated.

Halbarad: We haul our wounded back into the first room.

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Rob: I cure Peldor, and Peyote.

Ged: I cure Peyote, and use my potion on Belphanior. What about Mongo?

Mongo: What about me? I'm fine. Don't waste your healing on me. (drinks his potion of healing) Ahh!

THE PARTY'S CURRENT STATUS:

Alindyar: unwounded

Belphanior: recovering

Ged: unwounded

Halbarad: slightly wounded

Mongo: moderately wounded

Peldor: recovering

Peyote: recovering

Rob: unwounded

Belgar: unwounded

Leaving Alindyar, Ged, and Rob with the recovering party members, Mongo and Halbarad explore the nearby passages. To the south, in the room where the cook came from (area 5), they find 6 gp and a medium gem. In a nearby room (area 6) they find six empty bunks and 16 gp. There is a passage to the west, but they ignore it for now. Then they backtrack and scout out the looping passage (containing area 4, which is a tool closet containing picks, hammers, etc.). They begin to suspect that the nearby passage south and the previous passage may lead to the same place (area 7). They also check out area 2, the room where Peldor found the second round of goblins; within, they confiscate 10 gp and 16 sp. The northwestern tunnels are left alone for now. The pair returns to the room where the rest of the party is and discusses their options at this point. Unfortunately for the party, the goblin chief and the other goblins (all in areas 8 and 9) heard the ruckus earlier. The subchief and four goblins come to investigate...

Halbarad: What's this? I hear something...

goblin: (enters room) Aaa! (attacks)

DM: Round 1...

goblin#1: (hits Halbarad)

Halbarad: Ouch!

Belphanior: (just recently awakened, casts color spray on the group of goblins)

goblins: (four are knocked unconscious, the subchief is blinded)

Halbarad: (slays the subchief)

Peldor: (begins slitting throats of the k.o.-ed ones)

Belphanior: It's a good thing you guys woke me up!

Peldor: Yeah! Me too! Why didn't anybody search the bodies of all these dead goblins? I'm shocked at you all!

Thomas Miller

Ged: ...now look here, graverobber! We have better things to do than search the corpses of goblins!

Peldor: That's okay, I'll do it!

Belgar: I'll help...

Halbarad: We had better find any more goblins that may be wandering around, and get rid of them, or we will have to worry about the possibility of an ambush.

Peyote: Right on, man.

Mongo: Let's go find them!

Peyote: Waitamminute dude. (heals himself and Mongo with a spell each)

Alindyar: Mayhap we should pile all of these dead bodies in a single place? That way, they would be out of the way...

Mongo: There, in that corner. Peldor, why don't you help me, since you like to play with the dead so much?

Later, after the goblins are all in area 1, the party explores the north-western passages.

DM: You see one dead-end passage at the northern end of a long tunnel, past the second room. 3 sp are on the ground.

Peldor: I pick them up.

DM: Right to the south is another westward passage. The rock looks more freshly cut than the surrounding tunnels.

Halbarad: We take the westward passage.

DM: Further down, it forks to the north, then to the south, while a single tunnel continues west.

Halbarad: We check the northern alcove.

DM: It is empty.

Mongo: Look at the rock here. It's pretty hard...the goblins may have stopped mining this passage because it was too difficult.

Ged: What's in the straight west direction?

DM: It deadends, and there is a bucket of small uncut gems there.

Peldor: I'll pocket those!

Mongo: No! We put them in the treasure sack. Which I'm carrying.

Peldor: (thinking about getting into that treasure sack)

DM: To the south is another dead-end passage, containing a small underground stream. A number of buckets are nearby; this looks like the goblin's water supply.

Halbarad: Okay. We backtrack and take the main southern passage.

DM: It goes about a hundred feet, into a larger room. This area has exits in all four directions.

Alindyar: (with mapping proficiency, he is the party's mapper) Hmm. (checking the map) We know where the eastern and northern exits lead.

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Ged: Let's go west.

Halbarad: We cautiously move westward.

DM: You see an empty room to the south, and a door to the north.

Peldor: I search it.

Mongo: I "help" Peldor search. What do we find?

DM: A sack of 62 gold coins, and a potion bottle.

Halbarad: Good enough. What about the door?

Peldor: (hears nothing behind the door) I open the door.

DM: Beyond is a large room. You see a huge goblin, and four large goblins.

All of them have crossbows leveled at you.

Halbarad: Uh...

Mongo: (in goblinese) Surrender now, and we will spare you!

Goblin Chief: Hah hah! Shoot!

Goblin Chief: (shoots Peldor, hitting him and knocking him back to 0 hp)

Hor hor!

goblin#1: (shoots Halbarad, hitting and wounding him)

goblin#2: (shoots Mongo, but the bolt is deflected by his armor)

goblin#3: (shoots Peyote, seriously wounding him)

goblin#4: (shoots Belphanior, but misses)

Halbarad: We rush forth to melee them.

DM: Round 1...

Halbarad: (hits and wounds goblin#1)

Belphanior: (misses goblin#2)

goblin#1: (hits Halbarad)

Halbarad: (now down to 5 hp) Damn!

goblin#2: (misses Mongo)

goblin#3: (hits Belphanior, knocking him below 0 hp)

Belphanior: Well, maybe it's not such a good thing that they woke me
up...(keels over)

goblin#4: (hits Peyote, putting him down to -1 hp)

Peyote: Aaa! Not again! (falls)

Ged: I bind their wounds.

Mongo: (attacking on segment 10, the last segment) (almost casually swipes
goblin#2, slaying it)

DM: Round 2...

Mongo: (goes first) I don't believe it! I'm not attacking last! (aims two
blows at chief, both of them hit)

Goblin Chief: Urk!

Rob: (makes a mad dash forth, but misses goblin#4)

goblin#4: (hits Rob)

Halbarad: (slices goblin#1, slaying it)

Thomas Miller

Goblin Chief: (hits Mongo, wounding him badly)

Alindyar: (uses wand to magic missile goblin#4, wounding it)

goblin#3: (slashes at Halbarad, reducing him to 2 hp)

DM: Round 3...

Halbarad: (hits and wounds goblin#3)

goblin#3: (misses Halbarad)

Alindyar: (magic missiles goblin#3, killing it)

goblin#4: (misses Rob)

Goblin Chief: (hits Mongo, with a roll of 20, knocking him down to 3 hp)

Har har!

Mongo: Shit!

Halbarad: Time to retreat...

Mongo: Fuck no! I'm not running! (swings, hits)

Goblin Chief: (bleeding profusely) Och!

Mongo: (in goblinese) Die, you pile of orc crap!

Halbarad: That's an insult!

Rob: (swings his mace, miraculously hitting goblin#4)

goblin#4: (dies)

Mongo: Hey! The priest did something! All right!

DM: Round 5...

Goblin Chief: (swinging at Mongo)

Mongo: (holding his breath)

Goblin Chief: (the DM rolls a 1...)

DM: Err...he slices a chunk out of his leg...

Mongo: (chops at the Chief, hitting) Fuck yeah!

Goblin Chief: Go to hell, dwarf...(spits at Mongo, dies)

Ged: I bind all of their wounds.

Belgar: I'll help...

Mongo: What treasure is in here, I wonder?

DM: You find a small chest, open, containing 569 coins of gold and five gems, and two golden ingots. Also there is a warhammer at the bottom of the chest.

Mongo: I examine the hammer.

DM: It looks to be of dwarvish make.

Mongo: Good! What about the chief's sword?

DM: It looks like a finely crafted weapon.

Mongo: We get that too, then.

The party camps out in the chief's lair. They find that, during the battle, a large horde of female goblins and children fled from a room to the south, and headed out of the mine. Too tired to care, they set several traps and alarms (well, Peldor and Halbarad do, anyway) and rest for a full day and

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a half. Everyone is healed to full power, and no monsters molest the group. On the morning of the third day in the place, they head for the southern areas. To avoid being burdened with a lot of treasure, they leave the bulk of the heavy stuff (in other words, the ingots) hidden in the chief's room under a mattress for now. Heading to the south, they then find an empty room (area 10) with a lot of food and bunks; this room is right past a very precarious section of ceiling/walls, supported by a single beam tilted at an odd angle. Further south, they see a half-started tunnel to the west, and what looks like a cave-in blocking progress south.

Mongo: This isn't such a bad cave-in, really. There is about an inch open at the very top, see? (points to top of rock pile)

Halbarad: I wonder if we can clear it.

Mongo: How bad _is_ the cave-in?

DM: Not that bad...it would take about two hours to clear, you estimate.

Mongo: Oh. Well, do we want to see what's behind the cave-in?

DM: You hear rumbling from the north...

Belphanior: What do we see there?

DM: Well, there is Belgar, kicking at the loose wooden beam...it collapses, and you see a great deal of rocks and dirt fall down blocking the passage. Your lanterns are snuffed out by the dust billowing forth, and the air is suddenly heavy with grit, barely breathable.

NOTES: Belgar was going to follow the party and get a treasure share just for being there (he's a coward), but he saw an easy way to get the two golden ingots, and so he took it. Also, in our campaign, a roll of 20 spells maximum damage, with a chance beyond that for a critical hit (i.e. instant death). We weren't too keen on the instant death concept.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 2nd level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 1st/1st level high elf fighter/mage (CN)

Ged, 2nd/1st level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 2nd level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 2nd level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 3rd level human thief (N)

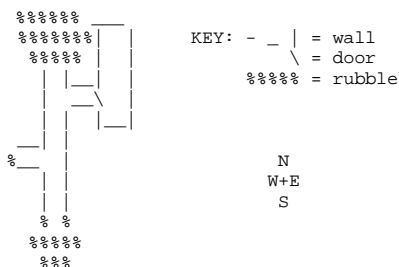
Peyote, 1st/1st level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 2nd level human priest (LG)

Perspectives



The party has been buried alive by the traitorous Belgar. They light a lantern again and survey their prison:



DM: Dust pervades the air around you, making it difficult to breathe.

Alindyar: I do believe we have been betrayed.

Mongo: I'll kill that motherfucker! I'll rip out his heart and feed it to a dog!

Belphanior: That's not good enough. First skin him alive, then pour salt all over him...

Peyote: Well, look at it this way. He wasn't doing much anyway, and now we don't have to give him a share of the treasure.

Ged: Yep, that's one way to think about it.

Peldor: Hah! That was classic! I couldn't have done a better job myself!

Rest of Party: (glaring at Peldor)

Peldor: Err...I wouldn't have done it to you guys, of course.

Belphanior: So, I wonder how long we will last here before we run out of air?

Rob: (gasping)

Mongo: I have no intention of staying down here for much longer. I examine the cave-in, using my mining proficiency to try and gauge its depth.

DM: The fallen rubble is comprised of mostly large rocks...it's at least ten feet thick, if not more.

Alindyar: What of the other side, to the south? As I recall, there was some space at the top of the collapsed section...maybe we could dig through it.

Mongo: (checking it out) Yup. This is definitely less congested. We could get through this in a few hours. 'Course, that would put us deeper in

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the mine...

Belphanior: So? Who cares about that? Let's start digging!

Mongo: (fortunately, Mongo carries a great assortment of things in his back pack, among them a folding shovel and a pickaxe) Well, I've got a few tools here. I guess you all can just dig with your hands.

Mongo and others dig for a while. After a few hours and much sweat, they have cleared a three-foot gap below the ceiling. Mongo peers into the darkness beyond, seeing nothing. He then lights a torch, as does Halbarad, and they climb through the hole first to check it out. Beyond the wall of rubble, the two warriors see the first thirty feet or so of a huge hall. Their lantern casts dark shadows upon old and dusty pillars, and at the edge of the light, a broad stairway is faintly visible, descending into the darkness.

NOTE: Experimental New Format For These Stories Starts Here

Mongo slid down the rocks, landing with a clunk on the floor of the newly discovered chamber. Right behind him came Halbarad, brandishing his lantern. Mongo thought it unfortunate that humans lacked the often useful ability of infravision, having to resort to artificial sources of light to see underground. Besides, the bright light ruined Mongo's own chances of seeing anything in the dark. Grumbling, the armored dwarf wandered around the chamber, examining the stonework. It was most definitely dwarven in make, and Mongo felt his heart stir with pride as he viewed the work of his race.

Halbarad was cautiously approaching the stairs, axe drawn and ready. The stout ranger was never one to take chances, and he held his bright lantern high and peered into the huge chamber at the foot of the wide stairway. He heard faint scraping noises from the darkness; it almost sounded like something was slithering down there. The noises became louder, and Halbarad sensed that whatever was at the foot of the stairs was on its way up. "Mongo!", the ranger shouted, "We've got trouble!".

Suddenly, a large, tubular form crashed out of the darkness, slamming into Halbarad. The lantern sailed off, shattering against the stony floor, but not before its light was extinguished. Halbarad managed to maintain his grip on his axe, even though he was knocked over by the impact. He got in a couple of swings with the weapon before his assailant backed away, and knew that one of them had struck a wounding blow.

Mongo had turned when he heard his companion's warning, and it took him a few seconds to adjust to the darkness after the lantern went out. When he could see again, in the infrared spectrum, he witnessed a long, snakelike monster with many legs stalking Halbarad. The ranger could obviously see nothing, and was swinging wildly in front of him with his hand axe. The dwarf unslung his battle axe - a REAL axe - and charged the thing.

Back at the mound of rocks, chaos reigned. Those who could see

with infravision were trying to figure out what was going on in the room beyond, while the humans were stumbling about blindly. Belphanior was over the wall in a heartbeat, landing, rolling, and running for the monster with sword drawn. Peyote, not as swift, made his way over the wall. Alindyar and Ged had to wait for now, since only one person could get through the laboriously cleared opening at a time. The dark elf watched as Rob, the human priest, ran directly into a nearby wall. Peldor, robbed of his usual speed and cunning by the darkness, crouched in a corner, waiting for visibility to reoccur.

Halbarad slashed at the beast again, opening another bloody gash in its side. Then the thing lunged at him, and a number of wet tentacles from its mouth slapped against his arms and torso. Every place they touched went immediately numb - poison of some sort, the ranger realized. His vision blurred, and though he tried to fight off the impending paralysis, it was no use. He collapsed on the floor, the axe slipping out of his suddenly weak grasp.

Mongo closed the distance between himself and the tentacled thing with all the speed his stubby legs could muster. If the monster thought that Halbarad was its only opponent, it had not tasted the gleaming axe of Mongo Thunderhead! The dwarven warrior's first blow sliced a huge wound in the thing's bulbous hide, and slimy blood sprayed everywhere. The foul stuff did nothing to dampen Mongo's fury, and his axe again bit into the monster. He shrieked with rage, it shrieked with pain, and then Belphanior leaped upon the thing, hacking relentlessly at its head. His blood-crazed eyes shone with glee as he pressed his attack, heedless of any and all consequences. The monster managed to lash at Mongo with some of its tentacles, but they didn't affect him through the quarter-inch of steel plate that was his armor.

Mongo's reply was more effective. He buried his axe in the monster's lumpy head, and shortly thereafter, it stopped thrashing about. Belphanior sat wearily atop the thing, awash in gore. The stench of blood and guts was everywhere. Someone lit a torch then, and as his eyes adjusted, Mongo looked around the room. Peyote and the two elven spell-casters were now in the chamber as well. Peldor climbed over the rocky wall to the north of the room, and surveyed the situation, deeming that his talents were not needed anymore. Soon after, Rob slid from the same wall to the ground, landing with a thump and looking somewhat confused. Ged immediately began checking the stricken ranger. The grey elf, skilled in the healing arts as well as those of wizardry, could see that Halbarad was suffering from a temporary paralysis, nothing more. He put some salves on the places where the monster's tentacles had made contact, and moved the ranger into an upright position, propping him up against a wall.

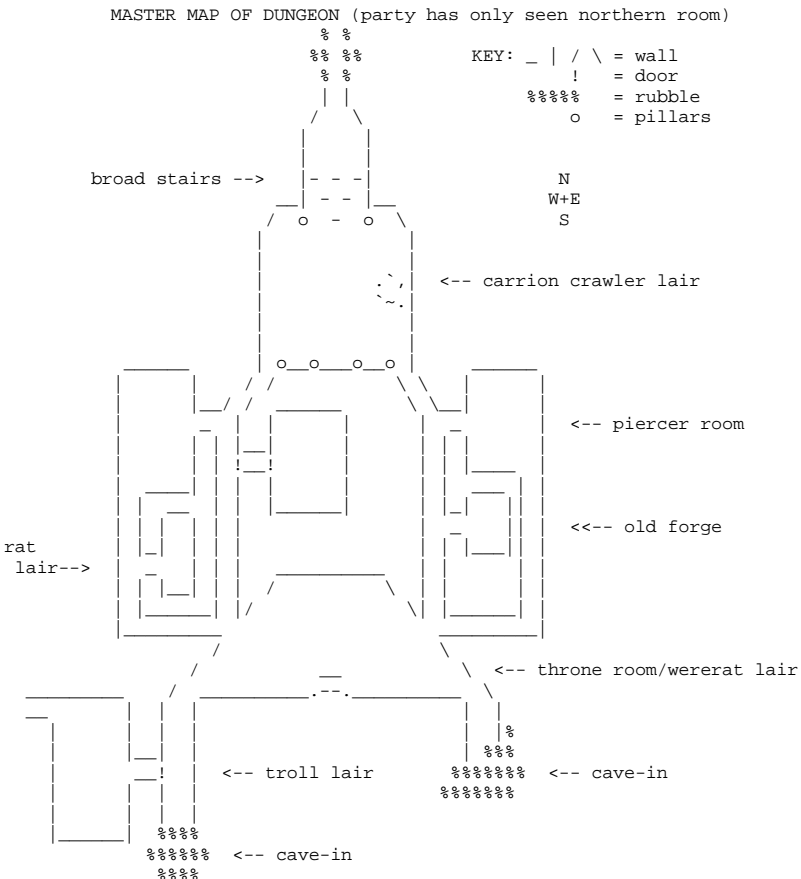
"What in the nine hells was that thing?", Mongo was wondering aloud. "All of ten feet long and as mean as a wild boar!" Ged turned to look at the dead monster, adding, "And with tentacles akin to an octopus on its mouth, too." Mongo was wondering what an octopus was when Alindyar

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spoke up. "That was a Pguthoid, as we call them in the Underdark - a carrion crawler. Against less opponents", the drow glanced around the room, "or weaker ones, such a beast is highly feared. I see that this group had nothing to worry about, though."

Belphanior replied to that, "Let's hope there's no more of them slinking around this cursed place. I have had enough slime for one day." The tall elf was trying to wipe the green blood off of his armor, a futile effort. Peldor chimed in then. "A hundred of them would not be enough to stop a group that named the mighty Peldor among its members! Let them come, we are ready!"

Halbarad was slowly regaining the use of his limbs, so Mongo and Belphanior fueled and lit another lantern and explored the large room they were in. There were two exits to the far south; one went southeast, the other southwest.



The carrion crawler had a messy pile of things, all sorts of things, to one side, so naturally Peldor went to have a look. Mongo trundled along

after him to keep him out of trouble. Meanwhile, Belphanior was searching the rest of the room for anything even remotely interesting a wasted effort. The chamber, while roomy with a 20' ceiling, had virtually nothing of interest, except maybe to a dwarf obsessed with architecture.

Mongo kicked at a moldy sack, and was rewarded with the clinking of coins. Golden disks cascaded around his boot, and the crusty dwarf's eyes lit up. Now THIS was treasure to be appreciated! Hundreds of pieces of gold! Peldor grabbed greedily at the coins, but checked himself when he realized that some of the others were keeping an eye on him. Especially that damned elf, Ged. Someday he would have to get rid of that one. Peldor sighed, and resigned himself, pocketing only the occasional coin as he scooped the pile into a stronger sack for the party. Mongo suddenly yelled with glee, and held aloft a shining golden ring that had been buried amidst the coins. Damn, thought Peldor to himself, I would have found that any second now! He started sifting the coins more carefully in the hopes of finding another such bauble.

Alas, there were no more hidden treasures to be found, and within the space of ten minutes the party was ready to move again. They had a brief discussion and opted to try the southeastern passage first. As the tunnel was barely five feet wide, Mongo led the way, his sharp magical axe theoretically the best deterrent to any attackers. The group moved only a short distance before finding a barrier, made of spears set into the ground, aiming toward them. Peldor nimbly leaped over the spears, then set about moving them. It was no easy feat, for the weapons were deep in the ground and their tips were quite sharp. "T'would seem that someone or something wants to keep the carrion crawler out of this area", theorized Alindyar aloud.

Soon enough, though, the spears were cleared away, and the group next found an entrance to a good-sized room ahead and to the left. Mongo took a quick peek in, but saw nothing, so he led them into this new room. Old tapestries were hung across the walls, and not a one of them was in decent shape. Oh well, though Peldor, tapestries were too bulky to lug around anyway.

Without any warning, there was a _whoosh_ of air from above, and something had fallen on top of Rob. Belphanior looked up (none of the party had thought to since entering this chamber, stupid STUPID) and his blood froze in his veins. The entire ceiling was covered with stalactites, both great and small points of jagged rock, and some of them were FALLING! Rob had a particularly long and narrow specimen imbedded in his right shoulder and was screaming senselessly. "Piercers!", yelled Alindyar. "Back, or we are doomed!"

The different adventurers acted in different ways. Halbarad was urging Ged and Alindyar, the unarmored ones, back the way they had come, using his own body to protect them in case of further hits. Mongo had his shield raised above his head, and was trying to figure out a way to strike back at the

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falling rock-things. Peyote was alternately trying to drag Rob to safety and pull the spike from his arm. A gigantic piercer narrowly missed the half-elf just then, probably due to luck more than anything else. Belphanior also had his shield above his head, though his was still intact, unlike the dwarf's, which already had two piercers imbedded in it; Mongo's shield was practically ruined. Nearby, the thief Peldor, in one of his more reckless moves of late, was sprinting for the passage at the southeast corner of the room. A number of piercers of all sizes were detaching themselves and aiming for the thief, but his speed enabled him to dodge them. So far, anyway.

Peldor saw the safety of the tunnel close ahead of him. As he made a final leap, sliding deep into the dark passage and out of the piercers' lair, he wondered how the monsters got themselves back up to the ceiling after they had fallen. Then he stood up, waving cheerfully to his companions and commending himself on his daring and skill, and set out to the south, after first lighting a large torch with flint and steel. The sputtering, oily wood cast flickering shadows on the cavern behind him as he left.

"That IDIOT!", yelled Ged in an uncharacteristic fit of anger. The party was all clear now, with only Belphanior and Halbarad sustaining wounds (albeit only minor scratches) after the initial attack. Rob was bleeding profusely, however, and he was in bad shape. Belphanior had pulled the piercer out of his shoulder (and smashed it to bits with someone's mace), but the wound was horrible indeed. "Dude", Peyote was saying, "you must relax. Let us bind the wound first." He was using herbs to cleanse the jagged hole.

"EEARGH!", screamed the priest as the leaves and spices touched his shoulder. Ged began moving his hands in arcane gestures, and they were momentarily limned in a blue glow. He touched the awful wound, and almost instantly, Rob went slack, the pain lessened to a great degree. The wound was still serious, but the edges were now sealed, and the natural healing process has been hastened.

Peyote added his healing magic to that of Ged's, and the wound all but closed then. Rob felt much better, and the party moved on. Belphanior reasoned that the main passage, which continued south, would parallel the tunnel that Peldor had taken out of the piercer room. They followed this until a small room appeared on the left - an old forge. Inside were long-unused smithing tools and a number of half-finished weapons and pieces of armor. Mongo examined the room most happily and thoroughly, but could find nothing of use here that was portable. They moved on southward.

Meanwhile, Peldor had followed his dark passage for perhaps eighty feet, when it turned sharply to the right. He rounded the turn, and saw light and figures ahead. And the noise! They were making all kinds of racket! As they saw him, Peldor saw them more clearly. It was of course the party. Did they always make this much noise in dungeons? No wonder they needed his services so badly! He walked toward them. "Greetings, comrades. I have checked the passage yonder", he said, pointing behind him, "and 'tis clear.

Let us move on, now that I have rejoined you!" His torch light merged with that of the brighter lantern, held by Ged, and the shadows retreated somewhat.

Ged swore beneath his breath. That foolish and reckless rogue was going to get them all killed someday. The elf wondered if Peldor had filched any treasure from the passage he had been through by himself. The party turned westward, and entered a huge room - a throneroom, by the looks of it.

"Sssss! What have we here? Fresssh travelers, it seemsss..." The speaker stood nearby a large throne. He (it?) was a large rat, but with a sword grasped in one furry paw. As they watched, three others like it scampered out of the shadows to join their companion. All of the things hissed and snarled at the party.

"Oh my", exclaimed Alindyar. "Wererats!" The drow's long-ago lessons in monster lore were proving to be time well-spent, not that he had had a choice in the matter. In drow society, an unwilling student often soon became an unwilling corpse. The wererats closed in on the party. "Such nice humansss! And elvesess too!", hisses the one with the sword.

Quite frankly, Mongo was offended. "So you don't like the taste of dwarf, eh! Let me show ya worthless rats why!" With that, the short warrior hefted his axe and charged the nearest wererat. Not one to be outdone, Belphanior ran after him, sword swinging in vicious arcs. The other fighters in the group also advanced, while the magi frantically sought the spells for the occasion. Peldor, eyes shifting craftily, snuck off in a random direction.

Mongo met the first wererat axe first. The sharp weapon bit deeply into foul flesh, evincing a scream of terror from the monster. It had been so long since they lycanthropes had battled anyone who had enchanted steel, and they were not used to prey who could fight back. The wererat clawed at Mongo, but barely scratched his armor. Nearby, Belphanior was having a harder time of it. He had landed a solid blow, but the thing hadn't even seemed fazed. The realization came to him as his opponent bit his sword arm. "Aie! We need magic to hit these creatures!"

Halbarad had already deduced this, however, and tossed his axe aside, drawing the enchanted dagger he had claimed as loot from their last adventure. As he dived in, a third wererat swiped at him, but missed due to the sheer speed of the ranger's attack. Halbarad sunk the gleaming blade to the hilt in the monster's neck and twisted.

Peyote was stalked by the fourth wererat, who emitted a shrill squeal of surprise when its opponent suddenly vanished, right before its eyes! The thing clawed at the air uselessly, but the half-elf was nowhere to be found. It then turned its gaze on the human priest nearby. Rob tried to cast his spell faster as the monster neared him.

Ged was looking out for his fellow priest's best interests, though. A fiery red bolt of magical energy launched from his palm and blasted the wer-

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erat, sizzling hair from its filthy hide. About the same time, a similar bolt, though blue in hue, issued from Alindyar's wand, striking the same wererat. The thing shrieked in pain at the attacks, but Ged was steadfast. "Foul spawn of murderers and rats! Boccob pronounces his holy judgement upon you!" Rob completed his spell, and conferred a blessing upon his party. Unfortunately, they had to listen to him chant all the while, but it was better than ending up as rat food.

Mongo was relentless in his attack. He smelled dwarf sweat, and dwarf blood - for his opponent had scored several deep claw wounds - but again and yet again the enchanted axe sunk into corrupted flesh, and the wererat's grip weakened, then ceased altogether. Hefting the gory weapon high, Mongo turned and surveyed the situation.

Belphanior, having nothing better to do, punched the wererat on his arm with all the strength his free hand could muster. That damned beast had locked onto him good! He couldn't seem to dislodge it. The punch had bloodied its nose, but that was all, and this sort of close combat would not go well for the elf. Suddenly, the monster shook. Out of nowhere, there was Peldor. He had stabbed the wererat right through the brain. The vile creature quivered for moments more, then was still. Peldor withdrew his sword and wiped it on the thing's fur. "I like this sword", said Peldor, admiring the edge on the weapon. "Yeah, me too", answered Belphanior, remembering that Peldor had also managed to secure a magical weapon for himself at the last dividing of loot, a fact that had possibly just saved his life. He decided that he owed the thief one.

Halbarad's single strike, uncanny in its precision, had been good enough to fell his opponent. He gazed about, then hurled the well-balanced dagger at the wererat facing Ged and the others. The weapon bit deeply into its shoulder, as another blue bolt from the drow struck the creature, and it reeled to the ground, bloody and smoking.

Belphanior, weak from loss of blood, also collapsed to the ground. Ged rushed over to him, immediately beginning a spell of healing. Belphanior was wondering in a remote corner of his mind what the chances were of him contracting the wererat's dreaded disease. Now, being a were-bear might be useful, but a RAT? The idea appalled the warrior/mage, and he made a note in his mind to seek out some temple when the group returned to civilized lands. That was, IF they ever got out of this damned place. What if he became a wererat right here in this dungeon? These and other ideas flashed through Belphanior's mind as he was healed by his companion.

Peyote was similarly aiding Mongo, who had several wounds as well, though given the tough dwarf's stamina, it seemed quite unlikely that he stood any chance of succumbing to lycanthropy. Rob finally ceased his blessing (and chanting), much to the relief of the others. He was thoroughly convinced that his holy words had paved the way to victory.

The party searched the wererats' lair, finding a number of gems, a

sack of gold coins, and a scroll tube containing, of course, a scroll.

The group next moved north, exploring the opposite side to the areas they had already searched. They first ignored a branch to the west, and went north, finding a room behind not one, but two doors, both of them trapped. Peldor managed to disarm the traps, with the help of some ideas from Mongo (for these were dwarven traps). Beyond was a barracks for a number of dwarves, long unused. Within they found eight small gems, of fine quality nonetheless, Peldor insisted, and two fine shields and a stone tablet with a single word engraved upon it. No one could decipher the word, so the party moved on, heading north and then east into a storage room.

The musty chamber contained long-rotted food and burst kegs of ale, and a lot of small bugs. To the south was a room mostly empty, except for several giant rats. These savage dungeon denizens were quickly dispatched, at the cost of a number of minor wounds and several healing spells. Peyote assured those bitten that his treatments would prevent any chance of disease from the rats' teeth. Also, perhaps more importantly, in the rat's dirty nest the group found a sack containing platinum coins, and a sealed metal tube full of fine, fine arrows.

The party then rested for a bit, and ate, in the wererat room. Much refreshed, they moved south, but found the way blocked by a cave-in. Mongo inspected it and thought it to be a useless digging venture, so the group decided to try the door they had passed, to the west. Peldor opened the door, very carefully...

...and was grabbed by a huge green troll! The savage beast, over nine feet in height, hurled the thief into a wall, where he hit with a sickening crunch, landing on the floor below. He did not get up.

"Hey!", shouted Mongo. "He may be a thief, but he's OUR thief, and only we can do that!" The dwarf chopped at the monster, sinking his axe deep into its leg. The resulting scream of rage and pain seemed to shake the very walls of the mine. The troll backhanded Mongo, almost casually, sending him reeling off to one side. Belphanior poked at it with his longsword, but it seemed to laugh, and slashed him across the chest with a clawed hand. The elven warrior looked in shock at his ruined leather armor and the bloody gashes now cut into it, and fell to the cold stone floor.

Halbarad moved in on the monster with a dizzying flurry of axe chops and dagger thrusts. He was using two weapons now because he thought this tactic might work to more effect on the troll. It did, to some extent, for the big monster actually gave some ground and backed up before the onslaught. Halbarad continued to press the attack, even after his opponent had bitten one arm with its foul fangs.

Alindyar moved in dangerously close to the combatants, and launched a spray of blinding colors into the ugly face of the troll. It seemed

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dizzy for a moment, but then snarled with newfound rage. Ged cast a spell at it also, hoping perhaps to put it to sleep, but the monster ignored this magic also. Peyote moved in behind it, as did Rob at about the same time, though the priest lacked the protective invisibility that Peyote now had from his ring.

Halbarad launched another series of slashes and parries at the troll. The great beast took a few cuts, but hit the ranger solidly with a claw, driving him back for the moment. Peyote chose this moment to strike, and he was very lucky, even with the invisibility, for he split open the troll's scaly head with his huge bastard sword. The thing fell to the floor, twitching.

"Burn it! Get a fire going!", Halbarad managed to gasp from lungs surrounded by cracked ribs. Alindyar complied almost immediately, starting a small blaze. Then Ged moved closer. "Perhaps this will help", the elf stated, and poured an entire flask of oil onto the small fire. The flames raged high, as Ged doused the still-quivering troll with another oil bottle. The fire seemed to leap over onto the monster, and the stink of burning flesh pervaded the room. Soon, though, the foul monster was no more. Only a greasy black smear remained on the dungeon floor.

Rob used his last spell, and one from his scroll, to heal Halbarad and Belphanior. Peldor was still alive, as it turned out, though he also asked for magical aid. After all, he HAD tried to listen at the door for the party. Halbarad used his potion to heal the noble and heroic thief. Mongo, with the constitution of a boulder, asked for no healing despite the beating he took from the troll.

They searched the room soon after, and found a number of wondrous things: a large diamond, a small but heavy chest of gold coins, a flail of good quality, and a wand inside a bag. The party also found an exit from this room, and following it, soon smelled fresh air ahead. They had found a way out! The troll's lair led to the side of a grassy hill, and the exit was blocked by a patch of high grass (and most likely, the vicious nature of the troll). The group camped nearby for several days, regaining their strength. Nobody or nothing saw fit to bother them. At one point, Ged used a spell to detect magical energies on the items they had found, and shortly thereafter, they divided the spoils, both magical and monetary...

THE LOOT (magical stuff only is listed):

potion of healing -> Ged
hammer -> Mongo
longsword -> Peldor
ring of protection -> Halbarad
arrows (11) -> Belphanior
shield -> Mongo
scroll (mage) -> Ged
flail -> Rob
wand -> Peyote
bag -> Alindyar

Also, the stone with the rune carved into it was nonmagical, but the word was written in magic and so a read magic spell revealed it to Alindyar. He could make nothing of it, but when he read it aloud, Mongo recognized the word as the name of a legendary dwarven hero. Then the word faded from the stone.

The party pondered their imminent return to Courwood and the possibility of retribution against Belgar.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 2nd level drow elf mage (N)
Belphanior, 1st/1st level high elf fighter/mage (CN)
Ged, 2nd/1st level grey elf priest/mage (NG)
Halbarad, 2nd level human ranger (NG)
Mongo Thunderhead, 2nd level dwarf fighter (CG)
Peldor, 3rd level human thief (N)
Peyote, 1st/1st level half-elf fighter/druid (N)
Rob, 2nd level human priest (LG)

R & T (Rest & Training)



Dawn rose, and on the side of a hill on the southwestern border of Celene, the party of eight prepared to return to their temporary home, the city of Courwood. They ate a cold breakfast of iron rations and water, and then broke camp. Several days before, when they had emerged from the dwarven mine via a hidden exit, they had scouted the area until they found the mine entrance. Initially, their horses had been tethered in a nearby camp, but the mounts were no longer there. The traitorous human called Belgar, they surmised, had taken the animals when he fled. After all, good mounts commanded hefty sums of gold in this day and age; eight alone would have set Belgar up for a year, even if he had not stolen the party's ingots of gold and collapsed the mineshaft, blocking the entrance to the place. It had been a stroke of luck that they found another way out at all.

They began the long walk home. Courwood was to the north and east, about twenty-five leagues. On horseback, that meant a long day's ride to get back; on foot, the march would take about four days, if the party moved all day long. They traveled through hilly terrain for the most part, but no hostile creatures bothered them, and after the first two days, they began to see the familiar dwarven and halfling patrols moving through the lands. When they finally dragged into Courwood, it had been four and a half days since they departed from the mine.

The weary group found the tavern they had stayed in a week before - it sure didn't seem like only a week - and purchased several double rooms for a month's time. Without even a bath or a meal, the party, to a man, went to their rooms, locked the doors, and crashed into a long and restful sleep.

Late in the afternoon of the following day, the various adventurers began the task of training, in whatever way was appropriate, and in their spare time, they searched for clues as to Belgar's whereabouts. At the moment, they had split up to pursue their various needs...

Belphanior: (outside the Guild of Warriors with Mongo) Hmm. This looks like the place.

Mongo: Shit yeah! We should have enough gold now to get some good training. (they enter the large hall)

Thomas Miller

Clerk: (an aging swordsman himself) What can I do for you lads?

Belphanior: We seek several weeks of training with your finest weapon masters.

Clerk: I see. Hm. Can you pay?

Belphanior: What is the fee?

Clerk: Depends on how good you are. Should be about a hundred or so a week. Gold.

Mongo: Gak! That's ridiculous! You guys must make a killing!

Belphanior: When can we start?

Clerk: Now. Times are tough, and business has been bad. If you want to join the guild, you get a ten percent discount, and also may come in here at your leisure to socialize. We also have our meetings once a week, where new weapon techniques are displayed and you can discuss matters of combat with other fine warriors.

Mongo: Sure. We'll take it all. (they pay and sign the roster, and are then led back to the fighting arenas.)

Training begins that same day for the pair. Belphanior attends the lessons for a full two weeks, but Mongo's peculiar fighting style keeps him for a week longer. Though Belphanior is a more refined swordsman, Mongo is much more powerful and determined to learn.

When Belphanior makes his way to the Tower of Wizardry, the main source for all magical training and equipment in the city, he finds Ged already there. They pass each other at the doorway into the tall tower.

Ged: Ho there. What brings you here?

Belphanior: The same lure as you, I would guess. How goes the lore and arcana and all that mess?

Ged: Well. I have chosen the spell of feather falling, and in no time at all have mastered its use utterly. What of yourself?

Belphanior: Well at least we can use MY new spell. I think I will try to learn the shocking grasp.

Ged: Hm. A wise choice. Perhaps you will some day use it on the thief, Peldor.

Belphanior: Perhaps.

Unbeknownst to the pair, the drow, Alindyar, is secluded in one of the private chambers, high above their heads. He was charged a higher fee for magic lessons, though not just because of his race. The drow elf has been here for almost three weeks.

Hooded Mage: That's it. Concentrate on the target area.

Alindyar: I think I can see it forming now. (suddenly, many sticky of webbing sprout forth and cover a large open chamber nearby)

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Hooded Mage: Superb! Truly, you are one of the fastest-learning students I have ever taught.

Alindyar: (somewhat bitterly) Yes, after I passed your group's magical tests for evil intentions.

Hooded Mage: Sigh. Let me tell you something, boy. I have seen a great many things in this world, bigotry among them. Wherever you may tread, it will always be the same. Your actions will have to prove you worthy of your thoughts. Those who are willing to wait and judge you by your deeds and words, rather than your skin - those are the ones who you will find friendship with, in most cases. Do not let the world's hatred of drow stop you from doing whatever you think is right. The companions you come to trust and hold dear in years to come, the innocents saved by your spells and deeds - those are the fruits of your patience. Do not be deterred from them by others who are not worth your time.

Alindyar: There is wisdom in what you say.

Hooded Mage: I would never have agreed to teach you if I thought you evil or unworthy. Alindyar, you are truly an exception among your kind. Be cautious, but also try to do what your heart tells you is right. You will not be sorry, many years from now.

Alindyar: Hmm. I will remember your words well.

Elsewhere in the city, the rogue Peldor is hard at work in the very depths of the thieves' guild. He has been practicing and training since the day after the party's return. Like the others, Peldor had to purchase a guild membership to train, though for a different reason that they did. Thieves' guilds did not take a bright view on random thieves who operated nearby without guild sanctioning. Such thieves often disappeared from the area permanently...

Peldor: (scaling a high rock wall rapidly)

Master thief: (watches with admiration) Now come down! Just as fast!

Peldor: (climbing down, more carefully, he makes it to the floor) No problem for Peldor!

Master thief: Don't get cocky, boy. That will be your doom someday.

Peldor: Doom?

Master thief: We have taught you all we can at this point. You must go out into the world and practice these things - the climbing of others' walls, the opening of their locks, moving about places in utter silence, blending with the shadows. These are the fruits of our labors here! (holds up a fistful of gems)

Peldor: Hey, that reminds me. I have a few things that I need to buy while I'm here. Things that I can only find in these halls.

Master thief: Very well. Let us go to the equipment shop.

Thomas Miller

Still elsewhere...

High priest: My son, I have heard your tales, and I think that you would do well to choose better companionship.

Rob: But Father, they are my friends! I have learned many lessons of the world from them. Perhaps some of them have not seen the light, but their actions are good at heart.

High priest: Well...you are of solid faith. Perhaps there is hope yet for them all.

Rob: I will try still harder to convert them all. Failing that, I can still go to work on the masses.

High priest: I wish you the best of luck, my son. (blesses the young priest)

And still elsewhere:

Druid: Remember well the lessons of Obad-Hai, young one. The forests and the animals in them are your very lifeline, and you must watch over them with utmost care. (a bird lands on his shoulder and begins to sing)

Peyote: Yes, High dude...err, One...I am most ready for this wondrous task. I can feel the power inside me, and I will use it well.

Druid: That is all that is asked of us.

Peyote: Yes. Well, I'll be on my merry way now! Thank you for your most excellent lessons, High One.

Druid: You are most welcome. Oh, and by the way...?

Peyote: Eh? Yes?

Druid: Take a bath.

Halbarad trained by both attending combat lessons (he chose a better school than the other warrior-types) and praying at the temple of Elhonna (sp? I'll have to check), goddess of the forests et al. He gained much, physically, mentally, and spiritually, and was perhaps the most content of the party at this point. He also searched around town for clues as to Belgar's whereabouts, finding only that the rogue had fled many days before, supposedly heading southeast, along the narrow strip of land between the Suss forest and the mountains.

The party reconvenes, nearly a month after they split up, in the now-familiar Screaming Griffon tavern. The general consensus is that Belgar must be found and made to pay for his actions. They discuss it over a fine dinner of roasted lamb, vegetables, steaming loaves of bread, and wine (Alindyar, Ged), ale (Mongo, Halbarad, Belphanior), beer (Peldor), apple juice (Peyote), or milk (Rob).

Alindyar: I think, at the very least, that we should regain our gold and

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horses. A little violence may be necessary, though.

Halbarad: I am confident that I can track him down, but the trail is growing colder every day...

Peldor: Death! Death by backstabbing!

Peyote: We could let Mongo cook him.

Mongo: I want to saute him, maybe make him into Bel-cakes.

Belphanior: Bel-cakes?...Any way you slice it, he's dead meat.

Rob: Belgar?

nearby drinker: Who the fuck is Belgar?

Belphanior: None of your business.

Ged: If we find him, I'll bless him.

Alindyar: He will certainly need it.

Halbarad: Shall we leave on the morrow then?

All: Yea...

And so, the pursuit of Belgar began. Well, actually, it began the next morning, as the party packed up their belongings and looked, for the last time probably, upon the city of Courwood.

NOTES: The area the party has been adventuring in can be found in the World of Greyhawk maps. Celene is on the western map of the Oerik continent; Courwood is a city in the southwestern reaches of Celene, right next to a river (I don't have my maps with me). A mountain range looms to the west and south, and the Suss Forest is somewhat east. There is a narrow (maybe twenty miles wide) plains area to the southeast, between the mountains and forest, like a tunnel through the hostile terrain. This is the way the party is headed. Next time I will try to provide exact hexes, maybe.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 3rd level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 2nd/2nd level high elf fighter/mage (CN)

Ged, 3rd/2nd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 3rd level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 3rd level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 4th level human thief (N)

Peyote, 2nd/2nd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 3rd level human priest (LG)

Pursuit



The party has been riding rapidly through the plains for three days. Fresh out of Courwood, they are headed southeast, through a pass of relatively smooth terrain between forest and mountains. This narrow pass is about thirty leagues in length, and they are just entering it.

Halbarad: (checking the tracks on the ground. The party has stopped for a rest) I really can't tell if he came through here or not. The tracks are far too old at this point, and much weather has come and gone. Should we continue?

Mongo: Damn straight! That sonofabitch isn't getting away from us!

Belphanior: They said in Courwood that he left in a hurry, and came this way. I think it is a good guess that he's somewhere beyond the forest by now. But, I say we get him too. That bastard owes us a lot.

Peyote: I am uneasy about the path ahead. I have heard talk of this passage south of the Suss being a favorite place for ambushes.

Ged: Makes sense. No one for miles around, the untamed wilderness, hostile lands, eight lost adventurers...yep, I'd say that we must look like pretty good pickings.

Rob: Lost?

Peldor: Bah! The mighty Peldor is pickings for no one. Let the fools come, if they dare. Any party that counts Peldor among its members has naught to worry about.

Mongo: Except slit money pouches...

Rob: Hey! Where's my money? Someone stole my purse!

Ged: See there? I knew it!

Rob: All my coins are gone! I'm broke! Bankrupt!

Peldor: (looking around innocently)

Mongo: Fork over the dough, thief!

Peyote: We could turn him upside down and shake, and see what comes out.

Ged: Sounds good to me.

DM: (to Rob) Wait a minute. You donated your monetary treasure to the temple in Courwood. Remember, you told me so!

Rob: Oh. Err...so I did. Why is everybody looking at me like that?

The party rides on in silence for a while. A few hours later the

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monotony is broken by a cry of alarm.

Halbarad: Ho! There are foes ahead! Giants! (The ranger has the sharpest eyesight by far, just another reason why he always gets to be the party's scout) I draw my sword!

Mongo: Giants?!? This'll be a new challenge for me. I unsling my axe and dismount.

Halbarad: Oh yes. I dismount too. Someone take the horses back and off to the side.

Alindyar: Have they any boulders?

Halbarad: No. We're better off for it, too.

DM: You ready yourselves for possible combat. Soon, around the bend ahead saunter not one, not two, but THREE giants. The huge, smelly humanoids leer at you menacingly. They tower over you, topping ten feet in height easily.

Giant#1: Har har. Look wut we gots heer.

Giant#2: Littul wunz!

Giant#3: Me's thinkin' supper...

Giant#1: Ayuh. Me stumick's rumblin' too.

Mongo: Hey, you! Why are you blocking the path?

Ged: Seems pretty obvious to me...

Rob: No! It couldn't be! Not...a toll road!

Ged: Quiet, you gibbering fool. They think we are their next meal.

Rob: Oh. I guess that's worse.

Peldor: No one, but no one, gets toll from Peldor.

Halbarad: (yelling out to the giants) We wish to pass! We want no trouble!
(Halbarad can speak hill giant)

Giant#1: Heh. No trubble et all.

Giant#2: (squinting at the party) Eh? Och! Good meel! All o' they differen flavors!

Giant#3: (brandishes huge carven bone as a club) Letsus be 'bout it then!

Alindyar: They are not listening, Halbarad.

Halbarad: I can see that.

Rob: Should we run?

Mongo: RUN?! From three stupid giants?! No way!

Giant#1: Hey! We'ez not stoopid, we'ez DUMB!

Belphanior: Whatever. I draw my sword. We should charge them before they get any closer to the magi etc.

Rob: Are you calling me an "etc." ??

Alindyar: Hm.

Mongo: Let's do it then! (charges the giants, followed by Belphanior and

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Halbarad)

Peyote: Uh-oh! I put on my ring (disappears from sight)

Peldor: (backing away to one side with sword drawn)

Belphanior: (hacks at giant#3, hits) Taste steel, lout!

Giant#3: Tikkles. See how you like. (clubs the elf across the head with his huge bone-club) Hor hor!

Belphanior: (head ringing and bleeding now) Crap!

Giant#1: (swings at Halbarad with a bastard sword, to the giant it's a short sword; misses as the ranger dodges aside deftly) Eh?

Halbarad: (slices the giant with hand axe and dagger, inflicting a pair of small wounds)

Ged: (casts a sleep spell at giant#2, the closest to him) Snooze, huge one!

Giant#2: (shrugs off the spell) Me not tired!

Mongo: (slow as molasses, but closing in on the lumbering giant)

Alindyar: (brandishing wand, blasts giant#1 with a magic missile)

Giant#1: Bugs out today. Stinging.

Rob: (casting a spiritual hammer) Oh lord, aid us in this moment of need...

Giant#2: (slow, but not as slow as Mongo; stabs at the dwarf with a huge spear) Har! We'ez eetin dworf today!

Mongo: No way! (easily dodges the clumsy attack, and slices the giant's kneecap with his axe...maximum damage and a knee critical to boot. Some of the party cheer.) Eat that!

Giant#2: Aaaaa! Muh nee! Aaaaa! (starts hopping around on one leg)
Aaaaa!

Mongo: Heh.

Giant#1: (swats Halbarad, sending him reeling to one side)

Giant#3: (knocks Belphanior over the head with the bone club) How you like this, elf? Ha ha!

Belphanior: (badly, badly wounded, falls to the ground)

Giant#3: Now I smash! (raises the bone to pummel the elf further)

Belphanior: Uhh. (trying feebly to roll out of the way)

Halbarad: (slices giant#1 with his axe, misses with his dagger)

Ged: (launches a magic missile at giant#3) Back, fell giant!

Giant#3: Ha. (not fazed at all)

Belphanior: (to party) Help! Somebody save me!

Peyote: (stabs giant#3) Excellent! Yie! (now visible, begins swordplay, such as it is, with the giant)

Belphanior: Medic!

Alindyar: (moving about silently, with a web spell ready)

Rob: There! (his spiritual hammer pounds giant#1)

Peldor: (sneaking behind giant#3)

Giant#3: Aargh! (suddenly backstabbed by Peldor)

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Peldor: Never, NEVER, turn your back on Peldor!

Mongo: (chops at the giant, scoring two hits with his battleaxe) Fall, shit breath!

Giant#2: (topples, badly wounded) Urk...

Halbarad: (slices his opponent feebly)

Alindyar: (launches a web at giant#1, the one fighting Halbarad)

Giant#1: (caught up in the sticky strands) Dang! I is stuk!

Peldor: (to DM) I go over to the one in the web and cut its throat if possible.

DM: Hang on a second there. (rolling dice)

Giant#3: (has turned around to face Peldor) Ho thar, liddle man! (smashes at Peldor with his bone-club)

Peldor: (sails off to one side) Ouch! You'll regret that!

Mongo: (misses giant#2 with his axe) Thunder an' damnation! Can't I _ever_ have a battle where everything goes right?!?

Giant#2: (on the ground, can't get the dwarf with his oversized spear and digs up a chunk of ground instead) Shee-it!

Rob: Back, fell giant! (bashes giant#3 with the spiritual hammer)

Belphanior: (ignored by giant#3 and his companions alike) (to DM) I pick myself up off the ground and try to crawl over to the webbed giant so I can kill it.

DM: (checking the battlefield) Okay.

Giant#1: (ripping some of the webbing away)

Peyote: (slashes giant#3 with his bastard sword) Whoa there man.

Giant#3: (bleeding profusely) Ach.

Halbarad: (stabs giant#1, the one inside the web)

Alindyar: (launches a magic missile from his wand, at giant#3)

Ged: (not wanting to miss the action, he swings his mace at the giant trapped in the web, easily hitting it) Ha! Such is the fate of all of the evil ones!

Peldor: Yea! (slashes giant#3, killing it) And all useless priests of Boccob!

Ged: (fuming)

Belphanior: (stabs the webbed giant#1, slaying it)

Peldor: (watching)

Mongo: (somehow gets initiative and chops giant#2 twice more)

Giant#2: ...(perishes)

Peldor: Ha! Victory!

Mongo: Who's gonna clean up this mess?

Ged: Maybe Peldor should.

Peldor: Never! Ones such as _I_ do not tidy up after the messes of the ilk of Boccob.

Belphanior: Hear, hear.

Mongo: Fuck this. I drag the bodies off to the side of the trail.

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Belphanior: I help.

Peldor: (suddenly realizes that there are pockets to pick) Me too!

Ged: Somebody watch him.

Halbarad: What of the giants' weapons and other possessions?

Belphanior: What of them?

Alindyar: If we pile them together, Ged here could check for magical emanations.

Peldor: But, Ged IS an emanation!

Ged: Enough, fool. I refuse to give in to your taunts. (to DM) I watch him very closely, though.

Mongo: Hey! (gold coins spill out from one of the slain giants' purses)
We've hit the mother lode!

Belphanior: (to DM) I watch all of them, especially Peldor.

DM: Okay.

Ged: Somebody count those coins! (moves to heal Halbarad)

Rob: I can help too! (starts binding Mongo's wounds)

Peldor: (to DM) Is anybody watching me? I take some of the gold, and also check for rings and such.

DM: (to Peldor) The elf, Belphanior, is watching you.

Peldor: I speak to him in thieves' cant.

DM: (after some note-swapping) (to Peldor) He replies...

Belphanior: (in thieves' cant, to Peldor) What say we split anything special, fifty-fifty?

Peldor: (in thieves' cant, to Belphanior) You're a THIEF!

Belphanior: I prefer to think that I steal from the rich and give to me...

Peldor: No problem with that. Heh.

DM: You have piled the loot from the giants into one big pile...

Ged: Let's hope so.

DM: ...and there is a total of about three thousand coppers and six hundred gold coins also.

Alindyar: What of trinkets, baubles, and other potentially magical items?

DM: The first giant had a bastard sword, and a small stone statue. The second giant had a huge spear, and an amulet. The third giant had his huge club of bone, and a giant-sized ring, and a wand.

Peyote: (eyes alight at the mention of a bastard sword) Dude! I examine that sword.

Ged: What does the stone statue look like?

DM: It is a crude animal form - a dog, or a horse. It's pretty badly faded and worn. A rune is carved into the bottom.

Ged: Can I read it?

DM: No.

Ged: Oh. Well, then, I check with each party member to see if anyone else can read the rune.

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DM: Okay, you find that Mongo can...it's a dwarven rune.

Mongo: What's it say?

DM: Err..."Equine". That's the word.

Peldor: Is the ring too big to fit on my finger?

DM: Well, since you're not a giant, yes it is.

Peldor: Oh. I examine the amulet for special knobs or symbols then.

Peyote: (to DM) The sword?

DM: Oh, yeah. It is a finely carved weapon, but dirty, probably by the giant's smelly paws.

Peyote: Okay.

Ged: Good, good. We pile all the stuff again, and I cast a detect magic on the whole of it.

DM: The sword glows strongly, while the statue glows faintly.

Halbarad: Peyote, why don't you carry the sword for now, and we'll put the rest in the treasure sack.

Mongo: (hefts the sack high) I guess I'm the official carrier of the loot sack now?

Ged: Better you than that rascal Peldor.

Peldor: Thank you for the compliment. I didn't know you had it in you.

Ged: Grr...

And so the party continued on, after some more healing and a late lunch break. The next day, they encountered a dwarven patrol...

Dwarf leader: Who goes there?!

Mongo: (to party) Let me handle this. (to dwarves) It is I, Mongo Thunderhead, hero of Clan Thunderhead, slayer of orcs and giants. These are my faithful companions (gestures to the rest of the party)

Dwarf leader: (turns to his soldiers) Any of you ever heard of this guy? No? I didn't think so. Hmm.

Mongo: Ahem. I see that word of my deeds has not yet come your way. No matter. Whither does the road lead?

Dwarf leader: To the town of Aria, about a half day's ride from here.

Belphanior: Aria? Haven't I heard that somewhere before?

Mongo: Well, we shall be on our way then.

Dwarf leader: Hold! Beware of giants, for some have been seen in these parts recently. In fact, even now we search for them.

Mongo: We ourselves just slew three giants. Maybe those are the ones?

Dwarf leader: Really? Where are the bodies then?

Mongo: (sticks a thumb back the way they came) Back there a ways.

Dwarf leader: We shall see. Stay out of trouble. (looks quizzically at Alindyar as the dwarves pass by)

Alindyar: (ignoring the dwarves)

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Shortly after dusk of that day, the adventurers reached the safety of the small town of Aria. They wasted no time asking after their quarry, Belgar, but responses were not encouraging. Finally, though...

Shopkeeper: (at a provisions store) Oh yeah. A traveller came through here not too long ago.

Halbarad: This traveller...what did he look like?

Shopkeeper: He was wearing dirty clothes, and looked tired. Ugly cuss, too, with a smashed nose...

Mongo: That's Belgar, all right! Where might he be?

Shopkeeper: He went westward, following a local rumor of treasure in the old castle.

Peldor: Treasure?

Ged: Old castle? Where is this old castle?

Shopkeeper: That'd be Lunok Castle. But you don't want to go there. I tried to tell him that too, but he wouldn't listen.

Alindyar: This Lunok Castle...what manner of place is it?

Shopkeeper: Haunted, I tell you! Only fools and crazy men go there!

Ged: Well. Belgar is a fool, to be sure.

Alindyar: Which are we, I wonder?

Rob: Crazy men, crazy men...

Mongo: ...and dwarf!

Halbarad: Enough. Where is this place you speak so fondly of?

Shopkeeper: 'Tis about four leagues west of town. I wouldn't advise you to go there, though, but if you must, at least wait until morning.

Ged: Good advice. Haunted castles are best left to the daylight.

Halbarad: Friend shopkeeper...

Shopkeeper: Call me Guzel. All my friends do.

Halbarad: Well then, Guzel, we will buy new provisions for our trip from your shop here, if you will tell us more of this Lunok Castle.

Guzel: Okay, if you insist.

The party restocked their supplies and found dinner. Guzel told them the following commonly heard rumors about Castle Lunok:

- Lunok Castle houses a demon
- It used to be a rich lord's home
- Strange and dangerous beasts come from it often
- The last group who went there never came back
- Long ago, someone did come back, loaded with riches and wild tales. He disappeared soon afterwards

The adventurers found lodging at a local inn, and planned to continue the pursuit of Belgar in the morning. They went to bed early, except for

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the drow, Alindyar, who stayed up very late studying his spellbooks.

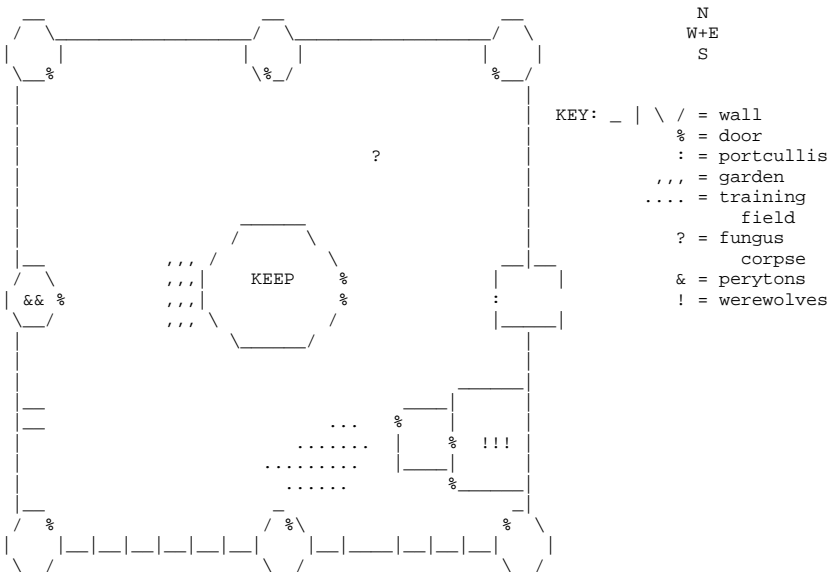
The next morning, the party ate, packed, and departed. They were delayed slightly because Rob's horse needed a shoe repaired, but they were on their way before too long. The castle was about four hours away, and the group had found it necessary to hire guides. The terrain was rough and very bad for tracking and similar things. The guides led them through hills, brush, and finally, rough mountainous ground. Suddenly, a dark castle on top of a hill loomed before them. One guided squealed in terror, and the pair grabbed their money and fled on horseback as fast as the mounts would go.

The second guide had been necessary because the first refused to have to go back to the town alone. Mongo had scoffed at such foolishness, but paid the natives anyway, glad to be rid of their whining.

Halbarad: What does this castle look like?

DM: It's pretty grim. The place is in extensive disrepair, with walls and towers crumbling everywhere. The main walls are about twenty feet high, while the towers are more like thirty. A round keep in the center of the castle grounds rises fifty feet or more into the cloudy sky.

CASTLE LUNOK (DM's map):



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Halbarad: Let's check out that open gate in the middle tower to the east.

Mongo: Yah! (swings axe merrily)

Ged: (looking around as they enter the gatehouse) The sky's a lot darker now. Where is the sun?

Rob: He's right. Maybe we should turn back before it's too late.

Alindyar: No sun out...fine by me.

Peldor: Cowards. Let Peldor show you the meaning of true courage.

Ged: Hah.

DM: You are in a fairly large room, the gatehouse. The outer door of the place has long ago rotted away. You see three skeletons, who, by the marks on the bones, died violent deaths.

Rob: I say a blessing over the skeletons.

DM: There is a portcullis, which is closed, and a ladder goes up to another floor.

Halbarad: Peyote and I climb up the ladder.

Peyote: Dude!

Halbarad: What do I see up above?

DM: Two more skeletons, some arrow slits in the walls, several rusted and broken weapons, and a rotting roof.

Halbarad: I check the weapons, to make sure they're not worth keeping.

Mongo: Meanwhile, I try to lift the gate.

DM: It's pretty heavy. You can't do it alone.

Belphanior: I help him.

DM: The gate rises slowly as you strain...

Peyote: I jam my spear under it to keep it from falling.

DM: (rolls for the spear) The weapon does not break...for now.

Halbarad: (climbing back down) Nothing useful up there.

Mongo: Look! (wanders underneath the risen portcullis) We've reached the inside of the castle!

DM: You see the keep, its door facing you. To the right (north) is some sort of corpse, barely visible on the ground. To the left (south) is a building attached to this side of the outer wall. There is a scuffed area of ground near the building. Small shops are built into the whole southern wall, on this side of course. Every one of the eight towers has a door opening into this court.

Peldor: I check out that body.

Belphanior: I go with Peldor. (they trot off to the northwest)

Mongo: I go have a look at the messed up ground.

Halbarad: Let's stay together. Why don't we check out the towers, one by one, working around the perimeter of the castle?

Ged: Sounds good. Where should we start?

Peyote: How about the northeastern tower? We can move counterclockwise from that one.

Alindyar: Let us begin.

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Mongo: (by himself, about sixty feet from the others, who are walking to the north) Hm. These marks on the ground seem to show a lot of combat in times past. I look for stuff on the ground.

DM: You find a few old, broken weapons.

Mongo: Come to think of it, this does look sort of like the places that I've practiced with weapons. Maybe that building there is a barracks. I rejoin the others, for now. They might need me. (walks toward the main group)

Peldor: (he and Belphanior approach the strange body) Is it a man?

DM: Maybe. Whatever it is, it seems to be covered with fungus of some kind. The stuff is green and red.

Belphanior: Hmm. So it is. Maybe we'd better leave this one alone.

Peldor: (rummaging through his backpack, finds an old torch) I take this old torch and throw it at the fungus man.

DM: A puff of smoke rises, and hovers around the body.

Peldor: I back away.

Belphanior: Let's go. If the others want to help deal with this, fine. I don't want to become infested. (they trundle northeast)

DM: The door of the northeast tower is before you.

Halbarad: We could listen at the door...where is that thief?

Ged: Robbing the dead, looks like.

Halbarad: Hm. I try the door, carefully.

DM: It's locked.

Mongo: (arriving) Hey! Stand aside! (kicks the door down) Eyaah!

DM: Two large skeletons emerge, swinging their bony fists at you. They are at least eight feet tall.

Ged: Now you've done it, dwarf.

Mongo: Better me than someone puny, like Peldor! (charges the nearest skeleton)

Skeleton#1: (swats Mongo, bruising him beneath his plate mail)

Mongo: Aaaaa! (chops at his opponent with his axe, chipping some bone away) Shit! This axe is next to useless!

Halbarad: (swings his small axe and dagger, hitting skeleton#2 but not inflicting any real damage)

Skeleton#2: (punches at the ranger, but misses as he ducks down low)

Peyote: (swinging his new, if only temporary, bastard sword, he hits Halbarad's opponent) Size L, right?

DM: Yep.

Skeleton#2: (staggered)

Peyote: What a bonehead! I must have this sword!

Alindyar: Methinks there is nothing we can do. Most of my spells are of no

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use against such foes as these.

Ged: I can do something! Boccob, grant me your power in this time of evil onslaught! Undead, begone! (waves holy symbol at the skeletons)

DM: The skeletons grin at you as they continue their assault.

Ged: Damn!

Rob: Let me try! (wanders toward one of the skeletons) I banish you back to the netherworld, foul ones!

Skeletons: (break and tromp off toward the gate of the castle)

Rob: I don't believe it!

Ged: Me neither! You succeeded where I failed!

Rob: Well, umm...

Peldor: Naturally. Boccob is a useless god, now it is proven.

Ged: Hush, fool. I didn't see you helping.

Halbarad: What's in the tower?

DM: Not much. A small gem lies on the floor, and the ceiling, along with the floor above, has collapsed. The sky is visible above you.

Mongo: I get the gem and toss it in the treasure sack.

Halbarad: Well then. Let us move on.

The next two towers were empty, but the one after that held more live monsters...

DM: As you approach the middle western tower, a pair of bird-like things emerges from the top. They look like eagles but have antlers, like deer. They divebomb you.

Belphanior: Great. Just who are they attacking?

DM: (checking) Um...Mongo and Ged.

Belphanior: The two smallest. It figures.

Mongo: I am NOT small! The last man to call me that is a dead man! Remember Krug the barbarian?

Ged: Divebomb? Me? Eep! I look for cover!

DM: No cover nearby.

Mongo: I heft my axe and wait, so I can strike as it attacks me.

DM: Ok.

Belphanior: I string my bow.

Halbarad: And I as well.

Ged: (looking at his mace) This won't stop that monster!

Peldor: Relax, spawn of Boccob. I'll protect you. (moves out in front of the elf, sword drawn)

Ged: ...

Alindyar: These look like nothing I have ever seen in the Underdark.

DM: The creatures attack.

Peryton#1: (slashes Mongo with its horns, inflicting heinous wounds)

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Peyote: Heinous!

Mongo: Fuck! That hurt! Take this, reindeer-thing! (swings the axe in a deadly arc, chopping the monster square in the head)

Peryton#1: (reels and spins about, crashing on the ground nearby)

Mongo: I go after that thing! (runs toward it)

Peryton#2: (decides that Peldor would make a good meal too, tries to gore him)

Peldor: (leaps aside) Hah! Not fast enough for Peldor, are you? (stabs the thing, making a minor cut)

Peryton#2: (flies back up into the air)

Peldor: Hey! Come back here! I'm not finished with you!

Halbarad: (fires an arrow, hits the monster) Hm.

Belphanior: (fires a magic arrow, hits the monster) Come down, little birdie!

Alindyar: Nice shot. (launches a magic missile at the thing)

Ged: Whew!

Peldor: See? Peldor watches out, even for you.

Halbarad: (launches a second arrow, misses) Damn!

Belphanior: (launches a second magical arrow, hits) Fuck yeah!

Mongo: (hacking at the badly injured peryton, dispatches it) Hah! Now I can claim another triumph over then monsters of the world!

Alindyar: (launches another magic missile at the monster)

Peryton#2: Urk. (falls to the ground with a loud and wet splatter)

Belphanior: I cut its heart out and feast on it!

Everyone Else: (looking oddly at Belphanior)

Belphanior: What? What?

Mongo: Ouch...

Ged: (healing the dwarf)

Halbarad: (putting bow and arrows away) I check out the tower that the monsters were in.

DM: You find a rotten, burst sack full of electrum pieces, and a metal potion bottle.

Peldor: Aha! Treasure for Peldor, savior of he who follows Boccob! Give it here!

Mongo: Not so fast, thief. (puts the potion in his sack)

Peldor: (eyeing the sack as the electrum is loaded into it)

Mongo: Say, this sack is getting pretty full.

On the western wall of the keep was a garden, but a strange, moving plant occupied it, and the party didn't feel like dealing with it now. They next moved along the wall, southward, and found the remains of some stables, then the southwestern tower, empty. Next was an armorer/weaponsmith shop, long unused.

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DM: A vat of brackish green water rests in one corner.

Peldor: I look at it closely.

DM: It's pretty opaque. Maybe something's moving under the water...

Peldor: I step back.

Belphanior: I kick it over. Away from the party, that is.

DM: The vat overturns, spilling water everywhere. Something slithers out of the container, some kind of grayish-black slime.

Mongo: Yikes!

Belphanior: Maybe it can eat our weapons.

DM: It flows toward you.

Everybody: (looking around) We run back to the north!

Alindyar: (running with the rest) I have an idea. Get the carcasses of the monsters we just fought, and give those to the blob.

Belphanior: Good idea! Being one of the fastest, I run for the nearest body, then stop.

DM: Since you stopped, the ooze heads for you now as the party runs on.

Belphanior: I get behind the bird-deer corpse, so that it's between me and the monster.

DM: (rolling dice) The ooze starts eating the corpse.

Peyote: (he and Mongo are dragging the other peryton body) Here's the other! (they toss it nearby the ooze)

Halbarad: Let's get back to our search before this thing decides to eat us as well.

They resumed searching the southern wall of the castle. The center tower was empty, and to the east of it are other shops, now in ruin - a bowyer, a wood shop, a leather shop, a stonemason, and a butcher shop. In the stonemason shop were three unfinished statues, each about three feet high, but none of them appeared interesting. The butcher shop had a nice, shiny cleaver in a leather case, and Mongo grabbed it quickly. Next was the south-eastern tower, which seemed to have collapsed upon itself some time ago. Only the barracks-type building to the south of the gatehouse had not been explored, so the party headed for it.

DM: The door is locked.

Peldor: (checking for traps, and then picking the lock, successfully)

Halbarad: It's dark in here.

Mongo: No windows?

Halbarad: They have been boarded up. Somebody light a lantern.

Mongo: I've got one. (lights his bullseye lantern and shines it around the chamber)

The room was about thirty feet by twenty feet. An old, collapsed table and a few chairs rested to one side. A single door led out, presumably

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to another room.

Belphanior: I check under the table.

DM: There is a skeleton there. Its head has been caved in.

Peyote: Gnarly.

Belphanior: (to DM) I look at the underside of the table.

DM: You see something scrawled in what looks like blood.

Belphanior: Can I read it?

DM: Sure. It says, "Fourth leg..."

Belphanior: I examine the table legs, tapping for hollow sections.

DM: Nothing.

Belphanior: I break them all open.

DM: Nothing is inside.

Belphanior: The chair legs, then.

Ged: What in the world are you doing?

Belphanior: Quiet. (all the chair legs fall apart under examination)

DM: What else? Heh heh.

Belphanior: Shit!

Mongo: I check out that door.

DM: It's unlocked.

Peldor: I listen for noise.

DM: You hear talking, in common, but can't make out the words.

Halbarad: Let's open the door.

DM: Beyond, you see three women sitting on a couch. They all look up at you and smile. All of them are quite attractive.

Woman#1: Welcome!

Woman#2: How do you do? (rises to greet the party. She is wearing a high dress with a low bodice, revealing a number of shapely curves beneath. She continues to smile at the party, in a sultry way.)

Ged: (muttering) Whores! I _hate_ whores!

Woman#3: It's been so long since anybody came here.

Ged: (to DM) I get to the rear of the party, so they can't see what I'm doing, and then I cast a detect evil.

DM: Okay.

Peldor: (strides forth) Greetings! I am Peldor.

Woman#2: Of course you are. (embraces the thief)

Peldor: (looking dazed)

Alindyar: (to DM) I start thinking about a color spray spell...

Mongo: Who are you people? What are you doing here? Don't you know it's dangerous in these ruins?

Woman#1: Of course not. Nothing ever bothers us here.

Peldor: (staring at the woman) I'll bet.

Belphanior: (to Rob) Hey, boy. Snap out of it.

Rob: Huh? Oh...

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Ged: (to DM) Well? How about it?

DM: You'll have to get closer, to get a clear view.

Ged: (steps forth suddenly) Aha! I KNEW it! Evil! Back, harlots!

Peldor: Aw, come on...

Ged: See for yourselves! They glow red with my spell! Evil, I say!

Woman#1: We have been found out, dears.

Woman#2: Such a shame, too. That one was so cute.

Woman#3: Some of the others aren't too bad, either.

DM: The women stalk you, even as they change. Thick fur sprouts from their skin, and sharp pointed teeth drip saliva. They seem to be in a half-human, half-wolf form now.

Alindyar: By the Dark Lady! Werewolves...

Rob: We are doomed!

Mongo: Werewolf women! Die! (slices at werewolf#1 with his axe, inflicting a shallow wound)

Werewolf#1: (claws at Mongo, but his fine armor protects him)

Halbarad: (chops and slashes at werewolf#2 with his axe and dagger, both of which hit; the axe doesn't wound the monster though)

Werewolf#2: Hee hee. You'll have to do better than that. (claws Halbarad, wounding him)

Belphanior: (slices at werewolf#3, but misses)

Werewolf#3: (slashes Belphanior, wounding him)

Belphanior: Oh shit! I could become a werewolf now!

Werewolf#3: That's right honey. You can join us, we'll treat you right!

Peyote: Uh...I get that wand I have, and aim it at one of the women, err, werewolves, and pronounce the word carved in its side.

DM: Okay. Say "Bazooka".

Peyote: (aiming wand) Bazooka?

DM: A fork of lightning blasts out, hitting the werewolf. You smell crisped meat...

Peyote: A lightning wand!

Werewolf#3: (dies)

Belphanior: (also dies, caught in the explosion of energy; he is at -8 hp at this time)

Mongo: (slightly electrified) Hey! Watch it with that thing!

Peyote: Oh shit! Someone grab that elf!

Ged: (drags Belphanior back and starts trying to heal him)

Rob: (starts praying...actually a chant to help the party in battle)

Alindyar: (launches a color spray at werewolf#1, hitting it square in the face)

Werewolf#1: (stunned for a minute)

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Halbarad: (looks around, stabs werewolf#2 with his enchanted dagger)

Werewolf#1: (still stunned)

Mongo: (shocked that he got a good initiative roll, also shocked by lightning residue) Aaaaaa! (hacks the stunned werewolf twice, hitting both times) Energized dwarf!

Werewolf#1: (dies of deep wounds)

Mongo: (to Peyote) Maybe you should blast me more often...

Werewolf#2: (bites Halbarad, inflicting scary amounts of damage)

Halbarad: Oh shit...

Peyote: (charges werewolf#2, the only living one left, but misses with his sword)

Werewolf: Ha ha.

Peldor: (slashes the werewolf with his shortsword, cutting deep) No woman, human or werewolf, will have Peldor as her plaything!

Halbarad: (slices werewolf again)

Werewolf: ...(badly wounded now)

Mongo: (grumbling about going last again)

Peyote: (chops the werewolf with an incredible blow, killing it)

Mongo: What an incredible blow!

Halbarad: Somebody heal me...

Rob: Eh? (heals the ranger of some of his ills)

Mongo: Treasure!

Peldor: Yes, where is it?

DM: You find a pouch containing many small garnets, and a scroll case with a parchment.

Halbarad: What's on the paper? We read it.

DM: It's a partial map of some complex of rooms and passages.

Mongo: Well, we can use that later maybe.

Belphanior: (in a deep sleep now)

Halbarad: We're going to have to rest.

Alindyar: I have an idea again.

Halbarad: Let's hear it.

Alindyar: About that "fourth leg..." business...perhaps the phrase is in reference to something other than a table leg.

Mongo: Like what?

Alindyar: I was thinking the statues that we saw earlier, in the room of the stonemason...

Mongo: Yeah! I'll go get 'em! (runs off)

Halbarad: Somebody should go with him, in case that ooze comes back.

Peyote: (dashes off after the dwarf)

Soon, Mongo and Peyote returned with the three small statues that the party had found before. Mongo unpacked his chisel and small hammer,

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and soon the statues were being broken open. Sure enough, inside of the second statue's left leg was a shining ring of bluish metal.

Mongo: Oh boy! You're a genius, drow!

Alindyar: (smiles...he _does_ have an 18 INT after all)

Halbarad: Good work.

The party rested in the werewolf room for the night. The lycanthrope bodies were tossed outside for the ooze, and a constant guard was kept in case that wasn't enough. At Halbarad's urging, one of the windows was unboarded, providing an alternate escape route if necessary. The party decided to tackle the huge keep next.

NOTES: Yep, Belphanior was a thief too, making him a F/M/T. That's why he has been gaining levels so slowly. He had actually been picking up a good amount of extra treasure, but I didn't want to spoil his secret right off. The party still doesn't know, though, and won't for some time. Later on, he and Peldor will do a lot of thieving adventures in cities together.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 3rd level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 2nd/2nd/2nd level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)

Ged, 3rd/2nd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 3rd level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 3rd level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 4th level human thief (N)

Peyote, 2nd/2nd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 3rd level human priest (LG)

The Keep (Belphanior's tale)



Rays of sun intruded into the dark room as the sun rose, heralding yet another day. Belphanior rubbed the sleep from his eyes and belched loudly. He had stood the first watch last night, then slept for about eight hours. That was the nice thing about being an adventurer - you didn't have to keep any schedule. The party had slept from about two hours after dusk until now - maybe ten hours, by the elf's estimation. They usually rotated the watch every two hours, letting the magi and priests skip watch. Supposedly they had to rest and be clear-headed in the morning. Belphanior wondered why it was that he didn't get absolved of the responsibility of watch duty, since one of his many trades was the weaving of magic.

Come to think of it, he didn't mind that much. It was probably for the better, anyway - Ged and Alindyar might be all right for standing watch occasionally, but in the long term, Belphanior would rather have a warrior guarding the party. Halbarad, Peyote, Mongo - those were fine fighters, indeed. The second thief (for Belphanior naturally considered himself to be the main thief), Peldor, seemed to be able to handle himself. There was no way that the priest, Rob, would ever be able to stand watch, not without Belphanior, at the least, worrying about the bumbling fool falling asleep on duty, or something like that.

The tall elf rose, swatting the dust off of his torn and beaten cloak. He would have to get another cloak in the next town, that was for sure. Peyote stood watch quietly, gazing out the window at things unknown. The half-elf was an odd one, that was certain. He talked in strange dialects, and mostly to the trees and animals rather than his fellow party members. Belphanior knew that the druidic warrior could pull his weight in a fight, though - their last few battles had proven this beyond any doubt. There was really no one in the party that the warrior/mage/thief didn't like, though the incompetent priest, Rob, and the faerie-elf mage/priest, Ged, came close. The former was a do-gooder and a moron, while the latter frowned on many of the things that Belphanior liked to do - slitting the throats of stunned foes, eating slain enemies, and the like.

Peyote bade his companion well. "Good morning to you, sir", he exclaimed when he saw the elf stand up. "Pretty boring night, if you ask me...". Belphanior hadn't, so he said nothing, acknowledging his companion with but a nod. He noticed that Peldor and Halbarad were likewise in the pro-

cess of waking up. Mongo, the smelly dwarf, snored loudly in a corner, his battleaxe grasped tightly in one hand. Someone kicked him, and he stopped. Alindyar was already up, and had busied himself reading one of his books. The drow was a strange fellow, Belphanior mused to himself, but had done nothing to brand himself like others of his race. Actually, it would be kind of neat, thought the elf, if the drow was evil-minded - might make things a bit more interesting for the party. Eating spiders - now that was something that even Mongo might be loath to do. Belphanior decided then, on a whim, that it was time for the party to wake up, and so, accordingly, he began rummaging through his pack for his trumpet...

Within minutes, the room was astir with activity. Most of the adventurers were eating a cold breakfast, except for the dwarf. Mongo had concocted a mixture of foods, and heated the whole mess over a small firepot. He was busy gobbling the stuff down; whatever it was, it looked not unlike blended organs. Belphanior sometimes wondered about the meals that the dwarf prepared for the party. Alindyar wasn't eating anything, having had breakfast hours before. The rest seemed content with their cold rations and water.

Soon, the eating was over, and the group began to pack up their food and bedrolls. Mongo found a loose stone in one wall, behind which was a small space. He crammed a sackful of coins from the party's earlier conquests into this hole, as the loot was getting too heavy to lug around. Belphanior would have been happy to relieve the load somewhat, but he didn't think that the party would go for the idea.

Today, the party was going to find a way into the massive keep at the center of the castle's courtyard. The structure was at least sixty feet in diameter, and about fifty feet high. The adventurers approached the main door, on the ground floor of the tower. Belphanior had compunctions about leaving loose ends behind; the plant-thing on the far side of the keep, the still-wandering (though not seen in a while) grey ooze - these were not things that should be forgotten about. As far as any of the party could tell, the plant couldn't just get up and walk around the courtyard, but who knew the ways of monsters? Belphanior was far more worried about the ooze, for such a thing could find a party in their sleep and consume a number of them before it was found out. The sullen elf wondered where the slimy thing had gotten to by now. Hopefully not too close to where they were now, he thought.

Peldor examined the large iron door on the eastern wall of the keep. "This door is locked", he pronounced with some clarity. The thief's skillful hands probed the lock, with the help of a number of small picks and probes. Belphanior wondered if his own prowess with thieves' picks and tools was equal to that of Peldor. The human looked up, disgusted. "There are no traps here, but this damn thing is barred from the _inside_, I think. And it's pretty thick, too." It seemed that the thief did not care for locks that stopped him.

Halbarad, as was his wont, spoke up suddenly. "We could send

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somebody up to the roof,"; he looked at Belphanior and Peldor meaningfully then; "and then that person could lower down a rope for the rest." Ged agreed almost immediately. "Sounds like a good idea to me." The plan did make sense, after all; the thieves were most suited for climbing of this sort, with their training and equipment. Belphanior looked around, then replied, "Okay, okay. I'll do it." As the elf unpacked his climbing hooks and rope, he noticed that Peldor was doing the same.

"I just couldn't let you go up there without me", the other thief said. He lowered his voice and spoke just to Belphanior. "Besides, there might be treasure on the roof, and we wouldn't want them" - with this he gestured disgustedly at the others - "to get any of it, now would we?" Belphanior could appreciate the logic of this young human. He couldn't help but like the thief, and not only because they had an occupation in common. Peldor was quick of tongue and wit, as well as sword and foot. The elf would rather have his fellow thief at his back than most of the others. Maybe there was honor among thieves after all.

With ropes secured at their belts and climbing hooks in hand, the pair of thieves prepared to make the climb. The tower rose away from them at a steep angle, and seemed like a mountain from the ground. Belphanior explained to some of his companions that he had much skill at climbing and rope use, and was going up with Peldor to keep an eye on him. The general party was not aware that the elf had thieving skills, and he meant to keep it that way. There was much agreement among the other adventurers; Belphanior couldn't believe that they were buying it. Peldor even helped, by scowling at the elven warrior after he made his excuse to the party.

Without further ado, the two began their climb. Though it looked formidable, the tower was made up of large blocks of stone, arrayed in a simple pattern. There were large gaps between the stones, plenty of room for an enterprising thief to get a finger or ten into. Within minutes, the thieves had scaled the fifty foot wall, and with a sigh of relief, they climbed over the parapet and landed on the inside of the wall. The low wall, about five feet high, was of the sort constructed to protect archers or sentries from arrows fired at them, whether stray or intentional.

In the center of the roof was a small octagonal building, probably a rooftop level, Belphanior noted. The small structure was about thirty feet in diameter, leaving a ring of bare rooftop between it and the parapet; this open area was about twenty feet wide and circled the roof. Before the pair could investigate further, there was a sudden scuttling sound, as a gigantic spider moved rapidly toward them. Its hairy body was fully three feet wide, and fangs the size of daggers dripped venom onto the stone beneath the beast as it approached.

Immediately, the two split up, Peldor going to one side and Belphanior to the other. This was a standard defensive move; the spider would have to choose one target, exposing its backside to the other. Belphanior couldn't

help but wonder if Alindyar, being a drow, could talk to spiders. The thing chose Peldor as a target, for whatever reason, not that Belphanior minded that much. Peldor crouched low as the spider moved toward him, his shortsword pointed toward it. As the monster lunged forward to bite him, the human leaped high above its head, slashing below him with his weapon as he did so. At the same time, Belphanior dashed over, behind the thing, and buried his own sword in its rear flank.

The giant spider, unused to such punishment, and bleeding from two wounds now, ceased to move. It twitched a bit, and then died. Its foul blood oozed forth slowly, rather like molasses, and yellowish guts dripped forth for all to see. Neither of the thieves really cared much for the sight, so they commenced a quick search of the rooftop. Belphanior paused to look at the party far below, but they seemed not to know what had happened on the rooftop.

Momentarily, the elf was lowering his rope from the short parapet. He had secured it on one of the large squarish stones of the ledge, and even now the half-elf, Peyote, was climbing upwards. The rope was knotted every few feet, for the benefit of those in the party who were not thieves. Peldor had found a handful of platinum coins and a few small opals, and an old skeleton, inside some spiderwebs. The skeleton had nothing of value except a worn leather vest; for some reason, Peldor had wanted the vest, and stuffed it into his backpack. Who could know the way humans' minds worked? Certainly not Belphanior. He leaned wearily against the parapet as the other party members climbed up to join them. Mongo seemed to have a difficult time hauling his weight up the rope - eventually, the dwarf's plate armor had to be removed and hauled up in pieces.

Before too long, everyone was on the roof. Inside of the small octagonal building, which had four windows but only a single door, was a spiral staircase leading downward. After pulling the long rope to the roof, to avoid others following them, party advanced into the lower floors of the tower; Mongo and Halbarad led the way, followed by Belphanior and Peyote in the second rank. The elf didn't really mind not being in the front; he had recently learned that some of the other members of the group were more suited for battle, with their heavier armor and weapons.

The stairs led to an oddly-shaped chamber, full of doors and tapestries. The spiralling steps continued down, but the party, subject to the curiosity of all adventurers, did not. They opted to explore this floor of the tower first. The room was lavish; Mongo took a fancy to some of the lighter tapestries and mentioned the possibility of confiscating them later. A window, heavily barred, was also visible to one side. A door led to a small, window-less guardroom on the north side of the level. It had seemingly once been a weapons room, for there were racks upon racks of various armaments here. A number of the items were of high quality, and this chamber as well was marked as one to be revisited.

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Another door to the south of the room with the tapestries held an ancient table and some equally ancient chairs, but nothing else. The final door from the tapestry room was locked; Peldor remedied this situation shortly, and the adventurers trundled into a huge room, which was basically the entire eastern half of the floor. In this well-adorned bedroom, they found a bed, dresser, closet, water basin - all dusty, rusty, or whatever signified a long period of disuse. There was nothing inside, under, or behind any of the furniture here; it was as if the occupant had packed away all of his smaller possessions and departed. In one dresser drawer was a scrap of parchment, which said quite clearly in Common, "In the caves, all is not as it seems."

Caves? Mongo was ecstatic. "Caves mean dungeons, and dungeons mean monsters!", the dwarf babbled excitedly. "And monsters mean treasure!", Peldor was quick to add. Belphanior agreed with that sentiment wholeheartedly; something had better happen soon to break the monotony. Peyote checked the walls for secret portals but could find none, so the party went back to the staircase and descended another level. This next floor was one large, circular room; a pair of opposite windows were set into the western and eastern walls. These were both heavily barred. Peldor almost immediately noticed something odd about the chamber; there were a great many small, pointed darts on the floor.

Belphanior offered his opinion to the group. "Maybe there was a trap, long ago triggered, and the darts flew through the room." Halbarad countered, though. "Then where are their bodies?" Peldor looked closely at the walls around them. "More importantly, are there more darts waiting here for _us_?", the thief wondered aloud. After a moment of discussion, it was deemed best to just go down to the next floor, skipping this room altogether.

On the next level down (the ground floor, by Halbarad's estimation - the ranger was good when it came to gauging distances and directions), the staircase ceased to lead further into the earth. The main door of the keep was off to the east, and had three heavy bars sealing it on this side. There were four other doors leading, presumably, to other rooms - two to the north, and two to the south. The adventurers opted for the southernmost one; it was unlocked and led into an abandoned guardroom. Well, not quite abandoned; six crumbling skeletons were strewn about the room. As the party entered the room, the bony remains trembled, then climbed to their feet (or what was left of their feet, anyway) and faced the group.

Belphanior wondered about the nature of the forces that could cause the dead to rise. He often aspired to control such forces himself - the topic of death was absolutely fascinating to the high elf. Unless, of course, it was his OWN death. Speaking of which, the skeletons were in the process of shambling toward him and the others. If they had considered the party easy prey, though, they had not reckoned with Ged. The elven mage/priest strode forth, brandishing his silver holy symbol. "Foul things, you no longer belong in this world. Go! I beseech you, in the name of Boccob, begone!" The elf

sometimes got a little carried away, but such was the adventuring life. The way Belphanior understood it, faith was an important part of such clerical activities.

The skeletons wavered, but then turned and fled from the room. Halbarad looked at the exit, and proclaimed, "We had better find somewhere for them to go. Otherwise they might find us again later..." Mongo volunteered to open the main door, hopefully encouraging the skeletons to use it, and removing themselves as potential problems for the adventurers. Belphanior followed the dwarf out of the chamber, and watched as he threw the triple bars up and kicked the door open. Who cared where the damn skeletons went? The dour elf simply wanted to find some more interesting things than bleached bones and dusty furniture.

The skeletons, in their mindless and repelled state, quickly fled the keep, and Mongo shut and barred the main door again. Ged looked around smugly, pleased at his show of power. Perhaps there was a use for the benevolent elf after all, thought Belphanior. The party headed for the other door to the north, but were somewhat disappointed, as it led to a study full of sagging shelves and rotting books. The room was not only musty, but humid as well. Mongo surmised that there was a water leak somewhere, and condemned the obviously inferior architecture of the room, and of the keep in general.

The first southern door the party took led to an old guardroom. The door was locked, and after Peldor had picked the lock, the party found out why. Twelve rotting corpses rose from the slimy ground of the chamber, moving to attack the party. Ged, and Rob after him, did their best to turn the things away, but Ged was only able to repel seven of them, while Rob failed altogether. Belphanior wasted no time at all, drawing the magical longsword that he had recently bought from Peldor and charging the vile undead. Now this, while not much more exciting than skeletons, at least would give the elf a chance to get in some melee practice.

Combat in general ensued...Belphanior slashed at a zombie's head, splitting it almost in half, but the moldering monster grinned at him through its split mouth and groped for him. Fortunately, Belphanior was quick on his feet, as usual, and dodged aside as the zombie stumbled by. He spun about and chopped at it again, this time severing its head altogether, and it fell to the ground, dead as an undead can be.

The elf gazed about, and saw that the others had defeated the rest of the monsters. Mongo and Peyote seemed to be somewhat wounded, but the priests were busy attending to them. Various zombies were spread across the room in various pieces - looked like some of Mongo's handiwork, Belphanior mused silently.

The adventurers were ready to move on in about ten minutes. The only thing of interest in the zombie's lair was a potion bottle full of black fluid, which Mongo tossed into his sack casually. The last door led into a

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huge room, basically empty except for an intricately carved stone face in one corner. When the party approached, the graven face opened its eyes and actually SPOKE! Belphanior, and most everyone else, were suprised at this, for they had never seen a magic mouth before. The drow mage didn't seem too stunned, but that figured. The mouth said aloud,

"TO PASS, ANSWER THIS: You cannot see me, yet you always know when I'm there. I help make fire, but also see rain. I carry very little weight, yet my power is quite great. Who am I?"

...and the beady little stone eyes glared at the group of adventurers. They drew back and debated for a bit.

"Tar?", Rob said quietly to the others. Ged all but laughed aloud at this. "No, you dolt! Have you no brain? Shut up before you doom us all." Belphanior's mind whirled. Whatever could it be? Forests? No, they weren't light in weight. Paper maybe? No, it had nothing to do with rain. Then, suddenly, he had it. The riddle really wasn't that difficult, as evidenced by Alindyar, Halbarad, and Ged also arriving at the answer simultaneously. Mongo just sat there, wondering why rock wouldn't work.

They briefly confirmed their answer, then the ranger stepped forward, facing the mouth. Stony eyes still glared at him. He proclaimed the single word aloud. "Air". The mouth relaxed, though the eyes did not, and spoke again. "CORRECT. LUNOK WELCOMES YOU. PASS." With that, the mouth opened even wider, revealing the top rungs of an iron ladder going down.

After another brief discussion, mostly about why Mongo was hesitant to go inside anything's opened mouth, the group decided of course to use the ladder and see what lay below. They climbed into the open mouth, one by one, and went down, with Halbarad in the lead, brandishing a bright lantern.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 3rd level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 2nd/2nd/2nd level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)

Ged, 3rd/2nd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 3rd level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 3rd level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 4th level human thief (N)

Peyote, 2nd/2nd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 3rd level human priest (LG)

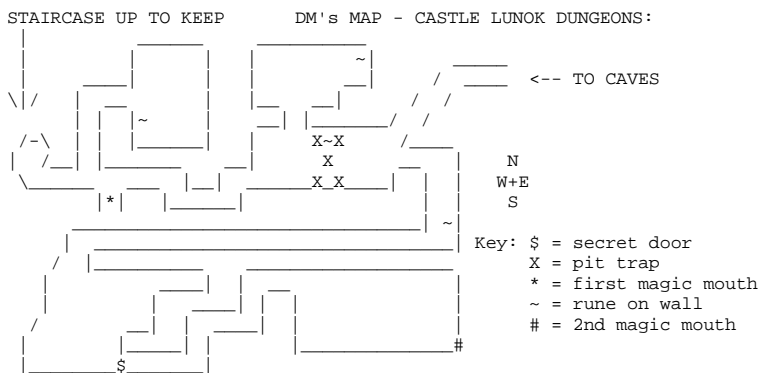
The Dungeon of Lunok

(Mongo's tale)



The party climbed down the ladder. The iron rungs were cold, and most of the adventurers found themselves wishing for gloves. Mongo, for one, did not care one way or the other. His weathered hands grasped the bars tightly as he descended, second in line (Halbarad, the ranger, went first, since he had much lighter armor and could carry the lantern more easily while climbing). The dwarf's plate mail clanked somewhat loudly. Mongo was having a hell of a time so far in this place, having battled scrawny skeletons, rotting zombies, winged deer, and wolfmen. The dwarf wondered what sorts of deadly monsters lurked below. Hopefully, they would soon find out. The ranger reached the bottom, and momentarily Mongo landed next to him. They were in a small cavern, maybe thirty feet by ten feet at the most, and a spiral staircase led downward. What architecture this was! Though not crafted by dwarves, the castle had proved to be fascinating to Mongo thus far, though he somehow doubted that the others were that impressed with its many features.

The rest of the group entered the room shortly, and since room was now getting limited, Mongo and Halbarad went down the stairs. The circular steps were cut from the very stone itself, and led down perhaps twenty feet. The dwarf had an uncanny knack for the judging of distances underground, much as Halbarad did in the outdoors above. At the foot of the staircase was a neatly cut, squarish tunnel, leading off to the north and east. Mongo looked both ways, wondering which corridor would lead to more interesting things.



The adventurers, now all down on this level, prepared to explore the

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place. Mongo noticed that the ceilings were about ten feet in height - plenty of room for him, at least. The place was generally dry and musty, and smelled like very old stone, a smell that Mongo was sure only he could tell apart from that of any other stone. The party started off toward the east, but was stopped when someone pointed out an alcove to the south. A magical mouth, similar to the one they had encountered earlier, started talking.

"GREETINGS. THE MIGHTY LUNOK IS LONG DEPARTED, BUT HE HAS LEFT A FEW SURPRISES FOR THOSE WHO ARE WORTHY. IF YOU CARE TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE, THEN HEED MY WORDS VERY CAREFULLY. THE OTHER MOUTH WANTS TO HEAR THREE WORDS. THE FIRST IS IN SEVERAL PLACES AT ONCE AND SHOULD BE NOTHING NEW TO YOU. THE SECOND YOU WILL MEET AS HE TELLS YOU SOMETHING OF VALUE. THE THIRD YOU WILL FIND IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST."

The deep voice went on. Mongo kind of hoped that it would stop blabbering, for puzzles were not his favorite thing in the world.

"THESE THREE THINGS ARE BOUND TOGETHER BY A SIMPLE CONCEPT. REMEMBER - IF YOU FAIL, THEN YOU MAY PERISH HERE."

With that, the thing ceased its speech and was still. "Hmm", noted Ged with a puzzled look on his face. "Another mind game for us to solve. How interesting." Mongo didn't quite think so, but he held his tongue for now. Combat was much better, he was sure of that. The axe and the sword - now THOSE were the kind of traveling companions a dwarf could trust at any time. It wasn't that he didn't like the company offered by his companions - their adventures had been a lot of fun so far. Mongo just wanted to hone his fighting skills and test his mettle against a variety of the world's monsters and evildoers. Puzzles such as this were simply a stepping stone to greater things, he felt.

"Mayhap there lies great treasure within this place", the drow was prattling. He always seemed to say wordy things that made no real sense to Mongo. "Hopefully we shall find out what sort of individual this Lunok was", continued the dark elf. Halbarad was quick to respond. "Let's be on our way. We have wasted enough time here." Right on! Mongo gripped his leather-handled battle axe and looked to the northern passage. There was sure to be something to do there.

Following the dwarf's lead, though they didn't really know why, the party moved north. They soon found a room, after the passage turned east-

ward, yet the chamber had no door. Mongo wondered if somebody else had been here before and kicked the door in already. As the group entered the sizable room, a large cloud of green mist writhed ahead of them. The vapors quickly took shape, becoming a large monster with a bird-like beak and sharp claws as well. At eight feet, the thing stood double Mongo's height, but this fact did not faze the dwarven warrior. As the creature, whatever the hell it was, strode toward the adventurers, Mongo raised his axe and charged it, screaming war cries with fervor.

Big mistake. The thing cast a sidelong glance at the oncoming dwarf, and without any warning, he was scooped from his feet by some invisible force. Mongo hung in the air for the briefest of seconds, and then was hurled back into the rear rank of the party. He tried to avoid this outcome, but his limbs flailed uselessly in the air, and the forceful impact bowled over both Rob and the thief, Peldor. Alindyar nearly got hit by the airborne dwarf as well, but sidestepped neatly out of the way.

Halbarad and Belphanior, as one, moved to attack the thing. At the same time, Ged began the casting of his magical missile, and Alindyar moved his hands to create some other spell. Peyote went invisible, slipping his enchanted ring onto his finger. With any luck, this advantage would enable him to get close enough to the monster to use his huge sword with deadly effect. Belphanior, the faster of the two meeleing the monster right now, attacked it first, slashing at its shoulder. The thing seemed to explode into a flurry of motion, swinging its taloned hands at the pair of opponents. Not only did the elf's strike miss, but he was struck across the head, and staggered backwards. Halbarad's attack was more accurate, though; the ranger got in a blow with his small axe, opening a tiny cut in the monster's scaly gray hide. Then he, too, was struck by a backhanded swipe from the thing, a blow which hurt quite a bit, even through his leather armor.

Ged let the missile fly, and the red bolt of energy zipped toward its target. As it hit the monster, however, it seemed to shimmer and die, losing its power and fading into wisps of nothingness. "What the hell?", exclaimed the grey elf, as he saw his powerful attack fail. "What is this thing, that magic will not work to injure it?" Nearby, Alindyar cast his spell also, a spray of color that hit the monster right in the face. The magi were jubilant for a moment, then their smiles faded as the shining colors broke apart and died out. Alindyar was not pleased. "I suspect this creature to be a demon of some kind", he spoke to his fellow mage. "And if this is the case, we are in dire straits indeed". Ged could not agree more.

The monster, stalking Halbarad, suddenly swept one huge arm to the side, catching Peyote full in the side, as he became visible from the attack. The half-elf grunted with pain and surprise, and then the arm's twin hit him too, and he crumpled to the floor of the dungeon, unconscious. The giant bastard sword landed nearby with a "clang" of metal hitting stone. Another similar sound happened then, as Mongo rose from the dirty floor to one side. His

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plate mail was dented in several places, and blood ran down one side of his head from his injury a minute before. The human priest, Rob, was still recovering from Mongo's unwilling time as a missile weapon. Peldor was stunned for the moment and sat stupidly in one corner of the room.

It was up to him, Mongo saw. The others were faring badly, and the dwarf had not done much better. But, he was the closest to it now, and he set his jaw with determination as he moved toward the thing again. However, Belphanior reached it first, hacking madly with his sword. He actually hit the creature, cutting its leg in a spray of black ichor, but then it swatted him aside with one hand. Immediately after that, the monster pointed at the magi near the entrance of the room, and a globe of blackness swallowed them up, just like that. Mongo thought it looked like the darkest night he had ever seen, blocking the doorway like some great black blob. The mages' cries of bewilderment and frustration issued from the darkness zone, and would have been funny in any other setting but this one, thought the dwarf.

Mongo had had enough. He leaped forward, trusting to his instinct that the thing could not execute too many attacks in such a short time period. Apparently he was right, for his axe bit deeply into the monster's torso, inflicting a horrific wound on it. The black blood flowed freely down the thing's legs, and it gaped at the dwarf, utter hatred etched on its ugly face. It groped wildly at him, but he was ready for this, and ducked its clumsy swings. Mongo was sure that the creature's attacks had not been so slow in the time before he had wounded it. His axe chopped into it again, this time hitting it in the neck, and the thing shrieked in agony, and actually backed off somewhat!

Halbarad pulled himself to his feet nearby, and with a sudden throw, buried his dagger in the monster's chest. Mongo was very close to the beast already, and didn't want it to get away from him. He followed its retreat, though it had nowhere to go, really, and chopped at its leg, wounding it yet again. The thing made a number of weak attacks, some of which hit the dwarf. In his state, blood pumping through his body, adrenaline spurring him on to greater and greater levels of strength, the blows did nothing to slow him. He hacked relentlessly at the monster, and it toppled to the ground and died under the rain of axe blows. "Die, fucker!", shouted Mongo in his moment of triumph, standing over the vanquished foe. He felt like he could take on an army and win right now.

As the foul blood dripped from his axe, Mongo came to his senses. Halbarad clapped him on the shoulder with a gloved hand. "That was a fine show of arms, my friend. Your prowess in battle is truly something to see." The others were now moving about slowly, binding their wounds or helping the others. Mongo felt that he had now proven his worth without question, and was suddenly pleased to be a member of this party (perhaps for the first time since they had met).

Soon, the group was ready to move on. There was a rune set into the western wall of the room, glowing like gold. It was a simple one - the letter "B". They noted this and went on. The party had to circle back to the alcove where the magic mouth had been, and then they headed east into a new room. Halbarad's lantern illuminated the way, much to Mongo's dismay; his eyes were bothering him today and the bright lantern didn't help. The group entered a large room, and chose to go through the northern exit, ignoring for now the eastern exit.

The room they were about to enter was as dark as the demon's magical globe had been. Halbarad entered slowly, and as soon as he was within the black area, his light grew extremely dim. Mongo wandered into the region of darkness, but his infravision was useless here. The ranger was a bit ahead of him, but his lantern only gave off light in a radius of a few inches. The room seemed to be empty, though; Mongo could hear no sounds of any potential dangers lurking in the black void around him. He stomped his armored foot on the ground, and caused a loud noise that did not echo much at all. Good enough, then; the room wasn't that big.

Soon, Halbarad and Mongo emerged from the darkness. The ranger had located a rune like the one found before; this one was an "L". They went back into the other room and headed for the eastern exit. Belphanior found yet another rune on the northern wall, but as he moved to examine it, a pit trap opened beneath his feet, and he fell a short distance (well, for a pit trap, anyway), hurting his knee when he landed. Mongo found a rope and tossed it to the elf, helping pull him out after he caught the end. Meanwhile, Peldor was busying himself searching for other pit traps in the chamber, for when one was found, there were usually more nearby; trouble came in numbers. The thief found four other such pits in the area, springing them by hitting the floor sharply with a small hammer.

The party had to tread carefully in order to avoid the pits as they moved across the room. The rune this time was a vivid black "D" in the northern wall between two traps. Mongo wished that someone would just spell a word from these damned letters, so that they would not have to find any more. Maybe another demon lurked nearby; Mongo's confidence waxed higher than ever as he thought about the last battle.

Through the eastern exit, they found two tunnels that split off, one to the northeast, and the other to the east. Mongo noticed that the northeastern path was cut from rougher stone than the other. The party decided after a short rest to take the northern route. They moved for a while along the tunnel, then entered a large cavernous area. The floor ahead became a crevasse, about fifteen feet wide and very deep.

"I can jump that." Peldor announced his intentions to everyone. "Ha! Go ahead, fool, jump! If you fall and die, so much the better!", snapped Ged, who seemed to be in a touchy mood this day. Mongo would have gone for it, but even without his armor to weigh him down, he wouldn't have a

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chance. Belphanior looked down into the gorge, obviously considering the same thing that Peldor was. Mongo figured that Halbarad could probably make the jump as well, and maybe Peyote, but that was it for the party. Rob would probably trip at the edge and fall right in if he tried for it.

Halbarad was handing Peldor a short, heavy coil of rope. Mongo found a long, sharp piton in one of his backpack pockets and gave that to the thief as well. "Here. Take these, and secure one end of the rope somewhere on the other side." Halbarad wished the thief good luck, for whatever reason, Mongo did not know. He personally hoped that Peldor would fall into the chasm and be lost forever. The thief was nothing but a leech - he stole from anyone or anything that he could find. Peldor said, "Luck? I don't need any luck!", and backed up a ways. Then he dashed across the chamber, building up his running start, and jumped off from this side. The thief easily made the leap, surprising some of the party members, and landed in a graceful roll on the other side.

Peldor looked about, obviously searching for some treasure or something to take, and then hammered the piton into the stone of the floor. He tied the rope into the piton's eye, using one of the forty-four basic knots known to all thieves, and then tossed the main coil of rope back across. On this end, Mongo secured it with another piton. He was glad that he had picked up a few of everything in the supply store last time. Looking down into the deep crevasse, the dwarf wondered what was down there. Maybe they would have time to check that out, too.

It was decided to send Belphanior and Halbarad across the rope to join Peldor. The magi weren't sure they had the strength to pull themselves along the rope, and besides, someone had to guard this end in case some dungeon denizen came along and cut it. The trio was just going to explore for a bit, anyway. Mongo watched them go until they turned around a corner and were out of sight.

The dwarf and the other four party members rested and ate lunch near the crevasse. About a half-hour later, their companions returned, bearing news of another of the underground cliffs, with a two-foot wide ledge to another chamber. In this last chamber, they said, had been an ancient man, sitting cross-legged. He had cackled to them about the treasure beyond the fangs, and then vanished. They didn't seem to Mongo to be too sure that he had ever been there in the first place. The dwarven warrior wouldn't really have believed them except for the presence of the ranger, Halbarad, whom he trusted.

The group then returned to the pit room, and took the other eastern passage. This led along a long, winding corridor - at one point they found another rune, a greenish one that represented "O". Further along, the tunnel turned south into a dead-end. There was no door, but a hazy curtain-like barrier blocked the way. It was opaque, and seemed to radiate cold. Mongo thought that they should toss Peldor through and see what happened, but no-

body really agreed with him.

Instead, Belphanior poked his sword into the field. Mongo would have bet a thousand coins of gold (if he had that many) that someday the reckless elf would find a way to destroy himself, be it by trap, monster, or whatever. At the touch of the cold steel, the strange effect ceased, revealing a huge room, most of it filled by a very large and very pale dragon, which was at the moment awakening. It looked in their direction, and grinned toothily, displaying many sharp fangs. "Good... I like to eat after I take a nap", it said loudly in the common tongue.

There was no time for discussion. Even the most dense of the adventurers realized that once the beast had fully awakened, they would never get by it without much trouble. Mongo wanted to ask someone how the large dragon had gotten into this room through smaller passages, or how it had stayed here for who knew how long, but this was not the time. Besides, Belphanior didn't even wait to think about it. The elf drew his sword and sprinted into the room. Mongo thought to himself that maybe this would be the time, but he hefted his axe and went in after him.

The dragon, still a bit sluggish from its long period in stasis, abruptly regained its full range of faculties when Belphanior's sword sliced a deep cut in its flank. The monster, fully thirty feet long, was not actually very big, as dragons went, but to this party, it was a monstrous apparition of death. The young dragon was quite hungry, however, and this newest meal had arrived just in time for its needs. It hated being trapped in this tiny room, put into stasis by that idiotic, mad wizard Lunok. Apparently whatever had been necessary to break the magic had happened, and the dragon decided that it would find a way out of this room and hunt down the mage. After it killed these fools, that was.

Belphanior hacked madly at the beast, but half of his blows couldn't pierce the dragon's tough skin. Mongo helped to remedy the situation, burying his axe in the thing's side with a mighty sweep. The dragon shrieked in pain, not used to food that bit back. Then it swiveled its head around to face the two antagonists, and took a deep breath.

"Oh shit.", proclaimed Belphanior. Mongo just stared at the dragon, recalling from dwarven legends the power of dragon breath. There was little time to react, but they both tried, leaping madly to either side. The huge monster launched a cone of white frost in their general direction, bathing that whole side of the chamber in ice and sleet. Belphanior managed to leap far to one side, avoiding the brunt of the blast, but he was nevertheless chilled to the bone, and collapsed to the floor, covered with ice crystals, unconscious. Mongo dived for the ground, but wasn't as quick as the elf. Fortunately, his armor had thick padding inside, and this probably saved him. The dwarf was enveloped in ice, much more than his elven companion, and though sorely wounded by the extreme cold, he also lived.

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Halbarad took advantage of the dragon's attack to get close to its head, and both his hand axe and dagger scored minor wounds within an instant. The dragon turned again, focusing its attention on the ranger, but not failing to smell some invisible fool coming in from one side. The monster, though wounded by the initial attacks, was far from defeated, and it bit Halbarad, locking its jaws on his lightly armored torso and crunching down. The human prey ceased to move, and the dragon discarded him with a toss of its head. Next, it turned suddenly and slashed at the half-elf it had smelled before, sending that one into a wall, slashed and torn. Peyote looked at the three large, bloody cuts on his chest and legs, and slumped to the floor in a daze.

Fortunately for the party, the magi had not been idle for the last moments. Ged cast a spell of sleep at the dragon, just on the off chance that it might work, but it failed to affect the monster. Alindyar launched a wave of webs at the great lizard, pinning it partially to the ground. Rob cast a spiritual hammer, but this magical weapon failed to strike the monster, hitting the ground instead. The dragon reared its head to breathe again, this time at the magi and priest.

However, it had not counted on the attack of Peldor. While the beast had been busy demolishing the other party members, the crafty thief had silently crept to the monster's side. The webs on this flank prevented it from moving much. Avoiding a leathery wing, he leaped atop its neck, at the same time burying his magical blade in the back of its head. The sword sunk into the creature almost too easily. Peldor was surprised, for he hadn't stabbed THAT hard. The weapon sank in with such force that its point protruded from the dragon's chin. Blood spurted from this new and dire wound, spraying the walls and some of the nearby adventurers too.

The dragon did not take it well. It writhed about in complete agony, sending Peldor into one wall with a loud "thump". The monster tried to breathe, but its throat wouldn't work right any longer. With a last breath, the lizard cursed Lunok, and expired.

Mongo slowly and painfully rose to his feet, eyeing the room. Belphanior was iced over, still, and did not move. Halbarad, as well, did not stir, and the dwarf feared him dead. Peyote grunted, soaked with his own blood as well as the dragon's, but he at least moved. Peldor was walking around the dragon's body, staring at it in wonder. The magi now moved into the room, as did Rob.

Ged was casting healing magic on Belphanior, while Alindyar broke off pieces of the ice sheet that was covering the elf. Rob, meanwhile, tended to Halbarad. The ranger was in bad shape, Mongo saw. Large holes were punched in his leather armor, and deeper, and he lay in a widening pool of blood and guts. "Ged!", the human priest shouted. "Come here and help with this one!" The grey elf ran over to Halbarad's prone and lifeless body, and quickly made a sad face. "There is nothing we can do for him anymore."

Mongo couldn't believe it. Halbarad? Dead? It did not seem possible. Yet it was! The dwarf grabbed Ged and shook him like a leaf. "There has to be something we can do to bring him back! There HAS to!" Ged was thinking quickly. "Maybe in the town, Aria, there is a priest who can help him. But we can do nothing for him, here." Mongo sulked for a while after that, but he built a stretcher for the ranger and loaded him on it. They would have to find a way to get the body up those spiral stairs, he realized.

Peldor considered the prospect of finding out what was in the dead ranger's pockets, but gave up that notion when he caught the look on Mongo's bearded face. Instead, he busied himself with searching the dragon's den. In one corner, he found a fanged mouth of stone. The thing suddenly came alive, voicing its thoughts for them all.

"GREETINGS. YOU ARE MIGHTY OF BRAINS AND BRAWN IF YOU HAVE MADE IT HERE. NOW PROVE YOUR WORTHINESS ONE FINAL TIME. WHAT IS THE FIRST THING I SEEK?"

Ged had the answer, as Mongo suspected he would. "Bold", the elf proclaimed loudly. The mouth was impassive. "AND THE SECOND?" Peyote spoke up now. "Old?", the half-elf half-asked. Geez, Mongo thought to himself. If you're going to say the answer, at least be sure of yourself. The mouth waited not a second. "AND THE THIRD?" Belly of the beast? Then Mongo sputtered, "Cold!", before any could stop him. The mouth grinned, its fangs gleaming.

"GOOD. YOUR SACRIFICE WAS NOT IN VAIN. LUNOK GIVES YOU TOKENS OF HIS APPRECIATION. NEVER DOUBT THE POWER OF HE WHO WAS ONCE KNOWN AS THE MAD MAGE OF CELENE!"

The mouth opened to a ridiculous size, revealing a large chest beyond. After a moment of debate, Mongo gingerly reached one arm in, and hauled the chest out quickly. He set it down on the dungeon floor, and Peldor checked it over. "Nothing", he reported. "No traps, not even a lock!" Mongo opened the iron chest up, anxious to see what it was that had been worth the life of a companion.

Inside were a number of treasures. First, the dwarf moved aside five platinum ingots, each one fairly heavy. Then he found a black pouch with some diamonds inside, and handed it to Ged, so that Peldor couldn't get into the gems. There was also a disassembled suit of leather armor, a medium-sized shield, a staff, and a necklace. The bottom of the chest was lined by a folded-up carpet. The thief checked for a false bottom but found none.

The adventurers rested for the night in a room above, in the castle. They could not stand to remain in the dungeon another moment. On the next

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morning, Rob cast a spell of preservation on the dead ranger's body, for obvious reasons. The party found that the keep had somehow fallen overnight, without any sound or vibration. Only a pile of rubble marked the place where the entrance to the tunnels had been. Mongo got a strange notion that somewhere, a mad wizard named Lunok laughed at them.

The party found that their horses were gone. For some reason, Mongo was not surprised. They began the long trek back to Aria.

NOTES: It never fails to amaze me. The party had, so far, routinely mowed through orcs, bandits, goblins, even undead...but a single type I demon came very close to spelling disaster for them. Oh well, such is the adventuring life. By the way, we use the rule that if any one blow does a great percentage of one's h.p., there is a chance for the victim to be stunned, or unconscious...a useful rule at times.

The dragon really cleaned Halbarad's clock there...by all rights, Belphanior should have died too. He was at -9 hp or so, but I ruled that someone could go help him. Halbarad was beyond hope at -17... Mongo came close too, having only 3 or 4 when all was said and done.

Having described things from the points of view of 2 out of 8 party members, I will revert to narrative mode for awhile. The upcoming fiasco merits it, as will be seen...

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 3rd level drow elf mage (N)
Belphanior, 2nd/2nd/2nd level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)
Ged, 3rd/2nd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)
Halbarad, 3rd level human ranger (NG) <DEAD>
Mongo Thunderhead, 3rd level dwarf fighter (CG)
Peldor, 4th level human thief (N)
Peyote, 2nd/2nd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)
Rob, 3rd level human priest (LG)

Back From the Grave; the Departure From Aria



The party has returned to the town of Aria, in the northern reaches of the Principality of Ulek. They bear much treasure, but also one casualty: the ranger Halbarad, dead from the jaws of a dragon. The adventurers hope to use their newfound wealth to bring him back to life...

Ged: Let us find a priest. A _powerful_ priest.

Alindyar: Aye. Halbarad would have done no less for us, were the situations reversed.

Mongo: Damn straight! A priest!

Belphanior: Yeah...

Rob: Where are we going to find a priest that mighty in a town this small?

Peyote: Alas. Rude deal, man.

Peldor: Have no fear. _I_ will find the man for the job! (departs)

Mongo: Now where in the hell is HE off too?

Peyote: If he finds a priest who can do this, then I'm a red dragon!

Belphanior: Hmm. Neat idea...

The party wandered around for a while, eventually finding the inn where they stayed recently. They bought several adjacent rooms there for a period of a week (pay in advance? No problem...). Within an hour Peldor rejoined them.

Peldor: I have found us a priest.

Ged: No! Really? Wonders never cease!

Mongo: Where is it? The priest, I mean?

Alindyar: What manner of priest might one such as _you_ find, Peldor?

Belphanior: Yeah! Who is he?

Peldor: No, no. "It" is a she. Dianna, that is, high priestess at the temple of Pholtus, a couple of blocks down the street. The fair lady informs me that she will perform the required casting, provided the subject is of good virtue, and pure of heart. In this case, we should have nothing to worry about. Halbarad was about as "good" as they come.

Ged: Well, I don't believe it! You did something useful...

Peldor: Of course I did. Let it not be said in the legends that Peldor was

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unkind to his companions!

Ged: Hmph. Boccob is watching you, rogue.

Alindyar: Truly Boccob must smile upon even one so base as he.

Mongo: Okay then! Let's go and get this done!

Mongo, Peyote, Ged, and Peldor carried the body for a while, until they get to the temple. The others remained in the tavern, guarding the treasures garnered from the dungeons of Lunok Castle.

Peldor: There! See? The most venerated temple of Pholtus, he of the Blinding Light!

Ged: Indeed. (they go inside)

woman: (obviously a priestess) Welcome. What do you...oh, it is you again! Are these your friends?

Peldor: Yes, you could say that. Gentlemen, this is Dianna, the high priestess of the sacred order of Pholtus. My lady, these are (gesturing) Ged, Peyote, and Mongo.

Dianna: (looking at covered body of Halbarad) This must be the one you spoke of.

Peldor: (pulls off the tarp covering the corpse) Yes, this is the ranger. Got bitten by a dragon a couple days back. He's pretty torn up about it.

Dianna: Err...yes, I see. Bring him to the holy shrine back here (walking away) and place him upon this altar.

Belphanior: Altar?

Ged: Altar?

Mongo: (to DM) I watch her carefully. One false move, and...

DM: Okay, okay. It's a shrine, not an altar. Geez.

Dianna: (returns with many herbs, paints, etcetera) These are the things we will need. (begins placing different things in different places near and on the body)

Ged: Uh...what ARE you going to do with him?

Dianna: I shall cast a spell to raise the dead. Him, in fact. By the way, have you sufficient funds to donate to the temple for this service?

Mongo: Oh yeah. (dumps out a bag of gold and platinum coins) I take it this will be enough?

Dianna: Oh, definitely. (begins chanting and waving her hands)

Ged: Wow.

Peyote: Watch and learn, dude. This is a master at work.

Mongo: D'you think she can really do it?

Ged: Absolutely.

Peldor: Of course she can. I wouldn't have found her for us if she couldn't!

Dianna: (spellcasting in high gear now)

Halbarad: (twitches)

Dianna: (still gesturing) His soul is returning to us...

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Mongo: It is?

Ged: I'll have to learn how to do this someday.

Peldor: Me too.

Halbarad: (body convulses, and is then prone)

Peyote: Far out. What happened?

Dianna: Your companion has returned. Incidentally, I got rid of his lycan
thropy while I was at it. No extra charge.

Halbarad: (opens eyes) I am _so_ tired...

Mongo: (leans over the prone ranger) Hey buddy? Is that you?

Halbarad: Yes. Yes, it is. Who else would it be? Please get your smelly
beard out of my face.

Mongo: Well I'll be damned!

Ged: Hopefully not.

Dianna: Whew. If you'll excuse me, I am somewhat weary from this
incantation. Please present the money to the alcolytes.

Mongo: Sure. Whatever you want, babe. (hefts the heavy sack and carries it
over to two alcolytes in the doorway. Between them, they drag the
treasure out of the room and disappear.)

Peldor: (to Dianna) Any chance of a date tonight? A woman like you, and a
guy like me...well, the possibilities are endless!

Dianna: No thanks, I'm busy tonight. Maybe some other time.

Ged: Heh heh.

Mongo: Thanks again, Dianna!

The four adventurers helped Halbarad out of the temple, as he was
still weak. They arrived back at the inn, and there was much celebration as
the party members welcomed back their companion.

Peldor: See there? I am a kind soul after all.

Ged: Without a doubt.

Mongo: Maybe I'll believe that. Someday.

Peldor: (looking wounded)

Belphanior: So, what's it like being DEAD??

Halbarad: Strange, but I'd rather not talk about it.

Alindyar: No matter. Shall we divide up yonder treasure?

Peldor: Yea! The treasure!

Ged: Well then, I shall detect for magic. (does so)

THE LOOT (magical items only; much of the cash went to Dianna):

bastard sword + - Peyote

stone horse - Ged

potion of feather falling - Ged

ring of regeneration - Mongo

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leather armor +3 - Halbarad
carven staff - Belphanior
medium shield +1 - Ged
black pouch (accessibility)- Peldor
necklace of prayer beads - Rob
carpet of flying - Alindyar

After splitting the monetary treasure equally, many of the party members sought out a mage to identify their items, providing the above details. (Had they thought about it, they might have sought to have their other items analyzed as well, since they still had a considerable amount of cash left at this point -DM). Also of note was a trade between Mongo and Halbarad. The dwarf gave up his axe, the magical one (he had decided he liked the heavy warhammer better anyway), in trade for the ranger's ring of protection. Halbarad had been wanting to upgrade from the tiny hand axe he had been using, and took a liking to the larger battle axe almost immediately.

The group spent the next few weeks in training, practicing their various skills by day, and living it up by night. The town of Aria celebrated its release from the specter of grim Castle Lunok, and indeed, no more strange monsters came in the night and carried off the townspeople. The party members received training as appropriate. Wisely, they did not question why it was that the town had masters who could train them, yet had done nothing to explore the haunted castle in all these years. The will of the gods was evident here.

After all this passed, they departed the town, and were seen off by many of its inhabitants. They wished the party good luck, and thus ended the adventurers' time in Aria.

THE PARTY (on the road again...) :

Alindyar, 4th level drow elf mage (N)
Belphanior, 3rd/3rd/3rd level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)
Ged, 4th/3rd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)
Halbarad, 4th level human ranger (NG)
Mongo Thunderhead, 4th level dwarf fighter (CG)
Peldor, 5th level human thief (N)
Peyote, 3rd/3rd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)
Rob, 5th level human priest (LG)

They traveled to the east, moving slightly southward at the same time. Peldor had seen fit to buy a map of the area back in Aria... this turned out to be a good move on his part, as the party could see what lands they journeyed in. At the moment, they were in the northeastern part of the Principal-

Thomas Miller

ity of Ulek, and journeying in the general direction of the Pomarj. This land was inhabited by hostile humanoids and bandits, but for some reason the party did not mind the idea of such encounters. They traveled through a hilly region for half a day, then found grassy plains as they went further eastward. Two days later, they arrived at the medium-sized city of Drek, at the fringes of the Pomarj region.

Ged: Drek? What sort of name is that for a city?

Belphanior: Not a bad one, considering what kind of city it is.

Mongo: Let's find a bar! I'm thirsty!

The group made their way to a raunchy-looking tavern near the gate to the city. A sign over the swinging double doors named the place as the Rogues' Den. The sounds of conversation and loud, raucous singing come from within.

Peldor: (swatting open the small double doors as he enters) The Rogues' Den! This is just the kind of place I've been looking for.

Ged: Undoubtedly it is. (he, and the others, enter)

Mongo: (accosts a scantily-clad waitress) Hey, we need a table.

waitress: No problem. (she finds a large table and quickly wipes it clean with a dirty rag) There ya go!

Mongo: Thanks babe. (the party takes seats at the thick oaken table)

waitress: What'll it be, boys?

Mongo: Beer! Your finest beer! Bring a lot!

waitress: You want a pitcher, pal?

Mongo: Hell no! Bring a KEG!

Peyote: Right on dude!

Peldor: A keg. Yeah...

Belphanior: I want wine. A carafe of expensive wine.

Alindyar: I'll have wine as well.

Ged: Wine. Boccob will keep me from overindulging, I am sure.

Halbarad: I'll share in the ale.

waitress: How 'bout you, babe?

Rob: Me? Oh...I'll have wine too, I guess.

Peldor: Heh. Get the priest drunk, then everything else goes to hell in a handbasket.

Belphanior: (to DM) I look for pockets to pick.

DM: You hear shouts, and cheers, from one table nearby.

Mongo: Hey, what's going on over there?

drunken person: It's 'e arm-wrestlin' contest! Urp!

Mongo: Hey! I want to play! Can I play?

Belphanior: Yeah! What an idea!

Mongo: (making his way over to the table. A large brute has just broken the

The Adventurers

arm of some wretch. A small, wiry man with slicked-back hair looks around with beady eyes.)

wretch: (cradling broken arm) aaaa...

Mongo: (to himself) I can beat this chump!

"Slick": Any other challengers out there? Ten-to-one odds for a match with Snod here!

bystander: (trembles)

Mongo: (looking around) Okay! You're on!

Belphanior: (comes to watch, along with Peldor and Ged)

Belphanior: (to DM) I position myself behind Slick there.

Mongo: (seating himself at the table)

Snod: Ha. Stumpy! Come to get arm smashed?

Mongo: Nope. Have you?

Snod: Ha.

Mongo: What are the rules here?

Slick: No rules. Wrestle until someone's arm hits the table.

Snod: Hrg. Won't take long.

Mongo: Damn right it won't. Let's get it on!

Peldor: I order another round of drinks for everyone.

Belphanior: (to Slick) I want to put a hundred gold on my buddy there. You good for it?

Slick: No problem man. (takes the small sack of gold from the elf with a grin) Ten to one! Heh.

The contest of strength began. The combatants pitted their brawn against one another, neither giving even an inch easily. After a span of perhaps fifteen seconds, Mongo gained an advantage, which turned into a lead. Just as soon, he lost the precious inches as the burly human struggled and drove his arm back.

Ged: This is boring. I liven it up. (to DM) I cast a command spell on the guy Mongo is fighting, trying to be subtle and say the word only to _him_. I tell him, "Lose".

DM: Okay...he gets a glazed look in his eyes, and his arm drops suddenly to the table.

Slick: Hey! What gives? What in the hell is going on here?

Belphanior: I'll take my _thousand_ in gold now, please.

Slick: No. I don't think so. (a number of evil-looking rogues have surrounded the table and some of the obvious party members near it) I think that _you_ will be giving _me_ some more of your money now. Heh heh.

Mongo: Dammit!

Barkeep: Yeah. And then you troublemakers can get out of my bar. After you pay us all. We don't need your kind in here.

Thomas Miller

Slick: Say, boy, that's some nice shiny armor you've got there.

Mongo: Eat shit and die. You want it, you come take it from me. IF you can.

Snod: (rises) Yup.

Ged: Uh...

Belphanior: You've gone and done it now, priest.

someone: Fight! Fight!

Some of the patrons of the bar drew weapons, or else picked up chairs or bottles. Others left in a hurry. Peyote, Halbarad, Rob, and Alindyar were still relatively unnoticed at their nearby table. Ged looked around and wondered if they would get out of this mess with their skins intact, and hoped Boccob would forgive him.

NOTES: I said Belgar would turn up...I guess I lied. He's somewhere nearby, I'm sure, and will pop up sooner or later. Be warned: the people in the bar above are essentially evil, if not altogether chaotic. Blood will be spilled by the otherwise-kindly party in episode XIII.

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 4th level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 3rd/3rd/4th level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)

Ged, 4th/3rd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 4th level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 4th level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 5th level human thief (N)

Peyote, 3rd/3rd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 5th level human priest (LG)

Utter and Complete Chaos



There is a barfight in progress...

Alindyar: (nowhere near the main battle) I cast a wall of fog in the vicinity of the table that Mongo is at.

DM: The table and those nearby are suddenly enveloped in thick, rolling fog. Cries of surprise and confusion follow.

Slick: What the hell?!

Belphanior: (to DM) Am I still in a position to backstab Slick?

DM: No, he's to your side.

Peldor: I was somewhere behind him, remember? I'll get him. (to DM) I stab him in the back.

Slick: Agh! (dies)

Peldor: I grab his moneypouches, and then ready my sword, looking for opponents.

Belphanior: I backstab somebody. (slays a nearby thug)

Snod: (the large human swings a fist at Mongo, but it rebounds off of his plate mail) Ouch!

Mongo: Hey! (punches Snod, bloodying his nose and sending him reeling back over a chair, breaking it) I look around. Who dares to face me?

thug: (his club bounces off of the dwarf's plate mail) Damn!

Mongo: No fair! (pulls out his hammer) I bet mine is bigger than yours!

Ged: (looking around, swings his morningstar at a thug who is approaching him with a broken bottle) A 20! Boccob!!

thug: (brained; grey matter sprays everywhere)

Ged: Hah! Glory to Boccob!

Rob: (pretty much out of the center of the fray thus far) Are there any innocents that I can usher to safety?

DM: Nope. But there is a woman with a table leg coming your way.

Rob: Oh. (to woman) Miss, please come with me and I shall see you out of this madhouse safely.

dame: (bashes the priest with her table leg) Shut up, pig!

Rob: (staggers back)

Peyote: (to DM) I slip on my ring and strike some random hostile thug. A subdual blow, not a killing blow. I'm a peaceful dude at heart.

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(rolls, hits, knocks a nearby thug out, then becomes visible again)

Halbarad: Good idea. (exchanges swordplay with a ruffian for a moment, succeeding in disarming the man) Begone from this place or you shall no doubt meet a violent end!

ruffian: (flees the bar)

Peldor: (to DM) I try to head towards the bar/bartender to get cash from his sales. I will attack him if necessary.

DM: Okay. He has a club and means to use it.

Peldor: (knocks the club aside and smacks the barkeep on the head with the flat of his blade) Peldor is merciful today! Now where does he keep that money?

thug: (misses Belphanior)

Belphanior: (slays another thug, chuckles) Heh heh. This is fun.

thug: (nicks Belphanior with a shortsword)

Mongo: (slams a thug in the ribs with his hammer, decking him)

Snod: (stands up, bleeding profusely from the nose and mouth) Hey dwarf! You and me not finished yet!

Mongo: Oh yeah! (smashes the big human in the groin with the war hammer) Sorry about that!

Snod: Ugh. (falls to the ground in extreme pain)

Mongo: Hah! Gods, I LOVE this hammer!

thug: (injures Ged with a sword blow) Die elf!

Ged: (nicks the thug with his morningstar) Never, Boccob willing!

thug: (his sword is deflected by Mongo's plate mail) Damn!

Halbarad: (still near the party's original table, he is defending Alindyar so the drow can cast spells freely) Why will these fools not cease their attack?

Alindyar: This is getting out of control. (casts a web at an entire side of the bar, trapping at least a dozen more thugs)

Peyote: Good move dude. Uh-oh. (looking out one window) The city guards are coming! (knocks out another thug with a sword blow)

Belphanior: (to DM) I head for the front door area.

Rob: (recovers from his earlier blow, attacks the wild woman who he has been fighting with) In the name of Trithereon, woman, let some measure of justice be done! (hits the woman with his flail, like the ranger and druid going for subdual damage only)

dame: (knocked out as she slams against one wall)

Peldor: (behind the bar, scooping the bartender's money into his magical pouch) Heh. (to DM) I grab a bottle of Jagermeister while I'm back here. And check the barkeep's pockets for tips.

Ged: (heading toward Peldor, purely by chance)

thug: (misses Ged, who is parrying)

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thug: (hits Mongo weakly)

thug: (hits Mongo, denting his armor a bit)

Mongo: Fuck! Fuck! Come back here and help me, guys!

Peyote: (to DM) Is anybody outside yet?

DM: The militia is here, about 20 people, heavily armed.

Peyote: I go outside and "explain" how we were attacked.

DM: Okay. They push you aside roughly and head for the doorway into the bar.

Peyote: Fine. (casts a dust devil, placing the magical creation square in the doorway) Chew on that for awhile.

militiamen: (halt at the sight of a 5' tall tornado of dust in front of them.

Some of them try to run through it, but are repelled, choking and wheezing)

Peyote: After casting the spell, I succinctly go around to the stables and gather the horses for the party.

DM: Okay, no problem. But it will take a few minutes.

Belphanior: (heading for door, now blocked) Yikes! How about a window then? Yeah! (to DM) I tackle the nearest thug and leap with him through the window!

DM: Okay. The thug is stunned as you both crash through the window and into the street. You take 4 hp from broken glass.

Belphanior: So? I climb to the roof and survey the situation. (makes the roll easily)

DM: Okay. It'll take you a minute to reach the roof.

Alindyar: What now?

Halbarad: (locking his axe with someone's sword) I have no idea where they went.

Rob: The militia may be dumb, but they're not THAT dumb. They'll get in here any minute.

Peldor: (finds a door marked "Barkeep Only") Hey guys! Here's the way out!

The adventurers remaining in the bar ran for the back door that the thief had found. Through it, there was a storage room, and a thick iron door with a bar in place. Peldor tossed the bar aside and opened it, revealing a dark alley lit only by the glow of the moonlight above. They all broke for the alley; Peldor started a bonfire in the storeroom, shattering a number of liquor bottles and then lighting a torch. As the party entered the alley, the thief hurled his torch into the chamber, and flames filled the room instantly.

Ged: Great! Wonderful! Now we can just add arson to our long list of crimes here...fraud, murder, interfering with the city guard, breaking and entering...

Alindyar: This all started because of you, remember?

Thomas Miller

Peldor: Don't forget grand theft.

Mongo: Shut up, all of you! Geez! Which way now?

DM: One end of the alleyway dead-ends, the other leads into the main street.

Rob: Great! We run for it then.

DM: Unfortunately, the guards have just arrived at the open end of the alley.
They see you and start shouting loudly.

Ged: Shit!

Peldor: Such language, for a priest! Are there any other doors in the alley way?

DM: Several.

Ged: We make for the nearest one then.

DM: The first one is locked, as is the second.

Peldor: I could pick them...

DM: No time, the guards are running toward you. But the third door is unlocked.

Mongo: We hurl the door open and run inside.

Peldor: Throw the bolt! There is a bolt, isn't there?

DM: Yep. The door is secure, for now. You hear shouts of anger and frustration from the alley.

Mongo: Where are we, anyway?

DM: As you crowd into the building, you see naked women wandering the hallway. Some of them lead half-dressed men by the hands, some by leashes around their necks...

Ged: Gasp!

DM: One of the women sees you and screams.

whore: Eeeeeeeek!

DM: Suddenly, naked women are running around everywhere, shrieking and shouting at you.

Ged: Let's get out of this house of sin! Back to the streets, you painted Jezebels! Repent your vile ways! There is hope yet!

whores: Aaaaa!

Ged: I get out some holy water and sprinkle it at any of the prostitutes who happen by.

DM: The women mostly stay out of your way. Who wouldn't?

Peldor: (grabbing at various whores as they mill about) Hey babe!
Whoops! Sorry about that! Maybe some other time! Ha ha!

The party headed down the main hallway, toward where they guessed the brothel to exit onto a street. They knew there was no time to waste, for the guardsmen would not take long to figure out where they had gone. Suddenly, a front door and desk (with a barred window to the outside door) were within sight. A huge blob of a man stepped into the hallway, blocking the way to the street.

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Big Man: What the hell is going on here? No one gets away with free booty in MY place! (lumpers toward the adventurers)

Mongo: Fuck! We don't have time for this. I knock him out of the way. (rolls, getting one of the most significant 20s of his career. Mongo collides with the bouncer/owner, pushing him through one of the thin walls) Yeah!

Ged: There's the front door...

The group burst through the front door of the whorehouse and into the street. Peyote was close by, having rounded up all of the party's mounts.

Peyote: There you are! It's about time. I was beginning to wonder if you guys were coming out at all. Here's the horses!

Ged: Thanks. (leaps onto his horse) Let's get the hell out of here before things get worse.

Halbarad: Indeed. This town will never welcome us again.

Alindyar: Fine by me.

Mongo: Naw, this is FUN! (at a poke from Halbarad, he mounts up too)

Belphanior: (still on the roof, surveying the destruction with a look of pleasure. The bar is engulfed in flames by this time, and all the guardsmen mill about around the front entrance. Various thugs and city guards are fighting in the alley the party ran through, and a number of naked women are running from the brothel, screaming. Some of the guards, having nothing better to do, begin to arrest them.)

DM: Uh...Belphanior, the roof is getting hot.

Belphanior: Okay. I cast a flame sphere on the ground and manipulate it to move around. The idea is to ignite any of the guards who are headed for the party.

DM: Okay...

Mongo: Hey look! A fireball! It's rolling!

Alindyar: There's the elf, on the roof. That sphere is his doing, undoubtedly. nearby guard: (set ablaze by the rolling, flaming sphere) Aaaagh!

Peldor: Serves him right.

Rob: Fireball? Did someone say fireball?

other guard: Die, outsiders!

Mongo: (smacks the guard with his hammer, sending him reeling to one side) Out of the way!

Ged: (magic missiles two onrushing guards) Dolts!

other guard: (overrun by Belphanior's ball of flame) Aaaaagh!

Halbarad: Let's ride!

Belphanior: I leap from the roof to the ground. How far is it anyway?

DM: About ten feet...you take 2 hp of damage from the fall.

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Belphanior: Bah! I leap astride my horse as the party starts to go.

Alindyar: (uses his wand to magic missile another guard. Most of them are dead or occupied now)

Halbarad: Spur your mounts! Let's get the hell out of Dodge!

The group rode on out of Drek. Pursuit by the city guards was to no avail, as the party was too powerful for the few who were left. The adventurers decided to head west, back into Ulek. They had had quite enough of the Pomarj for one lifetime.

NOTES: The entire barfight scene was theoretically caused by Ged's spell...though all the thugs were going to attack the party anyway (I knew that; they didn't). This was one of our more entertaining gaming sessions, needless to say.

This will be the last posting until after Christmas. Ironically enough, in the game world, it was near the middle of the 12th month and winter was heavily set in. The party got road dust for their presents, though :) Merry Christmas, and part XIV will appear sometime after the new year!

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 4th level drow elf mage (N)

Belphanior, 3rd/3rd/4th level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)

Ged, 4th/3rd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)

Halbarad, 4th level human ranger (NG)

Mongo Thunderhead, 4th level dwarf fighter (CG)

Peldor, 5th level human thief (N)

Peyote, 3rd/3rd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)

Rob, 5th level human priest (LG)

The Orc Keep



When last we saw the party, they had fled from the hostile town of Drek, near the Pomarj-Ulek border. Spurring their mounts to great speeds, they made haste, and soon the cursed place was long behind.

Ged: Whew! What a fiasco!

Mongo: Yeah. It sure was.

Peldor: It wasn't THAT bad. I got this fine bottle of liquor out of the deal. (doesn't bother to mention the barkeep's stash of money which he appropriated) Let's go back sometime.

Peyote: Not a chance, man. Bad, bad karma.

Halbarad: Best to be gone and _stay_ gone.

Alindyar: Verily.

Rob: Do you think that we saved any of the...err...ladies of the night back there? Saved them from their worldly sins, I mean?

Ged: Doubtful. Their kind seldom, if ever, changes. But they will always remember the day that we came to town, that's for sure.

Belphanior: Hell, the death toll inflicted by me alone was pretty high. I for one would just _love_ to go back and get the rest of them...

Ged: Boccob help us all. (starts to study his spellbook and his magical scroll, picked up quite some time ago but not yet read)

And so the group rode on for the whole day. Ged was now at a sufficient level to copy the scroll's spell into his spellbook, and spent some time during the day doing so. The spell he had added to his book was one to open sealed portals and other such things, the knock spell. Surely it would come in handy at some point in the future.

Near dusk, the party spotted a keep in the distance, about one quarter of a mile off of the old road. They set up a camp in the grass, away from the road, and Halbarad and Peyote went to scout out the fort. It couldn't hurt, since the group was still well within the Pomarj.

DM: As you get closer to the place, you see that it is made up of large wooden logs, jutting about 15' into the air. Their ends are sharpened to points. The keep is about a hundred and fifty feet on each side.

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Halbarad: Where is the main gate or entrance or whatever?

DM: On the east side of the place. It is a separate group of logs, probably hinged so it will open smoothly.

Peyote: What about guards? Can we see what sort of dudes are in control of the keep?

DM: There are a few guards manning the walls here and there. They are medium in height, you would guess, and have short tusks and pig-like faces...

Halbarad: Orcs! I knew there was something about this place!

Peyote: What should we do? Do we try to get in?

DM: You hear screams from inside the keep...

Halbarad: I know what I want to do, but let us go ask the rest for their opinions. (the pair make their way back to the camp)

Hushed discussion ensued...

Mongo: Well if they have prisoners, and it sounds like they DO, then we really ought to help out.

Ged: Yep. That's what Boccob would want.

Belphanior: Rubbish. I say we attack them, but because we want to, not for someone else's sake.

Peldor: Yeah. They might have treasure in there, too.

Halbarad: It was a fairly good-sized place. We would need much magical power to help the attack.

Ged: Which we can provide in sizable amounts, I am sure. Their prisoners must be freed.

Peyote: Aye. An eye for an eye.

Rob: What was that?

Peyote: Nothing, forget it.

Alindyar: Well, we certainly have nothing better to do right at this time...and they are orcs...

Mongo: Let's do it. Free the prisoners, before they wind up as dinner, and get rid of a few orcs and a keep. Who's gonna notice?

Halbarad: A vote, then.

Alindyar: AYE

Belphanior: AYE

Ged: AYE

Halbarad: AYE

Mongo: AYE

Peldor: (abstain)

Peyote: AYE

Rob: NAY

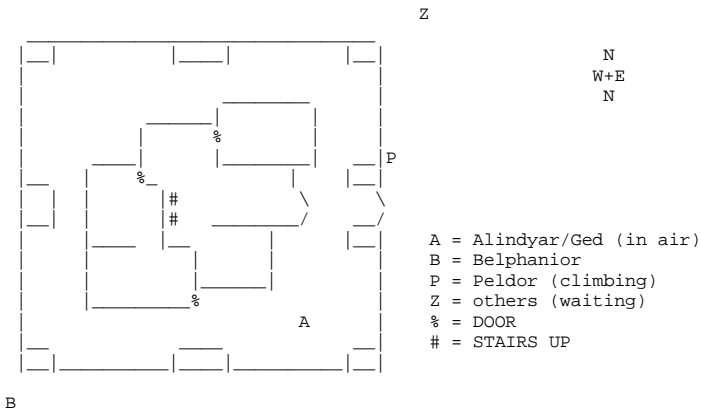
The Adventurers

Alindyar: 'Tis settled then. What plan of attack shall we use?

Halbarad: (drawing in the dirt now) Well, look here...

A plan was then drawn up, and implementation began. Peldor was to borrow Peyote's ring of invisibility (the half-elf didn't much care for this idea, so it was decided to let him hold on to the thief's pouch of accessibility to insure that he wouldn't just leave) and climb the wall, and then find a way to open the gate. This would be facilitated by a flame sphere, courtesy of the elf Belphanior, made to roll along the western rampart. This magical distraction would be timed to occur about a minute after Peldor got over the wall. Meanwhile, Alindyar and Ged were to hover over the keep on the drow's flying carpet, providing air support as appropriate for those on the ground. To illustrate:

ORCISH KEEP:



Peldor: (invisible, climbing the wall near the gate without any problem) I'm at the top now...what do I see?

DM: You're right next to a watch tower. A sleepy orc stands on the ledge very close to you, looking out into the darkness.

Peldor: Not for long. I sneak up and backstab him, catching the body so it doesn't hit the walkway.

DM: (checking, rolling) Okay, he's dead. Now what?

Peldor: Well, my minute's running out. I find the ladder going down from the ledge, and climb down to this side of the gate. Then I start looking for a means of opening the gate. Oh, yeah, before all that I slip the ring off, then on again, so I can be invisible for a bit longer.

DM: Okay. As you are climbing down the ladder, a blazing ball of fire appears on the far side of the keep. It starts to roll along the ledge, above the ground. Shouts ensue, and some orcs start running from here toward the commotion.

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Peldor: Hmm. Time to hustle.

Belphanior: (not satisfied with staying on the outside, he had climbed up the outer wall before casting his spell. This gave him much more accurate control over its direction.) I get over the wall and move east along it, looking for orcs to backstab or else push off the ledge. I send the flaming sphere rolling along to the north and then cease to worry about it.

Alindyar: (about 50' up, on the carpet with Ged) The plan flows smoothly thus far. (casts a magic missile from his wand at an orc below, knocking it over)

Ged: (deciding which spell to use)

Peldor: (has found the thick wooden beam barring the locked and double outer doors of the keep) I unlock the doors and then lift the bar up.

orc guard: Hey! What is you doing there? (rushes to attack)

Peldor: (door is unlocked; ceases trying to lift the bar and draws his sword again) Come on, little orc.

orc: (swings wildly at the thief, misses) Dammit, hold still, ya crapper!

Peldor: (slices the orc, slaying it) Now where was I? Oh, the bar.
(proceeds to lift the heavy beam up - the thief is quite strong - and pushes it out of the brackets; it lands on the dirt-covered ground)
Hah! I push the doors open.

DM: Okay, but another pair of orcs has spotted the doors opening and they are rushing toward you.

Peldor: Oh, yeah, I'm still invisible. I step out of the way, and after they run by, I backstab one of them.

Halbarad: (he and the other three have rushed up to the northwest corner of the keep since the commotion started) There! The gate is open!

The thief did it!

Mongo: Let's go kick some ass! (they run for the open gates)

Peyote: (draws his sword)

Rob: I still don't think this is a good idea...

Meanwhile, Belphanior's fireball had stopped when it hit the north-western guardtower, crashing into the wooden tower and setting it ablaze. The guards all along the western wall were gone, either flaming corpses on the ledge or broken bodies who jumped off to avoid being burned. As a side effect of the spell, the ledge had a number of small flaming spots, some of which were growing into large flaming spots very quickly. The elf, pleased with this result, was slinking along the southern wall, slaying every orcish guard he found. He was almost at the southeastern corner of the small fortress.

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And in the air...

Ged: (to Alindyar) Take us lower! I need to see what I'm aiming at down there.

Alindyar: By the looks of things, I would venture that the crazed elf has sufficiently illuminated the situation. Besides, we need to stay out of their sight range, in case of missile fire.

Ged: Bah! They have better things to worry about right now than who's in the air above their heads. Come on, fly us lower!

Alindyar: (resignedly lowers the carpet somewhat, to about 30' over the ground) Whatever.

Ged: (casts a sleep spell at some orcs, putting 6 to sleep) Yes!

Alindyar: Not bad.

And on the ground...

Mongo: (splattering an orc who is in his way) Sorry, chump.

Peyote: (dodges an orc's sword, dispatches the humanoid)

Peldor: (backstabs some orc, turns visible again) Hah. Nothing can stop Peldor when he is on the move.

Peyote: Hey, dude! Give me my ring back! (finds a lull in the melee to swap Peldor's pouch and his ring)

orc: (nicks Mongo's helmet)

Mongo: Ow! (smashes the orc with his hammer)

other orc: (hits Peyote for a minor wound)

Rob: (trying to get in on the action, but misses a rushing orc)

orc: (hits Rob, injuring him)

Rob: Maybe I should have used a spell instead...

orc: (misses Halbarad)

Halbarad: (slays the orc) Methinks we should try to get inside their buildings there, before they think to lock them...

Mongo: Good idea! (the party runs for the nearest door into one of the buildings in the complex, not coincidentally the double doors directly west of the main gates)

Peldor: Is it locked?

DM: No.

Peldor: Good. Then let one of the warriors go in first.

Mongo: Out of the way, puny thief. Fighting is best left to the fighters, after all. (Mongo, Halbarad, Peyote, Peldor, and Rob enter, in that order)

Beyond the doors were five orcs, arguing about what they ought to be doing right now. The fighters made mincemeat out of them in no time,

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and spotted two exits, a storage area to the south (which contained no orcs), and a stairway up. They chose the door to the north and east, and Mongo kicked it down. Beyond were the orc chief and two sub-chiefs...

chief: Hey yous bastards! What yer doin' in me room? Kill 'em!

Mongo: Heh. Fat chance.

Halbarad: (melees the chief) (in orcish) Speak! Where are the prisoners?
(hits the chief, wounding him)

chief: Go to hell! (misses the ranger)

sub-chief: (hits Mongo a glancing blow)

Peldor: (slashes other sub-chief) Who cares about prisoners? Ask them where their treasure is!

Rob: (using spiritual hammer, bashes Peldor's subchief, killing it) Justice is done!

Mongo: (smashes sub-chief) You won't be raiding any more wagons or towns after this! (smashes sub-chief again, slaying him)

Halbarad: (slays the chief) I guess we'll just find whatever prisoners there are on our own.

Peldor: Hey, these guys don't have any treasure. Well, almost no treasure. (pockets some coins) Where's the main stash?

Mongo: We'll find it. And give me that gold, I saw you.

Rob: Where now? (they go through the northwest door, finding first one, then another barracks. Both of the large rooms are empty, having emptied their troops into the fray outside)

Halbarad: That leaves the stairs, then. What's that noise?

Belphanior: (suddenly appears from the main room) Here I am! What's going on? Oh.

Mongo: To the stairs!

The six adventurers ascended the stairs. Just a moment before, Belphanior had finished clearing off the walkway up to the point where it met the main gate. He also torched a webful of orcs he found on the ground. There were a few orcs left, here and there; those who did not immediately flee were subject to the attacks of the two airborne magi.

Mongo: (at the top of the stairs) Uh-oh!

Halbarad: What is it? (beyond the stairs, on this second floor, are four ogres in their barracks. The monsters are now fully armed and armored.) Oh.

Ogre#1: Get them! (charges)

Halbarad: (slashes ogre#1, wounding it)

Peyote: (stabs ogre#2 with his bastard sword, dealing it a mortal wound)
Yeah. Good sword, man.

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Ogre#1: (nicks Halbarad with its blade)
Ogre#2: (hits Peyote, injuring him)
Ogre#3: (hits Rob, fortunately not too hard)
Ogre#4: (hits Mongo)
Mongo: Ouch! Shit! (smashes ogre#4's knee with his hammer)
Rob: (tries to hit ogre#3 with his morningstar, but misses)
Belphanior: (slashes ogre#1)
Peldor: I find some ogre's back. (sneaking about)
Mongo: (hammer crunches into ogre#4 again, dispatching it)

Halbarad: (chops ogre#1 with axe)
Peldor: (backstabs ogre#3, but misses...) Damn!
ogre#3: (swats Peldor, inflicting a serious wound) Har har!
Belphanior: (slashes ogre#1)
Ged: (magic missiles ogre#1, finishing it off) Boccob smiles this day!
Peldor: Bah.
ogre#3: (unwounded as yet, laughing at party) Heh heh.
Mongo: (misses ogre#4) Damn. Damn!

No one else was near enough to the ogre to attack it right now. Combat was suddenly punctuated by the arrival of two more, larger ogres from an adjacent room. These new combatants were also fully armored and bore huge pikes; their skin was a light shade of blue.

new ogre: What is this?
Halbarad: (attacks one of the new ogres, misses)
Belphanior: (slashes at same ogre, nicks it for a minor wound)
Peyote: (swings at other new ogre, misses) What's the deal here?
ogre#4: (hits Mongo) Har!
new ogre: (regards the situation, then abruptly breathes a cone of frosty cold all over Halbarad and Belphanior)
Halbarad: (goes down, covered with frost)
Belphanior: (likewise)
Rob: Aaa! They're not just ogres, they're...
Peyote: Ogre Magi!

THE PARTY:

Alindyar, 4th level drow elf mage (N)
Belphanior, 3rd/3rd/4th level high elf fighter/mage/thief (CN)
Ged, 4th/3rd level grey elf priest/mage (NG)
Halbarad, 4th level human ranger (NG)
Mongo Thunderhead, 4th level dwarf fighter (CG)
Peldor, 5th level human thief (N)
Peyote, 3rd/3rd level half-elf fighter/druid (N)
Rob, 5th level human priest (LG)

A Pair of Surprises; Rescue



The party was fighting some ogres inside of an orcish fortress, when the battle was joined by a pair of ogre magi. Belphanior and Halbarad were blasted by a cone of cold...the magi (Ged and Alindyar) are still outside. The six adventurers face a leftover ogre as well.

ogre: Har! That'll show 'em!

ogre mage#1: (grins) Indeed.

Halbarad: (stunned and frozen) Uhh...

Belphanior: (unconscious and frozen)

ogre mage#2: (goes invisible)

Mongo: Hey! Where'd he go?!

Peldor: The shit just hit the fan guys...

ogre: (hits Mongo, denting his armor) I take care of dis one.

Mongo: Ow! Shit, that hurt! (deals first one blow, then another to the ogre, wounding it badly) How's that, chump?

Peldor: (to DM) I slash at the place where the invisible ogre mage used to be...

DM: You hit...nothing. But the ogre hits YOU. Oh, let's see...a 20. Hmm. Not good. Not good at all.

Peldor: (dealt a gaping wound, he stumbles and falls) Ahh, the pain..

ogre mage#2: (now visible) So much for you, human.

Rob: (his spiritual hammer slams the ogre, finishing it off) Well, at least I did something useful today...

Peyote: You fucking bastards! (hacks at ogre mage#1, wounding it)

ogre mage#1: (now injured, casts sleep spell on the party)

Peyote: (makes his save) Dude?

Mongo: (makes his save) Hah!

Rob: (fails his save, falls asleep) Zzzz...

Mongo: What do we do now? They're smearing us, dammit!

Peyote: I don't know. Wait, I'll use my lightning wand! This is, after all, a desperate situation! (pulls out the wand and activates its powers, pointing it at the ogre magi)

ogre mage#1: Eh?

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ogre mage#2: What's this? Oh, no! NO!

Peyote, and other concerned parties as well, were surprised when the wand failed to produce the needed lighting bolt. Rather, the magical device sprayed forth a stream of butterflies (yes, butterflies!) at the ogre magi, blinding them.

Peyote: Awesome! Totally awesome!

ogre mage#1: What in the hells...? (swatting at the multicolored cloud of butterflies surrounding his head)

Mongo: HaHA! I'll be a son-of-a...Ha! Just when we need a lightning bolt, you give us BUGS! Oh, well, fuck it. (throws his magical hammer at one of the creatures)

ogre mage#1: (hit by the weapon, and knocked back into a wall, hard)

Then, a most astonishing thing happened. The hammer, after being used as a thrown weapon for the first time, exhibited a quite amazing and useful property: it returned to Mongo's hand after striking its target. Though the dwarven warrior was altogether unprepared for the hammer's return, he instinctively caught the heavy weapon, with an ease that should have taken years of practice to acquire...

Mongo: Wow! WOW! Didja see THAT?!? (dancing with glee) A dwarven hammer of throwing! Yes! YES!

Peyote: Geez. Chill out. It's just a hammer.

ogre mage#1: Urk. (slowly rising to his feet)

Mongo: (smacks the monster with his hammer) Ah, shaddup!

ogre mage#1: (dead now)

Mongo: It's not "just a hammer"! It's THE hammer! (suffused with happiness, he fails to notice the other ogre mage until it sends a cone of cold his way)

ogre mage#2: Take that, and shut up!

Mongo: (dodges somewhat, but is still blasted by the cold) Brrr!

Peyote: (within the scope of the magic as well, somewhat weakened by the cold) Desperate situation! Definitely a desperate situation! (aims wand at the remaining ogre mage)

ogre mage#2: (slowed down considerably by the power of the wand)

Peldor: (having regained his feet, he happens to be behind the thing now, and backstabs it)

ogre mage#2: (perishes)

Peldor: So much for _him_. Now what's this about a hammer?

Mongo: Weapons such as these (holds the hammer up) are spoken of in the dwarven legends, but no one ever finds any of 'em. Until now! And to think, I've had it all this time, and never used it. Damn!

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Peyote: Hey, is that Ged?

Ged: (entering the room, sees Peldor, Peyote, Belphanior, and Halbarad extremely wounded, and Rob asleep, and Mongo wounded but grinning)

Peldor: THERE you are! It's about time.

Ged: What?

Alindyar: (also enters) The orcs are all...eliminated, shall we say?

Ged: That's putting it mildly, drow.

Peldor: What took you two so long? We could have used some help!

Mongo: Bah! We did fine. And I feel great! My wounds aren't even bothering me at all.

Ged: I see that you people weren't idle, either. Ogre magi?

Peyote: Yep.

Ged: Too bad we missed it.

Peldor: Cowardly magi. Who needs 'em?

Much healing followed. No one was dead, though several of the party were unconscious. The pair of ogres and the pair of ogre magi had many treasures, including several small sacks of gold and/or platinum, a number of various-sized gems, several potions, and a fine knife. The first ogre mage was wearing bracers, while the second one had some kind of amulet on a thong around its neck. The party went through the door, into the chamber that the ogre magi came from. Beyond was a big room, obviously the lair of the two creatures. The place was lavishly furnished, as cushions were piled high upon silken couches and ornate wooden dressers, tables, and chairs were placed here and there. Tied to a post of one small bed was a young, attractive human female.

girl: Eeeeeek!

Mongo: What? What's YOUR problem?

Halbarad: Calm down. (grabs the girl's arms and holds her still)

girl: (not screaming anymore)

Halbarad: Who are you, and how did you come to be here?

girl: I...I am the princess Tasmela. I live in the Principality of Ulek...I am the daughter of Baron Trevor, in Havenhill.

Peldor: Baron?

princess: I was kidnapped about a week ago, when those disgusting beasts attacked my wagon. They killed all of my guards, and brought me here. What if they come back?

Peyote: No chance, sister. We got rid of them.

princess: Oh. Well that's nice. Could I possibly convince you gentlemen to escort me back to my homeland?

Peldor: Certainly, my dear lady.

Ged: Huh? Is he sick today? Why is he being so nice?

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Halbarad: We should be happy to do so, young lady. (to Peldor) Stay away from her, thief. She's too young for the likes of you.

The room naturally lent itself to a thorough examination by the party. They found a number of jewelry items and other neat things among the drawers and piles of clothes in the chamber. Ged cast a detect magic spell, and the party spread the collected loot out on the floor. The following items were discerned as magical and then divided among the adventurers:

potion (extra-healing)	- Rob
potion (extra-healing)	- Alindyar
potion (flying)	- Alindyar
knife +	- Peldor
bracers	- Belphanior
chime	- Mongo
scroll (mage spells)	- Ged & Alindyar
blue gem	- Halbarad
helm	- Peyote

Soon after, they departed the fortress, leaving it empty and in flames. They rode south and west for three days, eventually reaching the hilly terrain that marked the outskirts of the city of Havenhill, within the Principality of Ulek. The Princess Tasmela led the party to her father's manor within the city. As it turned out, the good Baron was a displaced human noble who happened to live happily in the (almost exclusively elven) Ulek area. The motley crew slowly approached the house...

guard: Oh my stars! It's you!

Tasmela: Obviously. Where is Daddy?

guard: Err...he's in the house. He's been going crazy looking for you, you know. Who are these ruffians?

Peldor: I take offense at that. I am no ruffian!

Ged: Quiet, fool. For you, that's a compliment.

Tasmela: Take us to him!

other guard: (appearing) I'll take them. (the party is led into a torchlit hall way, then into a room illuminated by candles; night has fallen.)

Man in robes: (stands up) Tasmela! Gods above! (rushes forth and hugs the girl fiercely)

Rob: Aww...

Tasmela: Daddy! There were monsters and ogres and orcs and kidnap and a nasty fort and then these nice guys came and rescued me and now I'm home and I'm so happy and...

Alindyar: Verily, the damsel doth bubble over with joy.

Mongo: (wondering where he can practice with his hammer)

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Peldor: (wondering about the possibility of reward money)

Rob: (taken in by the scene)

Peyote: (bored silly)

Man: Greetings, my new friends. (shakes the adventurers' hands one at a time) I am Trevor, and I owe you a great debt. Anything I can do for you, just name it.

Peldor: Anything?

Ged: Boccob will not tolerate such wanton greed, rogue.

Peldor: Sure he will. Just watch me. Heh heh.

Halbarad: Well, we certainly do not mean to impose, but we are in need of a place to stay for a while.

Mongo: And training grounds!

Belphanior: And food!

Rob: And a temple.

Alindyar: A nice quiet room would be nice.

Ged: Second that. Is there a temple of Boccob in this city?

Trevor: Enough. All of your needs can be met in Havenhill, I am sure. Stay here for a few weeks, if you need to. You will be my welcome guests!

Peldor: All right!

Halbarad: (to Peldor) I had better not catch you stealing anything from the good baron here.

Peldor: No problem. I'll find someone else to rob.

Halbarad: Whatever. Just remember what I said. You don't want me to catch you. (wanders away)

Peldor: (muttering) You couldn't catch me on your best day, ranger. That's the problem here - no one appreciates the thieves anymore. Well, I'll show them. I'll show them all. Soon...

And so, the party spent several months in Havenhill. They really hadn't intended to, but winter's cold was still upon the land, and the free room and board didn't hurt either. By day, the adventurers studied, practiced, or whatever. There was a retired elven mage in the city, who assisted some of the group in their efforts.

Alindyar studied for almost five weeks, learning several spells as well as copying some from the scroll that he and Ged got. The grey elf also learned some new incantations; from the scroll he took the spells charm person and enfeeblement (the drow got spider climb and forget). The two wizards actually helped each other out for this time, working together to decipher the scroll's contents and recopy them into their spellbooks.

Belphanior practiced for quite some time in the warriors' halls, seeking to hone his sword technique further. It was not yet time for the elf to learn new spells as of yet. He did spend a few days with Peldor, practicing

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drills and use of equipment. The human, by contrast, was at the thieves' guildhall for many long days, working hard on his subversive skills. Belphanior also attempted to figure out what his magical ring was used for, with limited success.

Halbarad found a temple of Elhonna, and donated a hefty sum to the clergy there. The ranger split his time between this place and the fighting grounds. He had his blue gem identified by the mage, and learned that it was a device to enable him to see altered, invisible, and concealed things as they really were.

Mongo practiced for weeks on the combat fields. He spent at least half of his time perfecting his skill with the hammer, not that there was much of a need. He also learned from the retired mage that his magical ring was of a beneficial, healing nature, regenerating wounds over a period of time; also his new chime was a magical device used for the opening of doors. The mage in turn learned that a dwarf does not part easily with large sums of gold.

Peyote trained in both weapon use and druidic magic, gaining a bit more power in both of his areas of expertise. He learned that his new helm was oriented towards the seas and oceans, in some way or ways yet to be discovered.

Rob the priest secluded himself in the temple of Trithereon, his patron deity, for almost all of the party's time in Havenhill. He was no doubt learning more of the holy magicks available to him.

NOTES: I kept hoping that Mongo would figure out that he needed to use the dwarven word the party found when they found the hammer, but he never did. So, I let the hammer function as it should when thrown (after all, he IS a dwarven warrior). Also, Peyote wasn't too happy when he found out that he had a wand of wonder, not a wand of lightning, but he got used to it pretty quickly.

I was looking through my old notes and found a number of notes that we used in our gaming sessions. Most of these were sent from various players to me, the DM, but a few were from one player to another. See if you can guess who said them (even I don't know some of them); I present these for your entertainment:

"I search them for anything suspicious"

"I'm watching Peldor"

"I'm keeping my eye on Peldor and that drow person"

"You know what I'm doing"

"What's Peldor doing?"

"I talk to him in Chaotic Evil - What does he say?"

"Oh, I don't know Chaotic Evil? Oh yeah."

"I run down the corridor 20' while invisible"

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"I watch everyone, especially Ged"
"I don't know what his alignment is. We must be careful with him though." (other player) "Why?" (first player) "He appears bad. Maybe he should be subdued sometime."
"I know who the other thief is."
"Search search"
"When I'm searching, if I can grab things without being caught, I'll pocket those - gems and magic items only though"
"Did the drow find anything?"
"What's the thief up to?"
"If Rob tries to talk to the water, I push him in"
"I watch to see if anyone leaves the party"
"I'm staying back and watching everyone"
"While they're all fighting I go through the door"
"While invisible I stay directly behind Peldor"
"If Peldor goes to sleep I pick his pockets"
"Maybe a wall of fog and then a burning flask of greek fire into it? Yeah, that's it! Cool!"
"Shake your head no if I got anything"
"I want secret messages"
"I pretend to eat more than one"
"You know, I don't think anyone is paying attention to us"
"Is the treasure heap still there when I get behind it?"
"I disguise myself at the first available opportunity"
"I cast a speak with animals and howl at wolves"
"While collecting the gold I keep an eye on the untrusted thief"
"Grummsh is dead. Die."
"I give Ged 250 gp for his church and deeds"
"Did I get anything this time?"
"I'm going to backstab someone"
"After casting the spell, I gather the horses and bring them to the party - I still keep an eye on Peldor"

* I must say, Belphanior's player was the champion note-writer in the party. He sent me many notes, relevant or otherwise.

Final Note: This novel is a work in progress so any comments should be sent to Thomas Miller "tmiller@cimmeria.oit.gatech.edu" or Rickie Chang at "fizban@asan.com" if you spot formatting errors.

Notes