

The Ba'Kaam Summaries

"The Trip South" by Cole (penned by Torr) (Rob)

Some six months have past since my last quest (ridding a northern dwarven village of their White Dragon). Since then I have been working with some common folk rebuilding a bridge that been destroyed in some unfortunate weather. I received a call ... it is as it always is. I feel a pull, an urging. - - South - - On the way rumors of drow and dragons are on the tongues of the travelers I meet. I know this is what I was sent for. One traveler tells of a band of adventurers heading to find the drow.

I eventually find my way into the town, BaKaam. A quiet enough place. Although the rumors of the happenings in the town are fantastic. I have spent enough time in the North country. A friendly blacksmith tells me of the Adventuring company. My former compatriot, Markeesh is among them. Summoning my faithful steed, I head for their location in hopes of joining the quest. Unfortunately as I arrive I learn that my good friend was murdered by a vampire only the previous night. I am sad at the loss of my friend but the fight against evil is not without cost. My own life my very well be placed beside his in due time.

This group of comrades seems capable although I do not know them very well at this time. The group entered a portal and into an underground stronghold of some sort. Of who and why this was made is unknown. Evil is near, I knew this alone.

I heard sounds of battle ahead. I had been distracted by some interesting wall carvings. When I rounded the corner, my mates were giving battle to a pair of celestial lions. I arrived in time to vanquish the last one. "Defeat evil through strength of arms" The lions were guarding a room, in the search for evil my mates incurred the wrath of the guards, although not evil in themselves it appears they were set as a trap of some sort.

Across the hall from the Lion room was another door. Our burglar was nearly killed by some ancient trap. That would have been more than the party could handle two casualties in a day's time. After he recovered we entered the room to find an animated statute. It appeared to follow us as we moved in the room.

A lovely woman appears before us. She then turned into a hideous ghost. Her hideous visage would have unnerved a lesser man. But righteousness and honor conquer all. The ghost suddenly possessed

the statute and began attacking me. I returned the favor and between myself and my mates we vanquished the statute and its unholy possessor.

After leaving the worked part of this stronghold the worldly ranger found the trail of the drow. We followed them into the underdark. After entering a rough cavern we were surprised by a strange beast. It launched tentacles against our group and some went down weak as puppies. I brandished my blade and hacked its tentacles. The fire from my blade affected it grievously. The good monk was being dragged into the beast's waiting maw when I slashed the tentacles holding her, I was injured in the process. Between myself and the Ranger the creature was vanquished. I was later told the creature was a Roper, an underground scavenger of sorts.

I can feel the drow are not far off. Let them revel in their dark god on this night as there will be no rest for them once righteousness and honor fall upon them. "defeat evil through strength of arms" it is not a motto, it is a way of life. Evil can only be defeated through conviction.

*an excerpt from the Chronicles of Cole, Paladin to the One God, Bane of Evil
as penned by his man servant, Torr*

Excerpts from the Chronicles of Cole (as penned by Torr) (Rob)

Our band refreshed after a night of rest and reflection continued deeper into the cavern in search of the elusive drow. They had placed guards to hamper our progress. The walls of the cavern were illusionary at some points and to our folly we rushed in too quickly. Webs were spun into our entry points and a good portion of our fighting force was trapped. A band of giant spiders stood in our way. My good armor was torn from my body and I was almost vanquished. I owe a great debt to the dwarven cleric who expelled one spider back to its home plane. However, the one that remained was still a staunch opponent. Our band came together as one in this fight and the spider was vanquished in the name of all that is good. The Ranger's bow is something to behold.

The monk had applied some salve that protected her from the web, this came in handy as she was webbed at the entry to the next room. A spider, disguised as a weeping drow attempted to lure our friend monk to her demise. I agree with Torr in his estimation of her, quite formidable. To the eye she is not your first target, but you would be a fool to ignore her. Another smaller spider was spotted in this area. I moved in on the pretend spider and joined her in combat. With my

armor destroyed I was sliced like a Sunday ham. But retribution was the dish of the day, she was vanquished. My brothers and sisters destroyed the large spider and victory was at hand.

From here we came upon a band of drow. This was quite curious - - there were four a mage, cleric, and a pair of guards. Our good cleric unleashed a flame strike that fell the cleric and injured the mage. Anything that injures a cleric does not kill a cleric of Lloth. Something strange is afoot. The noble Torr and the uncanny Boil pinned a guard in the corner and simply stabbed him to death. I rushed into the other guard and the mage. In my zeal I discovered the activation word for the searing light wand we recovered from this band. Bloodied again I rushed in for the kill but the mage escaped by me, he did not get far. Our band of brothers and sisters is too powerful. The drow fell quite easily ... too easily. Torr believes this is abnormal for drow. The bands are too small and there are not enough foot soldiers. A priestess generally has a much larger compliment of guards ... additionally, the trap rooms are most likely set in place by the drow so they are not threatened by them. The situation is odd. I took some chain from the drow .. although it is a bit snug for my liking it is servicable, Boil is in the same boat. However, I believe he is less comfortable with his armor given racial tensions between Dwarves and elves of any stripe never mind dark elves.

After some discussion as to the best course of action we continued on. Torr is worried about this course of action, however, he is no coward. We continue forward and find a small pack of ghouls. They are crushed in seconds. This was too easy: we feel something is out there. We move forward to locate something that is hiding in the shadows. I found it, but not the way I wanted. It reached down and attacked me. I have to find a better way to scout. Our band rushed in, however, it was not distracted and it attacked me to exclusion of all others. Paladins receive this type of treatment on occasion. Death was not swift, but it did find the daemon. Not before I was slashed from top to bottom and bitten a good deal. If not for the magical healing I would have scars to rival any still walking and many who are not.

We continue on now ... Torr believes it will only get worse. But the mystery will reveal itself and Torr does the worrying for both of us. The darkness is unnerving at times. How do creatures live in this mess. It feels unnatural to be out of the sun's warmth. I am sure the Dwarves feel differently being folks comfortable in this environment. But not I, once these drow and their plans are thwarted, I will take

great comfort in being above ground again. I can Torr questions if we will see the Sun again. I know we will.

From the Chronicles of Cole, Paladin to the One true God, Bane to Evil penned by his manservant and master scribe, Torr

Excerpts from the Chronicles of Cole (as penned by Torr) (Rob)

We continued our decent into the belly of the beast called the underdark in seach of reasons behind the drow excursions to the surface world.

Our journey took us into a large room filled with filth. Old spider webs and who knows what else littered the floor. As usual, the room was infested with spiders, Giant spiders. We instantly saw one. The monk was cleaver enough to spot another one near the far wall. However, the ranger, who Torr calls "death from a distance," put an arrow into its brain and that was about all the trouble that one caused. With only a single threat our party converged upon the remaining foe. We held it at bay until our noble burglar slashed off all of its legs on one side with a single blow. Most impressive, although very messy. It appeared that these foes were too large to exit this chamber and may have starved to death if we had not happened by to complete nature's work.

Continuing on our journey we found more signs of the drow, driders. These nasty creatures are pure evil. Smiting was necessary. But these bloated beasts kept away from us by climbing the walls. We closed in and the ranger dispatched one with little difficulty. The remaining drider gave us trouble. After I slashed into its abdomen it fled across the ceiling, nice trick, to the opposite side of the room. Our valient monk attempted to close for a better attack and fell through the floor. An illusionary wall, how dastardly. She fell onto sharpened stakes some 60 feet below. The drider was dispatched and our wounds were minimal. In searching the area, our burglar's zeal almost got the best of him as he rooted through unnamed filth to retrive some coin.

We hasily left this area and came upon a hole in the floor. Hand rungs were carved into the wall abutting the hole. Our noble burglar, Boil, snuck down into the pit. Things did not go well. We heard a wail and the telltale wizzing of drow crossbows. I lept into the pit to help him. I believe they did not order a Paladin with a flaming sword. My mates followed after me.

Upon reaching bottom I realized the boogle. Some form of undead drow created a nasty visage to those not sheathed in righteousness. I

closed for battle as the remainder of the troupe closed on a small band of drow. The Monk walked between three of them, I think they were surprised as to the result of this encounter with an unarmed elf. I turned on the undead and slashed at the undead beast. However, it healed the wounds as they were made and cut through my flesh with acid claws. The battle was going poorly for me and with some of our mates cowering in fear, I called upon the power of god to bless the beast out of existence. With a touch of my hand onto its forehead the beast imploded and the fear was removed. In the meantime our Monk was dispatching the drow. However, their mage escaped.

We saw how, we followed to find a pit of webs some 3 to 5 feet in diameter. The walls of this cavern were littered with caves. The Drow were building a ladder to the surface. If they were not stopped they would destroy the town above. What to do next? It is getting nasty and Torr has doubts about our survival. But he is loyal he says if I go he will follow. We will go, duty and honor command it.

*An excerpt from the chronicles of Cole, Paladin of the One True God, and Bane to Evil
penned by his manservant and master scribe, Torr*

Excerpts from ? (Tim)

The day cycle began normally. The reports from the gaurd posts came back negative. I reprimanded the foolish male for being so bold to state "as usual." He will remember his lesson each time he looks at his scarred hand.

The escaped female and male contingent has still alluded me and the Matron is not pleased with my delay. I must whip the scouts for incompetence. Their reports of drider and demons in the caves above must be exaggerations. If I have to venture into that shallow world so close to the vile world of light above, there will be hell to pay.

...

A day that began with a little bit of fun against the scouts, has become a mettlesome one. Apparently, a band of surface worlders have taken it upon themselves to "avenge" the raid on the useless town above. Their noisy entrance was noted easily, but has been very costly. I must discuss with the Matron our next steps. Perhaps the recount of the last hours events will enable me to find a weakness in this pathetic band.

One of the barrack males arrived earlier with news of the insurgent attack upon the outpost. It had taken him almost a minute to arrive with the news. After lashing him into extra speed to return to his

post, we issued the command for the web patrol to begin with orders to bring the blessed spider into the foray if needed.... loss of male life is inconsequential compared to the safety of the web and the city. Reports of the battle and "interviews" with the dead have proved informative though disturbing. The patrol caught the surface worlders off guard and seemed to quickly gain the upper hand. Darkness was used to separate the group - stupid adventurers always relying on light - and the sentries began to take apart the group. The spellguard was actually useful in aiding the battle this time, I will have to inform his master of his partial incompetence of fleeing however. A good flogging should rectify that matter.

The party seemed weakened by both spells and the great poison of the spider. The spells of the cowardly priest were nullified by the darkness and our innate ability to resist his puny god's magic. Either by chance or male incompetence, the battle turned. Although 2 adventurers were down and others severely wounded, the tide turned against them. The loss of leadership always throws the foolish males into chaos. The battle ended poorly and the adventurers entered the first cave - the barracks level.

Here again, they encountered our forces. This time, the holy one was able to aide the battle, but the luck of the surfacers and the holiness of a sword wielding paladin and cleric defiled our city with bright light blinding our warriors. All fell. This is not good. The surfacers are more powerful than we anticipated. We must stop them. The weapon's master shall be dispatched.

excerpt from diary of ?????, priestess of the city

"There is little wind this deep underground, save for that of our passage and the of the cold river deep in the chasm.

"Having proven ourselves the stronger against a barracks' worth of drow, we set to exploring, keen to learn where we should best turn our attention. Magically trapped spellbooks proved a fiery (yet amusing) diversion to the true discovery of letters from two commanding drow. My comrades came upon papers describing the martial activity of the drow, most of which we seem to have met and overcome already, as well as a curious mention of some trouble with their goddess of spiders. It must be a strange way of life, indeed, if one's source of strength and power is unpredictable even when trained and honed. We must understand them if we are to find a way to block their designs on Bakaam, for this quest will prove futile if all we can do is attempt to outfight an entire city's worth of dark elves.

"We fell prey to a trap of crafty drow jailers, a powerful insectile creature endowed with fire magic, which was expediently sent away by Degaul. An

odd trap to leave, for it might have also caught drow in its time. Having found nothing else of interest, we decided to rest and recover our strength. Boil made a cunning trap to snare any impending drow, however the sealing shut of the very stone of the passageway proved a far more comforting protection. I know Arrowyn still had misgivings, which proved justified as a band of drow --- barely-initiated fighters led by a mage and a cleric --- began excavating our "front door" half way through our rest. Curiously, based on a limited look at the three battles we have engaged in, the fighters and mages have nearly always proven to be male but the commanders and clerics female. I wonder if such rigid divisions were imposed on them by their goddess or chosen by their own people.

"The rest of our band quickly dispatched the fighters, while the mage proved a little harder to kill, being invisible (so I was told), and the cleric harder yet, being covered in magical flames. We showed them the strength and conviction of those who walk in the sunlight (as well as the power of the longbow over diminutive hand-sized crossbows). However, overconfidence breeds its own trouble, and both Cole and I faced death at the fell hands of the cleric. Even weakened and dying, my shadowed kin are fierce. I don't recall how the rest of the battle went, but every drow was dead when Tor roused me. With the aid of one of the gods of the dwarves, we became as the wind, free and ephemeral, and made our way to another cave, one we hoped with connections to the city mentioned in the letter.

"Our destination was chosen well, for there were gray dwarves with pack lizards, fish men, drow, and a mind flayer engaged in trading in an ante chamber of a deeper passageway. We acted honorably and offered our coins for the dwarves wares', but racial tensions would not be so easily brushed aside. The gray dwarves acted much as my kin would act if a drow came to trade, and their refusal in turn affronted Cole. Melee ensued, regretfully involving the mind flayer, who stunned Boil and Arrowyn and Bane with a strange magical attack. The battle split three ways, with Cole going to work on the gray dwarves and pack lizards, Degaul taking on the drow, and myself joining with Tor in protecting the stunned ones. I can only marvel at human adaptability, for Tor, who complained of being so afraid of being in the Underdark and of its inhabitants, charged and dealt the death blow against the mind flayer, a creature I hesitated attacking.

"Boil and Arrowyn came to their senses and joined in the fight, turning the tide and devastating our foes. When the death quiet returned once more, we took stock of our wounds and our newfound supplies. Is it my imagination that a faint breeze beckons from deeper within the passageway?"

"Having destroyed the traders and looted their corpses, our band from Ba'kaam set to exploring the doors carved into the rough stone wall up on the ledge. The doors led to a series of rooms infested with spiders of

various sizes, which we promptly crushed. Arrowwyn cast a wry look at our work and kept a watchful eye to the main cavern, so I am not sure if this affronted her ranger principles. I suppose you could consider the spiders a part of the wilderness of the Underdark and in that sense are no more vile than forest spiders. Still ... it was satisfying.

"I wonder at the effect on me of traveling with my comrades, since, for an instant, I did feel a pang of regret that there was no treasure to be gotten and admired. Master Wei might have laughed; humans are so quick of heart. I think it not so bad to enjoy what is earned through skill or battle, as long as such a reward is not the only reason for striving. I have learned that relentless self-improvement is too focused a goal, producing a person much like a sword that has been sharpened too thin: brittle and impractical. My kin would do well, I think, to learn this lesson.

"It seems the rooms were part of an old house left to dust, looted long before we arrived. I did not think my dark kin would be so migratory as to allow these rooms to remain unused; I would think a stone house far harder to carve than a wooden house to construct. Then again, I know little of those who live away from the sun. Perhaps the rivalry between factions is stronger than I thought, enough to remove whole families.

"Strange dark creatures, little more than ooze and slime, proved a lively distraction to exploring the abandoned rooms. Odd magics must have affected this place, for the creatures had no bones, muscles, or skin, and yet they hit like bears and burned like acid! Arrowwyn's arrows, deadly in the past, had the bizarre effect of cleaving the creatures in twain rather than striking them dead. A long and disgusting battle was averted with a powerful fire spell from Degaul. It occurs to me that, while we heard the great river rushing in the depths of the main chasm, we have seen no springs or even trickles of water. Finding such would have been a welcome chance to refill our canteens ... and clean up; mud is one thing, acidic drool from an otherworldly ooze creature is entirely different.

"We opened many doors but it happened that Tor, loyal, timorous, and brave, opened one that should have been left closed. A magic rune caused the door to explode, but more shocking were the strange, amber-colored creatures oozing past the splintered wood. I glimpsed a flickering purple light further in the room but was distracted in trying to free Arrowwyn from the whip-quick tendrils of a roper! The canny creature picked itself the perfect trap, for our last encounter with one proved it a fell foe by itself. For lack of a door to close, we set about clearing the room in a slow and frustrating battle.

"The roper's trap was far better than we knew, for it took advantage of Cole's being partially enveloped by an ooze to drag him across the room

and into a pool of acid. His screams must have echoed throughout the region, as even his armor was dissolved. It was a race to get through the oozes in time to help the unlucky paladin, and to my regret we all failed. I feel that I was remiss in battle, to have not risked more to gain even a breath or two, enough perhaps to heal or help Cole. Even as the roper slumped in death, Tor's master breathed his last.

"The roper had picked an ill-omened place to lair, for Degaul identified the room as a temple to some god associated with oozes. Seeing the holy symbol in lurid purple, flickering as if with laughter, I tasted a bitterness unrelated to the acrid air of the grim room. One glance at the rest of my comrades told me they felt the same. I am unsure about the customs of humans, they vary so, but I can at least say that there is no body to be defiled by the inhabitants of this dark land and that his remains will not be tainted by the dark temple in which he died. Cole stayed true, lead by deed, and was a mighty warrior. The air is still, where he fell.

"The Underdark is taking its toll on us, and we have further yet to go."

Another Chapter (Rob)

I sought to save my master as he has done for me many times. However, the roper entangled me as well and I was unable to cast the spell. If only one of the others has slashed the ropes before he was dragged into that terrible pit. It is now too late, a finer soul will never be found. I cannot think any longer in this terrible place. I must find my way home.

From the journal of Torr, High Priest to the one true god

Meanwhile on another plane:

Voice 1: The Paladin has failed.

Voice 2: Impossible, we sent the priest to see to his safety.

Voice 1: He failed.

Voice 3: The dwarven high priest was there.

Voice 1: He failed.

Voice 2: What of the Monk?

Voice 1: Not quick enough and the ranger although valient also failed?

Voice 2: What of the rogue, surely he was there to help?

Voice 1: This is unclear.

Voice 2: We cannot let this fall to the drow

Many voices: This is true, what shall we do?

Voice 1: Send the Half- Orc

Voice 3: You do not fix a watch with a brick

Voice 2: He is destined to fulfill this quest - he shares his soul with an angel as his forefathers.

Voice 1: This is truth, he is more than a brick - - he is wisdom and power. His strength is beyond the expectations of his enemies and his ability is surely underestimated. He is perfect.

Voice 2: Will the chosen trust him?

Voice 3: They will know, the dwarf is no fool, the monk and ranger judge on actions not appearance. He will be accepted.

Voice 2: Can he succeed?

Voice 1: We have no other choice, direct involvement is impossible. Send the Half Orc - - he is a barbarian this is true but with the soul of an angel. This is not poetry as you all know - - it is literal.

Voice 3: Is it decided

Many voices: It is?

Voice 1: Good luck, my son.

Far away beneath the surface of the realms, a half orc rippled with muscles made his way toward a location he has never been to but knows exists. A single thought gripped his mind, "the Paladin has failed, you will take his place"

O, yes, almost forgot: a mystery

Not everything is quite what it seems.

The small can often be large.

The most ignored has the most potent venom but often means no harm.

It lashes out in defense.

Chronicles of Cole: The Last Installment (Rob)

When I look back on that final quest all those years ago, I know we did the right thing. Even though it did cost the life of my Patron. I am grateful to have known all of my fellow travelers and hope they feel the same of me and my meager contributions.

The last hours follow:

... We had dispatched the grey dwarves and the mind flayer. Looking above a number of doors ringed a ledge some 10 to 12 feet above us. We all heroically climbed the lip. It was plainly obvious that none of these doors had been used in years and we should have been on our way. But we were too young to realize that the mission was not through those doors. So we entered, slaying spiders and rooting through junk. That is until we opened the wrong door. The walls were cleaned - - scored is a better description. Jellies, a nastier beast cannot be found. Acid touch and hard to kill as they have no heart or lungs to pierce. The first two were a decoy and we had little trouble with them.

But then things got bad. I set off a trap and the door exploded out on me. On the other side of the door were three more jellies, a roper and a pit of acid. This was well thought out. The roper lashed out grabbing our mates. Cole rushed in and slashed through the bonds. But now he was the target. He had been immune to the last roper, but was not so lucky this time. He was hit with two arms and could not move. He was dragged to the pit of acid. But were this not enough he was enveloped by a jelly. He was being burned alive during his trip across the room. I tried to help but I was also ensnared and my strength was taken from me. It was a sickening display. The archer tried to kill the roper but it was too late by the time she succeeded. Cole was already within the the pit and my spell was of little help at that time. He had died as he lived, helping those around him. In his selfless act, he took the place of another so that they might continue. He was always in the foreground. Always carrying the banner of justice.

Now in a small monastery in the Ice Wind Dales his tales are required reading for a new generation of paladins and clerics. Talking of honor and commitment is an easy task, acting on the same concept is not. This is what I learned from Cole and this is what I hope to instill in the next generation who take his place. I hope he approves.

Torr, high priest to the one true god and head master of the monastery in the Winds.

"In the wake of Cole's death, our band continued along the passageway beyond the bazaar. After a time and the tantalizing sound of water, we came upon a forest of overly-large mushrooms, in truth a drow village, lit by ghostly magic fire on the cave roof. I recalled Melintelinas' description of banners of sky lights in the northern lands, and I wondered that such a magic would find its way here, deep underground. Magic in general seems more prevalent in the Underdark. Would such magic affect creatures, after time, altering body and mind? Warp like wax or harden like clay, perhaps a mix of both? Would it depend on the person, the upbringing? I begin to wish I had given more time to the priests of Treehollow and Ba'Kaam, useless thoughts given the current situation.

"Curious and confident, Boil planned to snoop and learn if this were the sought-after city but was attacked and set a-fire! Not desiring conflict, especially one so untenable, we fled back to the web chasm and made our way to another barrow, this one sealed by a curious magical rune spanning its large archway. An odd look came into Boil's eyes, and he skillfully made toothless the magical trap. Perhaps more than his leg was stung by drow bolts. Even he seemed impressed with his work.

"A battle ensued with drow stationed inside, armed with chains and fell magic, a barrage of which hit Boil. With a slight regrouping and a quieting spell of Dagal's, we gave the drow a demonstration of sunlander combat, albeit short-lived on their part. Certainly, the warrior who thought he had cornered Arrawyn was put in a tight spot, for I counted four arrows, fired at point blank, each a fingerlength into the wall, supporting his corpse.

"The cave proved to be a tower, inverted, not stone encased by space but space encased by stone. With DeGaul's wind spell, magical climbing slippers, and a magical climbing rope, we were well-equipped to moving around this hollow-bodied tower. One can only wonder what the drow do. The second floor housed wizards and we proceeded with an awkward battle. Our burglar's luck was foul, and the wizard drained him with a strange spell. In return, I snapped the drow's neck, for I liked not the dwarf's ashen face. What I thought was a lingering spell from the first wizard turned out to be another spell-caster entirely, sent fleeing by DeGaul's spells.

"The remaining rooms held magical studies, one which left Dagal grim and forbidding. Our continued explorations were interrupted by an ... unusual drow. I would expect such a creature in the courts of the human kings, so flamboyant and, well, mannerly (by comparison): he did not try to kill us at first sight. Solom Ned'razak called himself an archmage, and Szith Morcane his city. Displeased with and hampered by the current theocracy, he sought our aid to bring about what he calls a mageocracy, somehow differentiated from his total rule of the city. The details of our aid involved

the high priestess, Dorina T'sarran, her nieces(Velasta & Velina), a unholy warrior, Zedarr T'sarran, and the archmage's erstwhile apprentice, Susztam mar- Shinn; our "assassin" group squared against the priestess' death squad, already a-hunting. Reluctantly and with the promise of information to aid our quest, we agreed to do this thing.

"I cannot tell how the wind blows around this choice, so still is it in these caves, and I hope our choice held wisdom. I can only wonder where Salem Heth has hidden herself and her comrade. Should we find the city which staged the attack, how will we find the leaders and, moreover, convince them that future attacks would not be profitable? Only Dagal and Boil speak the language of this dark realm, what good that has done us, for only one drow has bothered to converse.

"We do not see the end of a path while treading it and very rarely see the end until it is upon us. Like a feather in the wind, we drift, and there are storms riding close. I never found pleasure in causing such chaos, yet having a hand in starting this storm instills me with a small satisfaction."

The letter found in the barracks (Tim)

Indrizil:

Word has probably reached you about the fall of Maerimydra, and perhaps you have wondered about my safety. Obviously, I survived the sack of the city, although it was a close call indeed. The city fell at the hands of mere chattel - - - the priestesses of the Spider Queen had kept the city so cowed that, with their power gone, its defenders could not resist even a force of goblins, ogres and giants. We held our strong places for a time without cleric, but then House Chumavh was overthrown from within, and so we were undone.

I write to you now from Szith Morcane, the old outpost north and west of the city. Perhaps you will come visit me - - - though I must say that if you still profess faith to Lolth, you will not be welcomed by those who rule here now. The Spider Queen's priestesses have found a new role here, which I think you would not enjoy very much.

I do not know if you still cling to the hope that the Spider Queen will restore you - - - will restore all of us - - - to her favor, but if you do, I urge you to reconsider. It is not too late for you or for our bond of blood. The Lady of the Dead will accept you still, just as she has taken me into her care. All Maerimydra is her temple now, and her emissaries rule here too. Abandon your empty allegiance to a silent goddess and come to Szith Morcane, but do not wear the emblem of the spider. I have need of allies of my own blood, and if Lolth still ignores your please, I suspect you do as well.

Rhavauz

Excerpts from various diaries... (Tim)

Excerpt ONE:

It seems my long awaited plans are finally coming to fruition. I had planned on using my influence in the Arcane tower to slowly subvert the warrior nobles, but the arrival of the surfaceworlders provided me with a excellent opportunity. They were easily convinced that my goals coincided with theirs. As I expected, a little flash of power and they cower in fear of me, choosing to listen and bargain for their lives instead of boldly fighting onward. I used it to my advantage. They will now remove the Kiaransalee usurpers from Szith Morcane and with the Lloth temple in decline, I will step forward and create a leadership based on intelligence and magic. The commoners care not for who rules, just so they are protected and commanded.

The surfacers will probably not survive their forage into House Morcane, but any weakening of the forces there can only aid me. I wish them well... at least as much as I can.... after all I am drow and a quite cunning one if I say so myself. Notes continue..... Note to self... must look into getting new apprentices, the fools have gotten themselves all killed.

Excerpt TWO:

I sense that something is wrong, I should have heard from the team I sent out. My niece was to report back, yet I sense nothing. I am concerned as to how this will look to mother. Her command was strong and her disappointment is not to be trifled with. I will bolster our defenses and assure the presence of the wards. I will hold here till there is no other option, then report back to Mother.

The human is becoming a nuisance. She has provided much information of the surface as well as the towns above, but continually whines about rewards and riches. My promises will hold her off a little longer, then her reward shall be costly indeed. For now however, I pass the information on to Mother, knowing it will aid us in the glory to come.

Excerpt THREE:

A bunch of surface dwellers tried to assault the cavern the other day, but my scout team drove them off with our superior fire power. I know that I gravely wounded the dwarf and the others claim to have

killed at least one of them, though we found no body or blood stain. Why a group of neophyte surfacers would be down so deep. Fools I would guess, they will not survive long here. Probably end up as Rothe food. Anyway, perhaps my deeds yesterday will come to the recognition of the nobles and I can be promoted in the ranks. I have seen the scarred dark warrior brother of the new matron wander our quarters, perhaps I can address him the next time he comes through. I hope he leaves the cat behind though... it scares me.

In a another place.... (Rob)

V1: Preparations are complete. The agent has been informed and is prepared to make the journey.

V2: Have you warned him of the dangers?

V1: He did not want to know.

V3: Typical. I hope he remembers who he is. He will be the 3rd agent we have sent.

V2: What of the target location? The wards seem quite strong. Will there be errors?

V1: He is strong willed and strong armed. He will suffice. He must. The wards, yes, we have compensated for them. They are of mortal design after all.

V3: Very well. Prepare the gate. Tell him to be ready - the afterdaze may be confusing. He must be able to join the travellers with out issue.

V1: The gate has opened. He has passed through.

V2: May the One go with him and guide him.

Great Chorus: Go with the One.

V1: Succeed where others have failed. You must.

V3: Yes, but there is always the Other.

Book of Deeds, Chapter 143 (Rob)

The Pact

Within the nation of Thay life is brutal and cheap. This has not always been the case and today there are some true heroes that walk out of Thay's borders.

More than a thousand years ago there lived a man, a humble man of less than fortunate birth station. He was trained as a cooper and his name was the same: Cooper. In the twenty first year of his life Cooper made the pact.

The Army of Thay was sweeping toward its Eastern Borders on some incursion of forgotten import. Cooper was pressed into service as an infantryman. He marched with them toward their ultimate objective all the while pressing every able bodied man over the age of 13 into service.

The Army came across a band of BugBears and Hobgoblins heading northwest. The Army fell upon. There were few survivors. But those that were found did talk. Grimlock, the Goblind King, had heard news of the movement of the Army and saw opportunity. He mobilized his forces and made for the exposed Thay countryside. The Thay Army had only encountered a small fraction of the Goblin King's Hoarde. When Cooper learned of this information he was beside himself. The Captain had his orders to push on and the small towns deprived of their strongest residents were to be sacrificed.

Cooper was part of a large family. He had seven brother and four sisters, he had many cousins as well as more distant relatives in the neighboring towns. He knew his family would be slaughtered by this menace, not that living in Thay would bring any promise health and happiness in itself. But they had each other, without that what would his life be worth?

Cooper knew he could not run away, he would be killed and his family would also be punished. He did what many in Thay fear to do, he prayed to the gods of mercy and justice. He did this all night long. In the morning he was visited, a globe of bright light appeared before him. A disembodied voice spoke to him.

"Cooper, you would have us save your family?"

Cooper fell to the ground and nodded his agreement.

"If this is so, you will be obligated to us and your family as well."

Cooper nodded, afraid to speak.

"Until your return, my brothers will protect the lands where your family lives. In return, the second born son to each first born daughter will serve our cause"

Cooper agreed and slashed his hand to memorialize his promise.

Cooper left for war and returned. Nothing is written of the war he fought in. However, there is a strange tale regarding Cooper's home.

A band of Bug Bears, Goblins and Hobgoblins did descend upon Cooper's lands. When they arrived they were greeted by a force of some 30 Hound Achrons. The carnage was spectacular. A mound still exists where more than three hundred goblin kind are amassed. In that it is remarkable that they have not been turned into undead. More importantly, not a single member of Cooper's family was harmed in anyway for the four years he was gone. No deaths or injuries of any sort.

Today, the second- born son of each first- born daughter bears the scar of Cooper on his right hand and does the bidding of the Angels until the next is available to take his place. Some, Eighteen years past the first born daughter in the line of Cooper fell in love with an Orc Barbarian, an odd match to be sure but by all reports they were a happy couple. Of their twin sons, the second displayed a strange birthmark and some unusual characteristics, including having conversations with himself (or so it appeared).

The Records of the Watcher, The Dark Elven Campaign (Rob)

It has fallen to me to record the deeds of the Agent in the line of Cooper. Our brethren have taken great interest in the quest undertaken by the Heroes of Ba'kaam. There are things at stake that I have not been told of. All I am to know is that I must write these entries to chronicle the deeds for some future use.

For all his apparent flaws, the agent has power that I did not anticipate in one of the cruder races of the material plane. I have always known half- orcs to be boorish and without any true conviction. I may rethink this over time, but it appears that this one is a good choice.

The Council Champion opened the gate to the underdark with exacting precision. Our Agent leapt into the existing fray. Vampires and drow undead beset the Heroes of Ba'kaam. They appeared to have the upper hand. It looked as though they were surprised by the arrival of the agent. His pick was not enough against these creatures - - we should have thought better about his armament. These

creatures did fall through the valor of the team as a whole. The silver punch dagger was enchanted by the dwarven cleric and this allowed the agent to have more effect. This was the Agent's job: complete the team. He is succeeding in this regard.

With the vanquish of the vampires the team moved on. The happened upon a drow female chained to a wall. Apparently she was meant to be food. Our agent pulled the chains from the wall and gave up his potion of restoration to heal her razed constitution. This is a questionable move on his part. Consorting with Drow is troubling, but the circumstances are not black and white. Perhaps there will be forgiveness for our Agent in this regard. The dwarves smartly destroyed the resting vampires in their coffins and destroyed the resting place of a third.

The Heroes ventured on, the burglar opened a door which revealed drider vampires and the third vampire, who now had no resting place. The burglar attempted to quickly shut the door. Our agent saw his mission, he threw open the door and rushed into the room. Sometimes he is as smart as a bag of bricks. Magic flew, darkness filled the rooms and the villains fell on our Agent. He knew not of his mates coming to his aid, he rushed to where he thought light would be. However, a drider blocked his way - - he drove the drider back some 20 feet - - I do not believe that I have ever seen such strength from a half orc or even an ogre before. He then flew into a rage on his opponent as the other heroes came into the room. The dwarf removed the darkness. The vampires were difficult foes. The usually stalwart dwarven cleric took a support role increasing the size of both the Master Monk and our Agent. The ranger's arrows continued to find their mark, her skill would be legendary even here. She fell the weakened drider our Agent had all but slain at that point.

The remaining drider and vampire were slain. The driders were set ablaze to prevent their return. A nasty trap - - undead driders. I believe our Agent will complement this team nicely. But his Barbarian ancestry may get the better of him.

Report One of the Dark Elf Incident, by Kaalim Maestrill, Junior watcher to the Counsel of Angels.

"We moved further into the recesses of the drow house with the exiled daughter, Dessa, as reluctant company. The path I walk is fraught with tripping vines and stumbling stones, for I found myself confounded by the nature of mercy and forgiveness. Here we found a drow fighter, obviously the enemy of our foes and at the mercy of vampiric invaders of her house. Cassius gave me the choice of healing her, and I do not regret that choice, for she could not stand on her own. Faced, though, with the choice of

healing Dessa more from our limited stores of such potent potions, I chose our possible future need over her present recovery. The more I thought about it, the more I felt at odds with my choice. I kept close to Dessa as we progressed, thinking that I could say something or learn something that would put me at ease; and yet, I did not. In this choice I feel I have failed my dark kin. As it turned out, it was the only chance I was given.

"Past the lair of the vampiric drider we came upon the rooms of the drow clan's daughters, one of which belonged to Dessa. The drow were, it seems, well-served by their suspicious nature, for Velina waited for us within one of the rooms, enhancing her Quth Maren guards with fell spells. The battle was short, though the air was quick with fire which the others were not as quick to dodge. Instinct and luck seem one in the same in a single battle; it is only over time one can tell the difference, I think. Perhaps we were getting stronger, adapting to this dead, dark world, for the priestess fell shortly after her undead minions. However, the drow, it seems, were always quicker. Dessa chose our occupation with her sibling and those walking skinless abominations, the Quth Maren, as her moment to vanish, after having recovered something hidden in her chamber. In the arrogance of assuming that I understand my dark kin, I would venture that revenge was foremost in her mind. Time might prove me a liar.

"Moving along, we found a locked door requiring Boil's attention. His triumphant grin gave way to something more sickly, as he found his reflection in the eyes of the massive feline which had been resting in the surprisingly well-appointed room. With alacrity and Dagal's enlarging magic, we dispatched the beast, which had a peculiar innate magic, a skill at not being where sensible senses said it would be. Boil, however, suffered being the mouse to this cat and was sorely wounded. Made more cautious (or, at least, made cautious), we approached the innermost room of the house.

"Ornate doors gave way to a spare room of worked stone and woven thread, the focus being a large stone pillar with an ancient, wizened, drow matron perched atop it. Confused, trying to tell a stone-patient drow from a carven effigy, I entered the room, the others following despite Dagal's misgivings. Spells fell from the air like a rain, a shower of fire and hate-sharpened metal, but the caster had hidden herself well. Dagal shouted a warning of illusions and drow trickery, but I found myself baffled by what was not, while Boil, in a stubborn dwarven way, sought to fight the evil his heart told him was there. He knew the truth Dagal saw, and worked mayhem against it: Dorina was hidden inside what was actually an illusionary pillar, blasting us with spell after spell.

"It took the combined skills of all of our small band to overcome the priestess. Arrawyn sending persistent arrows in the face of a persistent

spell attacking her; Dagal calling on the power of his god to combat the workings of Kiaransalee; and Boil unrelenting in the sheer obstinacy and inventiveness of his attacks. The fierce battle proved another daunting truth about the daughter of the drow: unnaturally strong, unresponsive to pain, and inexhaustible, Dorina had given herself entirely to the Lady of the Dead and allowed herself to be molded in her goddess' image, forsaking life for undeath. Dauntless Boil fetched her the final blow with one of the dark elven corrosive daggers. Caught between worlds, the undead priestess fled to her coffin, concealed behind the chamber wall, guarded by stone and magic.

"An enraged Dagal found this affront too great and leapt through the resulting barrier of blades. He proceeded to cut open Dorina's heavy stone coffin, whole swords flashing inches from his enlarged shoulders. It was surreal. The determination of the living, though, won out over the tenacity of the undead. I think both Dagal and Dorina were shocked when they found themselves face to face over her sarcophagus, he in surprise that she was conscious and she in horror that he had breached the sanctum of her grave. Swiftly, deftly, Dagal took care of the vampire as his training and his passion dictated, and he tossed her severed head into her own barrier of blades. Dagal found a letter to Dorina from her mother, another follower of the Lady of the Dead, which made mention of disturbing things.

"Now, in the aftermath of the battle, I feel a cold pricking down my neck, irrationally deciding that this is somehow a calm before the coming storm. The stillness is unnerving me. The lack of wind makes me feel as though there is no hope of change or of growth in this dangerous land. The mentality of the Underdark is a wind which turns on itself and destroys anything in its path. Our work is far from done in this world of darkness and intrigue, but we will see our quest to its end."

"On the body of Dorina, we discovered this letter. By Larethain, what is going on in the Underdark?"

(Tim) Daughter:

Our Dark Lady favors my efforts, and my research proceeds well. Within five tendays, perhaps six, all will be ready for the Day of Great Vengeance. The Spider Queen is dead; we have already brought low the Spider-kissers and seized our rightful place in the realms of the dark. Now the Day draws near when we shall avenge ourselves upon those of the day-blasted lands, too, and achieve that ultimate triumph denied us so long ago.

While I prepare my Great Revenance, it falls to you to make ready the way. Harry the surface-dwellers, hunt them in their woods and fields, and take the measure of their strength. Do no concern yourself with

putting them on their guard; our Lady desires their blood, their fear, and their dreadful anticipation of our ultimate act of revenge. With each slaying we grow in her favor and sow the seeds of our coming victory.

If they come against you in Szith Morcane in irresistible strength, slay as many as you can. Withdraw from the fight if you must, and bring Zedarr with you, but as for the rest - - - they are to stand and die for the glory of the White Banshee. The battle for Szith Morcane will come to nothing when our Great Revenance comes to pass. If anything, our final vengeance is made ever sweeter by each fleeting, false hope our enemies entertain before it falls upon them.

Work great slaughter for our Lady's dark glory, my daughter. Soon I will come to you from Maerimydra with such dark and terrible might that all Faerun will tremble before us.

"Mother"

"The Underdark is always quiet, a silence as thick as fog, listening, waiting for a mistake to be a crack in our defenses.

"Having explored the rest of the level and found it empty, my companions and I made our way to the floor above, curiously accessible by eight well-spaced narrow columns in the ceiling. The climb up the tube was made more bizarre for the fact that they led into a truly unusual room: a great chamber carved to be like the inside of a massive spider, with the narrow entrance columns the spider's spindly legs. Those who served the Spider Queen were hit hard and shown no mercy, it seems, for the bodies of priestesses were strewn about the room, the leavings of a great yet foregone battle. The strange room was complete with an altar at the spider's "head", the power of the apparently overthrown goddess evident even then: lingering magic brought forth the ghost of the priestess draped across the plinth. We dispatched her, and Dagal examined the altar with a speculative, destructive eye, frustrated by the lingering evil magic and by the sturdy construction.

"Assured that none of the other bodies would rise, Boil turned his eye to the metal gate sealing off half of the room. While he gave it his professional attention, Dagal commented that some of the bodies were missing and concluded that they were taken and transformed into those fearsome undead hulks, the Quth Maren. There were plenty of bodies left, and I did not relish the thought of fighting so many in the future. Perhaps we can halt whatever Great Vengeance is planned before that could happen.

"At that instant, we were all startled by a magical defense protecting the gated sanctum of the drow, as a truly large spider appeared among us. It reminded me of the battle at the entrance to these caves, when the paladin was still with us, resplendent in shining armor. I regretted the loss of Cole, his strong arm and steady spirit, and a lethargy suddenly weighed heavily on me. I but watched as the rest of my companions dispatched the spider.

"I was startled by my weakness, equally fearful that it was a weakness in myself, hidden until now, or a sickness of the soul imparted by drow magic. Would prolong contact affect us all like this? None of the others seem too shaken by what they had seen. I reminded myself more forcefully that the dark elves are less elven than they seem, although part of me decried such thoughts. As it happened, I shook off the strange depression to aid in opening the gates with my slight strength, increased somewhat by Dagal's magic, helping our burglar, who is quite stout for someone skilled at such a dexterous and delicate craft.

"The fall of the heavy metal gate brought dull echoes from the next room, which was shrouded in tapestry, carpet, and plush pillows. The servants of Kiaransalee had seen to this room as well, for the fine tapestries had been defaced by faintly glowing magic, depicting fairly crude insults in a form of Elven. In some things the drow are quite similar to us, I think. The only odd thing about the room was a strange mist, cold and evil-feeling, which lingered near a second altar of desiccated spider web. Warned by Dagal of possible hidden undead, we searched the room to no avail until I approached the altar, which was perhaps not the wisest thing I could have done but certainly the expedient choice.

"A ghostly drow priestess faded visible in front of us, her scream of rage, hatred, and betrayal sweeping over us like a physical blow. The banshee's keen struck Arrawyn to the heart, knocking her into death itself, and sent Boil cowering to the other end of the room. This was no time for soul-weary laments of the past! As Dagal tended the shockingly pale Arrawyn, I laid the banshee to rest, a surprisingly easy battle despite her initial death cry. With Arrawyn restored, and Boil calmed, we looked around at the dead and realized that our task from Solom was completed. Those he wished taken care of, as well as many more, were dead and the city was open to him.

"As we returned to the archmage's tower, I found it odd to look at the drow warriors and see them as no great threat. We have ourselves grown stronger from the dangers of this dark and still realm. Solom was quite pleased at our success and was busy with his acquisition of Szith Morcane, however, he did promise us safe passage through his realm and back again. While honor bound me to return the magical ring he lent me, I grew so fond of it that we bartered it back, as well as some of his magical

supplies, with the drow armor and weapons we took from our fallen foes. I was surprised at such a commonplace treatment of the stolen goods of his own kindred, but life goes on, it seems, for the drow. My dark kin are made stronger for this kind of conflict.

"Having rested ourselves in a room provided by Solom, we returned to Ba'kaam via a powerful spell of travel cast by Dagal the next day. Our report to the council felt long- overdue, but it had only been a few days and was quite timely. The town was recovering, its luck still holding. Novart seemed to have grown into his position from dealing with the catastrophic drow attack; no longer as self- important and petty, he seemed, at least to my eyes, to act more like a father to his town. Our report to the council was remarkable for the brief appearance of an old mage, who interrupted the council as smoothly as a river stone, warning of the importance of stopping the future drow offensive for the safety of this town and others. Elminster, it seems, found something to value in our expedition to appear personally. Not that we recognized him, but it's the thought that counts, I think.

"Despite our impatience to continue our quest, reporting to the council and reequipping ourselves took most of the day. The market has only expanded, and although such bodes well for the growth of the town and must surely be a joy to the townsfolk (almost city- folk), it was an obstacle for us. Despite the distractions, the noise, the smells, we did well for ourselves, indulging in some truly fantastic purchases. First and foremost, a visit to Amarak's forge, trading the stoic smith a pouch of platinum for a range of magical and normal arrows. Of course, the dwarves' eyes lit up while in the forge and they acquired fine weapons of their own. Boil seemed quite taken with his lightening axe and Dagal quietly pleased with his adamantite mace. As for myself? Seeking to lighten my heart from the heaviness I felt, I visited the temple to converse with the head priest. His quick eye discerned something surprising: I had been laboring under a drow curse. He lifted it, with my thanks, and introduced me to a few of the new acolytes, visitors from other temples in Ba'Kaam's time of need.

"Armed, armored, we prepare to return, Ba'kaam fixed in our hearts and Maerimydra, the source of the attacks, fixed in our minds. By craft or by conflict, we will see the drow attacks and the threat of the Great Revenance ended. I am renewed, having rediscovered why I learn and fight: it is for this town. May the winds always bring it change - - - and courage."

"The drow seemed eager for us to leave their city; I'm not sure whether it was because we were a security threat or a source of disgust. With our backs protected by a stout, locked, iron grate, we made our way along what we were assured was the path to Maerimydra. A strange magical portal through the stone proved a surprising obstacle, but Dagal and Arrawyn quickly deduced that the portal required merely an Underdark

mushroom (the dark realm's "wood"). Having fed the portal, we were transported on, although not even the dwarves could say how much stone the magic crossed.

"Our first step on the path proved an exciting one, a battle with a stone giant whose face seemed to have migrated from its head, losing its eyes and nose, and leaving its mouth in its abdomen. I wonder if such a creature is natural or whether it was altered by magic. A poor choice on my part made me more a hindrance to my allies, but the battle ended soon enough. Arrawyn later suggested that the creature was "seeing" with the sound, much like a bat.

"After such a heart-pounding arrival, it seemed almost anticlimactic that we traveled a whole day without further incident. The stone tunnel was varied in shape, direction, and size, but the dwarves assured us that we were progressing in a definite direction with a slight downward slope. I was made edgy by the target it made of us and found myself envious of the dwarves' ability to see in total darkness. The second day followed the pace of the first, uneventful and made slow by the broken tunnel floor. Part of the threat of the Underdark lay in the simple fact that we cannot be on guard all the time; such would exhaust us in a few days.

"The next day, as we sought a safe alcove for a sleep, voices drifted back through the tunnel of Undercommon and drow, Dagal noted, with one speaker less fluent, less well-regarded, and quite, quite familiar. We had found Salem Heth. Our attempt to sneak up on the group might have been laughable to the keen drow, but, as adventurers, we felt honor-bound to try.

"Stealth abandoned, Arrawyn and Boil charged into the drow-spelled darkness to familiar rhythm of Dagal's chanting. What followed was an excellent battle with drow rangers and Heth herself. Boil was pinned and fighting furiously -- all I saw were flashing drow swords --- Arrawyn was taking the drow down one shot at a time, Dagal took care of Heth with the hand of Torm, his god, and I had the pleasure of demonstrating the timing and precision of my martial art. The drow were not well-armed, so our work was swift and Heth the sole survivor of our efforts.

"Arrawyn's excellent and just barely non-lethal aim convinced a sullen Heth of our seriousness, and the former Lieutenant of Ba'kaam relented. She told of a drow leader, Irae, and of providing intelligence on Ba'kaams defenses. She admitted to betraying the town for the sum of 9,000 gold, an amount she valued highly which almost made me spit. Pure greed! I would not be so quick as some of my kin to cry of human weakness, but I must admit even to myself that there are such spectacular cases as this one. We decided to let our collective rage cool for the night, and Heth's

magical ability to penetrate the darkness expire, leaving Heth frustrated by our burglar's skill at knots. The next morning we passed the judgment of Ba'kaam on the traitor: exile, minimally equipped, alone in the Underdark. Dagal was quite pleased at placing a single vial of lamp oil in Heth's pack while she watched.

"There was the slight diversion of experimenting with an adhesive, magical, drow tattoo, which skipped the bearer ahead in time like a fish jumping in a lake. Boil was keen on having it and quickly applied it to his face, an effective distraction from his namesake."

"This realm held danger by what was there and, surprisingly, what was not. Who would have thought that the absence of something - - - so taken for granted as to be ignored - - - would come closer to killing us all than all the denizens of the Underdark? Every challenge has been confrontational and dealt with in our single-minded way: a threat presented itself; we overcame it. Blinded by this truth, encouraged by curiosity and a little greed, we, ourselves, were almost overcome - - - not by a fearsome, magical creature or by sheer numbers and skill, but by the very air of the tomb-like Underdark.

"Our haste could have cost Dagal and Cassius their lives. Were it not for Arrawyn, who in cloud form was unaffected and unable to affect, her sharp memory and quick advice, I would have not been able to rescue the two fallen warriors. It is difficult to weigh the danger to the town against our own danger, and there is no scale to balance our haste. Experience is a hard school, unforgiving and deadly, and yet it is the only way we learn.

"Subdued, we sped along, the wind at our backs. We encountered giants, stone brothers, and the friendliest folk we have met since leaving the sun. Dagal and Cassius negotiated safe passage through the giants' "house" and they confirmed our directions to Maerimydra and gave us some curious advice as well. After a brief debate and with naiveté born of optimism and pride, we decided to cross the massive, freshwater lake with the remaining time of Dagal's wind walking spell, trusting in our luck and resourcefulness. We had yet to learn which was stronger, our stubbornness or the truth of the Underdark. Simple travel already had proven itself perilous; gigantic, night-dark, freshwater lakes inhabited by magical demon fish should not have been taken so lightly.

"Our blood was roused by a brief fight, instigated and ended by Cassius, who spied bones left by a large, vaguely familiar, lobster creature. Those bones and his honor called him to fight the creature and lent strength to his arm. Where I am the persistent breeze which topples the tree, in anger he is the whirlwind! Two things we gained from the battle: an interesting, portable, magical boat and the cold stone of doubt in our stomachs, when we learned that the chull was a buffer between the giants and the beast of

the Lake of Shadows. We were facetiously told to kill the lake beast to fix our mistake. We ended up attempting just that.

"A magic-born water-spun storm, summoned by the kraken creature, prevented our crossing. While Arrawyn consulted with the giants (and I carried the torch), the men decided to wait on a temple created by the lake's fish men in worship of the kraken. Distant screams echoing across the lake told us that they had picked a fight with either the kraken or the fishmen. Our expressions mirroring each others' hearts, we used two precious magic potions to fly to our comrades' aid. As it happened, it was the kraken, a monstrosity of the deep with massive tentacles and crushing strength.

"Boil, Cassius, and Dagal, through might and magic --- aided by an airborne Arrawyn --- forced the kraken to retreat, inconveniently taking me with it, though I convinced it to release me. More than the cold water of the lake sent a wind up my back; the sight of the light dimming under unknown spans of water will stay with me. It was disconcerting to learn that I walked the tip of a branch, nothing to catch me from a fall, for my new-found abilities were unreliable in the sunless realm. A pleasant surprise was that Boil killed a monk fishman for me, expediently, I was told, and one who possessed excellent and exciting magical weapons! I felt fierce joy in the sound of fire and cold crackling in the air as I whirled my new weapons!

"Dagal said his magic indicated that the kraken waited for us underneath the temple, perhaps inside it. We eyed each other, shook out our bruises, and prepared to finish the fight. We intended to see the battle to its end (or ours) and to repay our debt to the giants after all.

"Our haste may kill us yet."

"Cautiously, muscles tensed, senses keen, and weapons ready, we explored the kraken's temple. Surprisingly, it was only lightly tenanted, shadow-hidden fishmen made invisible by magic. They were quickly dealt with, and I would not hesitate to say that Arrawyn is as deadly inside a building as outside, unexpectedly so to someone only a little used to the ways of the bow --- but to be expected for one of Arrawyn's training. Boil delighted in acquiring a magic ring which would allow him to be invisible in the darkness. That would be a dubious blessing to someone night-sighted like myself, but Boil, a dwarf, has lived part of his life in total darkness.

"That seemed so alien to me, not to have the trees, the wind, the life of the forest, but neither of the dwarves are as alien as I would have thought two years ago. In truth, I am ashamed to admit I have been judging the inhabitants of the Underdark by their environment, thinking creatures born

and raised without the sun and such abundant life as I have known could know no other life. I was wrong.

"Master Wei told me that rocky slopes bring forth stinging nettles as well as djossi vines, but a wooden-headed wild elf did not carry such a lesson in her heart and with her as she went underground. How amusing, for here I thought myself so different from my own folk, and here in the dark I find myself, for all my training, just the same. I understand a little better how one could easily become that which one despises without ever knowing it, and it gives me the feeling of walking at night, unaware, one step away from a night-dark chasm.

"We moved further into the temple, eliminating the piscine clerics of the kraken so swiftly that I doubt they had time to pray to their frightening god. Cassius was keen to explore an underwater cavern, guided and guarded by only his dagger made luminous by Dagal's magic. His curiosity betrayed him, for he was attacked by a fishman, whip-quick in his native environment and deadly in defense of his god. As if the reddening water around the brave half-orc were not bad enough, the cavern wall shimmered and revealed the snaking tentacles of our recent foe, the kraken.

"The battle was chaotic, and I remember it only in snatches. I recall Boil pulling me back from my frantic attempt to aid the struggling Cassius, keeping me a handspan away from the grasping tentacles, but Dagal was not so lucky and was struck a mortal blow. I did not see Cassius during the battle and feared him drowning, dying, alone. Arrawyn severed tentacles with mighty shots until the kraken's questing tentacles chanced upon her balcony perch. Looking back on it, our quest underground might seem like a series of unfortunate events, each distinguished at the time only by being the most immediate; however, this was a decidedly a fight of ill-fortune. Cassius was missing, our sniper was neutralized, I was trapped underwater, and Dagal was dying.

"Again to the rescue, Boil saved Dagal with a hastily snatched potion, who, upon waking, rose with just enough spark of life to cast a devastating spell on the kraken. Unexpectedly and most welcome, Cassius appeared from behind the kraken and dealt it a death blow straight to its eye. The crafty warrior had circled around the kraken and caught it by surprise. However, even the kraken's body, dead and dead weight, proved difficult to escape, for I was too weak to free myself from its coils and Dagal struggled against his own weight and that of his armor. Stepping between places did not work (again!), but we were both rescued by Cassius. We had not died but we certainly had dyed --- clothes, hair, and skin! Only deep appreciation of my comrades allowed me to let the dark elf comments pass. Just.

"With the kraken defeated, we took the time to rest. With eyes tuned to magic Dagal warned us of an odd mosaic on the second floor, one which assaulted his mind. He also cautiously advised that the stones around the well to the underwater cavern --- now the kraken's grave --- suggested magic of a more benign and healing nature. Impatient, the dwarves quaffed their fill of the inky, oily water, getting themselves healed and mildly sick. The rest of us preferred to wait.

"Healed, canteens filled, and slightly heavier with treasure, we walked out of the temple and into the dark of day."

"The stone giants were barely not unimpressed at our defeat of the kraken, and offered to escort us across the lake, perhaps wishing us gone before we caused more trouble. With their strength and stamina rowing our magic ship, we crossed 17 miles of lake shore in 7 hours. Truly, they are formidable, especially to have kept the fishmen and the kraken at bay. Bidding farewell to our allies, we rejoined the path to city of the drow.

"On a non-lethal note, which made it interesting in itself, we came to a room veined with black crystal. It was beautiful in a way I am only just learning to appreciate, but it was astonishing for the crystals shivered and twisted, reorienting to catch the most of our meager light, almost like plants straining for the sun. I thought of my garden back in Ba'Kaam, of the stones soaking up the sunlight, and scraped up some of the black sand which had fallen to the ground to take back with me, back to the sun.

"Arrawyn pronounced the cavern a sensible resting place and we were weary. The first watch was mine, and I was enjoying the vantage point afforded me by my spider-like cloak when the far wall exploded and revealed two mighty, stone-crunching, rock-tunneling behemoths! They moved quickly for such massive beasts and attacked my sleeping comrades even as I shouted out a warning. Groggy, and with less grace than usual, we took them down.

"I thought unease at the random attack fueled my dream of a gloating drow matron, taunting me with words of despair, until I saw Dagal's face the next morning. He confided that he, too, had such a dream. We shared with the group her two warnings, given in assurance and arrogance to Dagal, "Your every spell empowers me; how could you think to defeat me," and to myself, "One of you is destined to serve me, and you will all know the meaning of vengeance."

"Disturbed, Dagal consulted his god. She who spoke was the mother of Dorina, who had been the one spying on us with her fell magic. She spoke the truth in each case, for Dagal's spells would aid her, although he would, at least, be aware of it, and in that sense one of us would serve her. There was good news, for the Great Revenance would not occur in the next 20

days, and we might find allies in Maerimydra in the worshippers of fallen Lolth, if our negotiation skills match our battle skills. Expectedly, we would meet Desa, again, but she would neither aid us nor aid Kiransilee.

"All of the difficulties we have run into so far will be as nothing compared to what awaits us in the city, and I can only hope that we are learning enough from our experiences to measure up to this challenge. What use is a breeze which dies before bringing relief to the faces of those in need?"

"We traveled with heavy thoughts and a heightened awareness of the time's passage, again so keen on our haste that we startled a group of bizarre creatures, sickening in appearance with bulbous and far too visible brains - - - and a clearly aggressive nature. Their attacks were magical but of an unknown kind, perhaps particular to the Underdark, and Arrawyn and Boil felt the brunt of their force. Undaunted, unaffected, Dagal used his magic to defeat the odd creatures.

"We acquired another tattoo of strange Underdark magic. This one promised a life restored in the face of an untimely demise, just as one would catch a chick as it falls from the nest and ensconce it once more; safe, alive. My ability to step between places has proved less than reliable, so, although I accepted the tattoo, I greatly doubt its ability. It clings to my arm and catches the corner of my vision like a clawed shadow. Surely Boil does not feel so about his tattoo, proudly stretched across his pate like a mountain cat sunning itself on a rock. I resolved to ask him at some point during our next rest.

"The wind wailed intermittently, like the dead we have left in our wake, as we came to what we would later learn was the base of Glouroth's Chasm. To our eyes it was a debris-laden chamber with a sheer stone face and a heavy iron chime, which we did not ring in spite of great temptation (well, temptation to some of us). In our attempt to climb the chasm, we roused a clan of gargoyles who roosted further up the wall. The leader of the flight was a fearsome female of somewhat unusual and draconic heritage, and the gargoyles displayed excellence in their coordination of attacks and their maneuvers, a noticeable difference in those who born to the air and those who merely travel it.

"It was an interesting battle, for we had few perches on which to return fire, but we concluded it in our usual manner. The gargoyles surprised us by possessing quite a few magical items, including gloves imbuing the wearer with strength, little gems which explode in fiery bursts, a fan which summons a great wind, and a horn of pleasing tone, possessing some magical properties according to Dagal (the details of which elude me still). Boil amused himself and us by adorning himself, rugged Burglar and dungeoneer that he was, with copper, sapphires, and a golden tiara. I

laughed at the incongruous site, but in truth the dwarf seemed very happy about his wealth.

"I laughed, and it seemed like it had been an eternity since I last did so. What is an elf if not laughter in the wind, delight in the world, and time to appreciate it all? It is an even finer jest to be reminded by a stone-born rogue of a dwarf, a fine gift from our Burglar."

"Heartened and encouraged, we ascended the chasm, myself scouting ahead, confident that my speed would protect me long enough to warn my fellows. Thus when I came upon the dragon's lair, not that I knew it as such, I entered, cautiously but alone, at the behest of a deep, courteous, and exceedingly evil voice. It was less wisdom, I now think, than settling a question of courage. Joined then by my comrades, I felt emboldened to banter with this invisible creature, and learned very quickly that dragons value only their own words, their own treasure, and their own power, all demonstrated in succession for us, a final gift from the dragon Glouroth to his victims.

"Fighting lesser creatures is challenging on its own: each possesses skills, weapons, and powers which weave a different enough dance every time to keep a warrior on his toes until he can get within reach. Magic, like terrain, may prolong the fight or conclude it speedily, but the tempo of the fight is generally the same. Fighting a dragon is completely different, and if I knew then what I know now, we would have passed the lair in silence, secrecy; as always with these things, though, I did not and we did not.

"In the beginning we did not know it was a dragon attacking us, for the beast was endowed with great magic and had made itself invisible, rumbling taunts from the shadows of his lair. Dagal, however, saw through the eyes of Torm, his god, and was not fooled by this trick. Perhaps it was this awareness that shielded him from the awe inspired by the fearsome dragon's sudden appearance, to which the rest of us fell victim. We were all shaken, for the creature was huge and formed of lissome darkness: quick as a snake, strong as an oak, and as insubstantial as smoke in starlight.

"While the battle with the kraken remains discontinuous in my mind, I can recall every instant of the fight with the dragon, a clarity of hindsight I rue in comparison to my muddled and distracted thinking at the --- enough. No one is so skilled as to be useful all times and all circumstances; to have such a goal is a poison that seeps slowly into one's heart and destroys one's soul. My companions battled well and it is their fight I describe.

"The coal-dark dragon again exercised his magic, and where there had been one dragon suddenly there were six, clawing, biting, and baiting; but they were as ghosts, without form or substance, distractions from the very

real and deadly dragon, himself. Startled, Arrawyn dropped her bow - - - she actually dropped her bow! - - - as I would have dropped my weapons, had I held any, for the dragons appeared barely ten paces from us, trapping us against the cavern wall.

"Frowning in fierce concentration, Dagal dispelled the images, allowing the Burglar to go on a surprising and effective offensive. Lightning danced along the dragon's flank as Boil slashed it with his magical axe. This was surprising for the javelins I threw, those spelled to transform into bolts of lightning, died out before reaching their target, swallowed by the dragon's darkness. With another gesture, teeth bared in a feral grin, Dagal summoned the might of his god made substantial, a ghostly hand of strength, the very symbol of Torm, and set it to harry the shadow dragon.

"A curious thing then happened. Watching the dragon repeatedly bested by the might of Dagal's god, we felt our fear of the dragon dry up as the morning mist vanishes in the sun - - - burned away, I think, by the simple truth that we had not died horribly as the evil dragon promised. Inspired and encouraged, Arrawyn sent shot after shot into the struggling beast, and I saw Boil gripping his weapon with new determination.

"As faith is less often an overpowering wave than it is a steady undercurrent, the hand of Torm could only exist corporeal for a limited amount of time, and it vanished, its purpose well served. With the knowledge that our foe was sorely wounded, grounded, and dying, we closed on the dangerous shadow creature, intent on ending the battle. Growing frantic with the awareness of his impending mortality, the dragon played his final card and unleashed the darkness of its being, of its heart, and swallowed our light.

"I do not know if he intended to flee, heal, or retaliate, for Dagal left him no time to act. Empowered by Torm with great strength and sight to pierce the darkness, the cleric closed with the dragon and dealt its death blow. It died in its own darkness, and with its death the darkness died. Exhausted, we did not have the heart to celebrate, for this was an unintended distraction from our journey to Maerimydra; instead, we focused on healing the worst of our wounds.

"The first to recover was Arrawyn, who had sensibly plied her bow some distance from combat, especially after the shadow beast's first appearance. Seeing her picking through the dragon's impressive hoard, Boil perked up and trotted over to offer his professional opinion. Even to my untrained eyes, there was far too much treasure for us to be able to take all of it, in spite of the incredible capacity of our magical bags, although I knew the two would try. The gold and silver ran like a bizarre river, the staccato susurrus of which set my teeth on edge.

"Mixed in with the wealth were some curious spoils. Arrawyn found something like a tight-fitting suit of a strange stretchy material, like the skin of a creature that itself is alive, which once donned shifted to blend with Arrawyn's surroundings. It was a little hard on the eyes to look at her, especially indirectly, for part of my mind wanted to say 'stone pillar' where I knew the Sniper stood. More Underdark magic, I suppose, as were little crystals Boil was keen on carrying, which he said would help him at his craft.

"I wonder if this odd magic is the same as the phaeris Solom mentioned, or if it has any relation to my stepping between places. I am not a mage. Should we survive, this, though, I would have a few questions for the Archmage of Szith Morcane. Was this some trait of the Underdark, inherent in the air we breathe? Or was this simply some new form of magic, as 'harmless' as our potions? Would we, too, start - - - changing if we stay down here too long? Change, itself, is not to be feared; it is growth, adaptation, and it is life. All the same, I felt a flutter of uneasiness.

"Dagal sealed the dragon's lair with what treasure we could not carry. The entrance closed like a giant eye going to sleep after the nightmare reality of the shadow dragon, Glouroth, whose name this chasm bore. The echoes of the grinding stone faded into the ever-wailing wind, which I found an odd counterpoint to the rising optimism in my gut which said we might just make it to Maerimydra unscathed, if this was the worst the Underdark could do to us.

"After killing air, demonic krakens, and dragons of night, what more could worry us?"

Something Unwanted this way comes (Tim)

Somewhere ahead of you....

It begins with ranting, slips into a steeling gaze, and after 3 unlucky service males slip lifeless to the floor, an evil smirk passes over the chillingly beautiful face of the one on the throne.

Glancing to a glowing figure to the left, the matronly figure begins her soliloquy, "Yes, they have come farther than I have every expected, but perhaps now I can truly use them to advance the Great Coming. They have proven strong, perhaps I shall use that strength to rid myself of other rodents in my path. Perhaps even to break this seige - that would show a gesture of my good will to the 'people!'"

But first, I will test them. We shall see how truly strong they are. I shall give them no rest. I shall make them wish to turn back or better, join me." Mad laughter..... followed by a sigh.

I see you there waiting. - you will continue to wait, in silence if you know what is good for you. You shall get your revenge, human, this I promise you. Now begone, your presence offends my eyes.

And now to more interesting business," glancing at the 3 bodies laying in poisoned contortions at her feet, "how can I make you more useful...."
