

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™



SHADOWPLAQUE

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONSTM

SHADOWPLAGUE

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™ SHADOWPLAQUE

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Introduction

Any television writer worth his salt—and I assure you that John Rogers is worth sacks of the stuff—is intimately acquainted with the “writers room.” It is usually a dank conference room—ripe with the smell of take-out food, dry erase markers, and punishing deadlines—in which we who toil to entertain America generate the characters, stories, and scenes that make up the raw material for every dramatic hour that shows up on your screen week after week.

The writers room is a crucible. It is a place where you spend more time in the company of other hyper-articulate, highly intelligent, and desperate-for-attention social maladjusts than you might with your family.

The day-to-day of those lucky enough to do this job can best be described as competitive group therapy: the sharing of all of your stories, fears, and anxieties in the hope that they will be judged fit to become part of the show’s narrative. Being in the room requires patience, a love of yarn spinning, and a desire to create a shared universe: a willingness to fearlessly bring to a collective story the stuff of your own life.

That’s where *Dungeons & Dragons* comes in. For many writers in my generation (and I am a ground-level first edition player who can claim knowledge of Gygax’s primal work with the *Chainmail* RPG) and beyond, the gaming table—ripe with the smell of Red Pop, stale pizza, and impeding frost-giant-attacks—was our first exposure to the crucible of collective narrative storytelling.

Playing *Dungeons and Dragons* taught me patience with other people and their ideas. Every gaming session was an object lesson about pacing a story—knowing when to let things develop at a leisurely pace and when to stir my audience with extreme revelations and shocking destiny—and about when to insist on my way and when to let others run with the narrative ball.

Playing D&D also taught me how to handle the sheer mockery and ball-busting ridicule that comes with sitting in tight quarters with

a gang of hyper-articulate, highly intelligent, and desperate-for-attention social maladjusts. For example, after making the mistake of painting my first lead figure with glossy paint, I was mercilessly teased and forever saddled with the moniker “the disco cleric.” Believe me, sporting level-three leather armor around your ego when in a room full of snide contemporaries is **essential** for anyone who braves the writers room.

Every lesson I learned about surviving a room full of nerdy friends (and sometimes frenemies)—each trying to one-up the other with the best solution for a life-or-death random encounter with a beholder—has come back to help me in the writers room of every show on which I have worked. The ability to come up with a zinger like “I’d like to butter my initiative roll, but I have no modifier” doesn’t hurt either.

Let’s face it: the jocks and all their fellow barbarians may have learned to socialize in parties full of nubile cheerleaders, in vans full of pot smoke and cheap, illegally obtained beer, and in awkward, fumbling grope-out sessions in linen closets, but the geeks earned their social stripes fighting epic battles, navigating the darkness of booby-trapped caverns, interrogating the sullen denizens of the town tavern endemic to every module of D&D, and making life-or-death decisions in real-time while earning treasure and power beyond that of ordinary mortals...

...and guess what? The geek inherited the Earth.

I suspect that Mister Rogers and his conspirators know this all too well. It’s clear in every lovingly crafted page of the story. Where attempts at narrative epic fantasy set in the realms of D&D reek with faux Shakespearean language and annoying post-*Wheel of Time* huff and bluster, this book has all the elements of a great D&D campaign run by a bunch of geeks in the prime of their Monty Python-loving imaginations.

Rogers’ pacing is fast and frenetic. No protracted fellowship-forming, mead-drinking, Tom Bombadill

bulldada for this merry band of adventurers. This is *Dungeons & Dragons*, and that can only mean one thing: it starts in a tavern, the zombies attack in short order, and the story takes off like a magic missile.

As pencilled by the masterful Andrea Di Vito, the adventures of Adric, Khal, Varis, Tisha, and Bree feel like the expertly wrought-and-drawn distillation of the best campaign you never played. The action never stops, the stakes keep getting higher, and the characters feel like D&D archetypes as opposed to someone’s recycling of the dregs of a dozen of Tolkien’s less-able acolytes.

Best of all, the characters **talk** like expert players around a gaming table. The ultimate triumph in these pages is Rogers and Di Vito’s creation of a group of comrades-in-arms that at once look and sound true to their world while still coming across like the cast of an awesome present-day action film. No fusty thees-and-thous, hark-lo-and-forsooth blithering in these pages, just the expertly crafted patter of people who truly inhabit this fantastic realm: where having to get your ass handed to you by an orc to buy your friends time to find a wily shape shifter is all in a day’s work.

This book is—as one of its characters might say—“dwarven craftsmanship,” and I say that in the best possible way.

So order yourself some cardboardy pizza, bust out the Red Pop and your own personal disco cleric, and put yourself in the hands of an expert Dungeon Master... because you are about to join a level 7 party including a human fighter, halfling thief, paladin dwarf, elven scout, and a tiefling magic user...

...and you’re in the town tavern, minding your own business... but the ground begins to rumble...

...and the adventure begins...

Javier Grillo-Marxuach
May 7, 2011



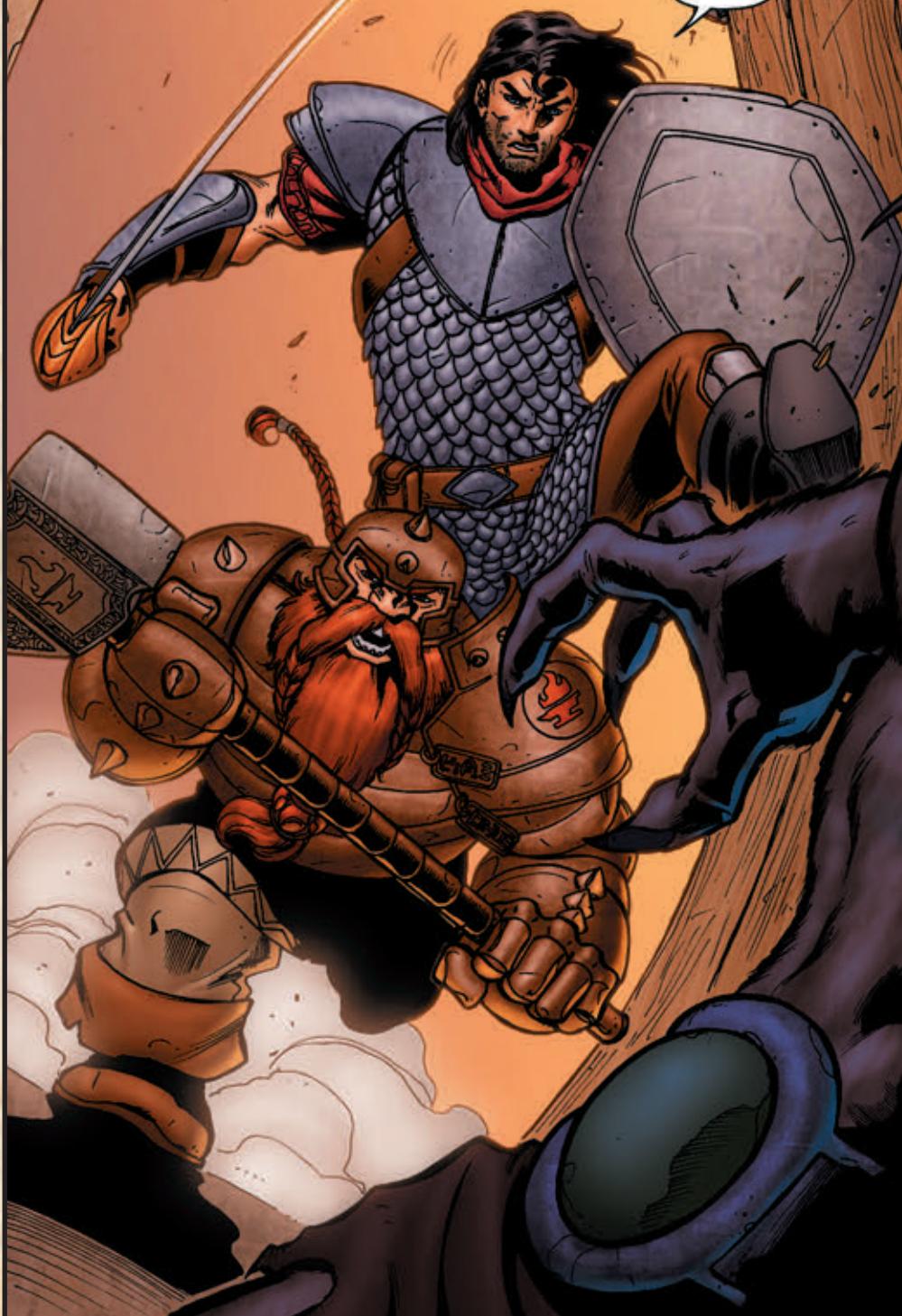
Art by Wayne Reynolds



KRASH

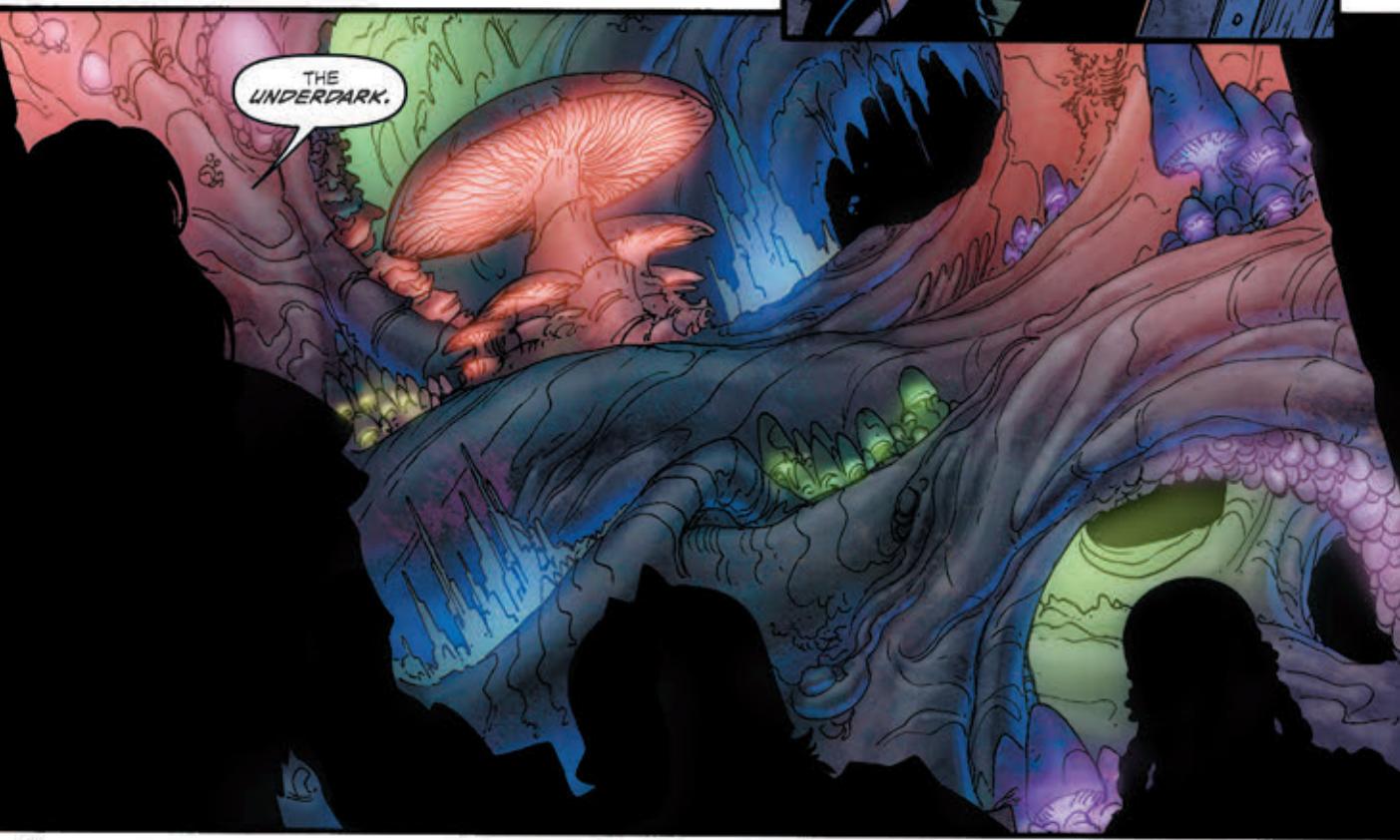
THIS WAY!
WE CAN
CATCH THEM
IF WE-

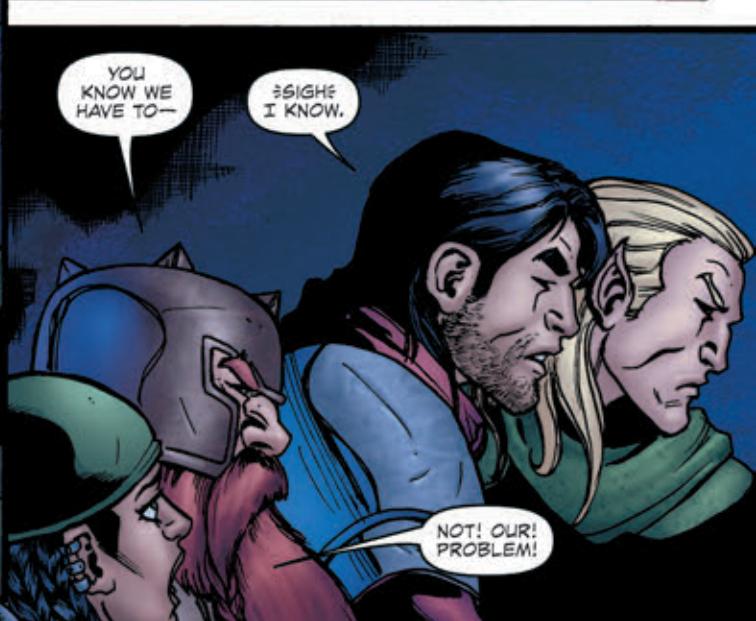
-OH, HERE
THEY ARE.
GREAT.

























Art by Tyler Walpole



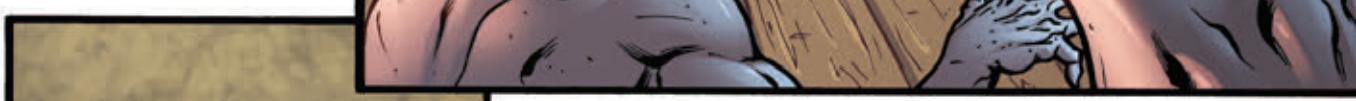


THE DAY STARTED FINE ENOUGH. KHAL GOT A LETTER.



AND SUDDENLY, IT WAS A BAD DAY.







IN THE NAME
OF THE LORD
WARDEN—

—HOLD!



WHAT
ZOMBIES?

AAAND SUDDENLY, IT
WAS A VERY BAD DAY.









IT'S
COPERNICUS
JINX.

I'M HORRIFIED
TO HEAR OF THIS
UNSPEAKABLE
TRAGEDY.

NOW LET
ME AT THAT
CORPSE.

DO NOT DO
THIS ON MY
TABLE.

SOON BEGIN,
SOONEST
DONE.

BREE,
DAGGER.

THANK
YOU.

COPERNICUS JINX. WIZARD. MY
COMMANDING OFFICER IN THE LAST
BORDER WAR. HE'S FOND OF ME.

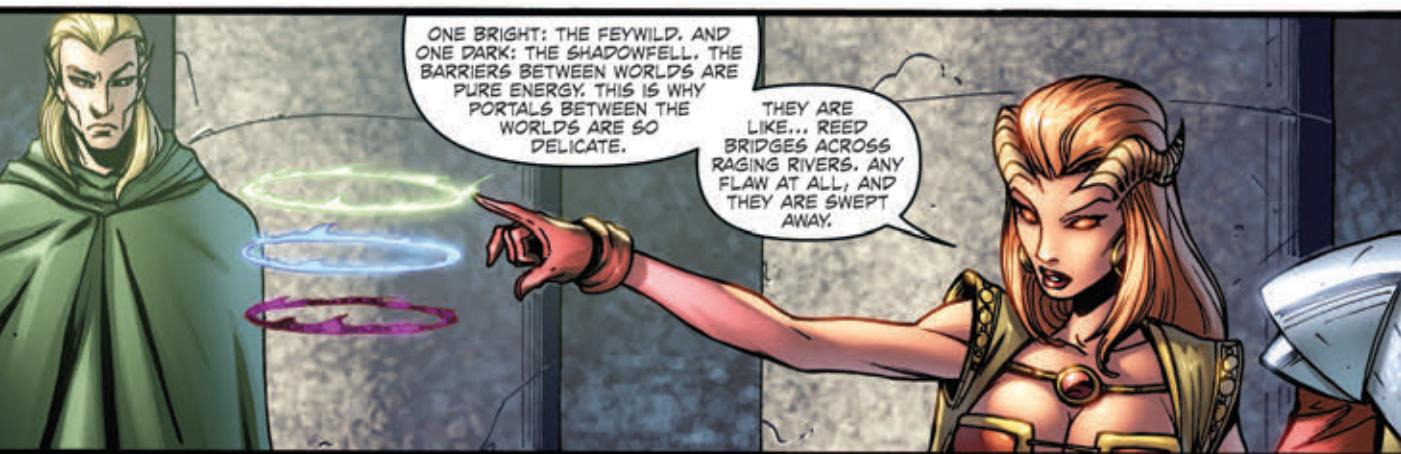
MY LORD, I
SENSED A MAGICAL
DISTURBANCE EARLIER IN
THE DAY. SOMETHING
DARK. I BELIEVE WE MAY
BE TRYING TO SOLVE
THE SAME MYSTERY.

ALLOW ME
TO GET TO THE
HEART OF THE
MATTER.

SLISH
SLISH
SHLURP

THIS IS A
TERRIBLE THING.

















HARDTACK.
LOTS OF MOLASSES.
SMUGGLER'S CAVE.

AKH-ARASH
HYDOLI
TREBURA MA
KHUTAR—

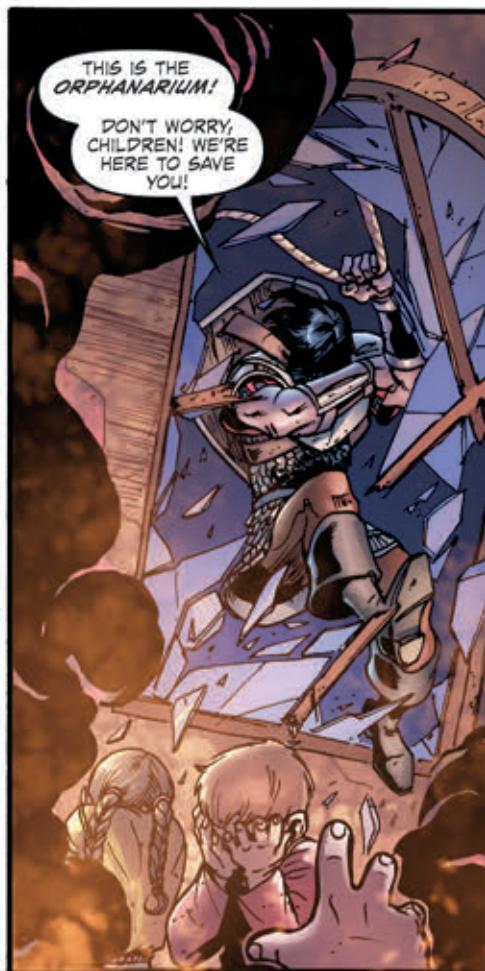
SHHH. HEAR
THAT?

KTHALA FTAGHN
TRESSURA MA
KHUTAR VENOS IN
CORIUM!

KHAL,
WHAT IS
IT?

THAT SPHERE
BE ADAMANITE AND
DIAMOND, BONDED IN
MAGICS FAR BEYOND
HUMANS OR ELVES.
FLAWLESS,
INDESTRUCTIBLE.

DWARVEN
WORK.





NOW YOU'RE ALL CAUGHT UP.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, THEY'RE ORPHAN ZOMBIES...

...SO NOBODY'S GONNA MISS 'EM.

RRRRRRRRRRRUMMBBLE

YOU FEEL THAT?

I HEAR IT. IT SOUNDS LIKE, LIKE—

JUST IN TIME.

JUST IN TIME FOR OUR LUCKY BREAK.

KA-
BOOM





Art by Tyler Walpole



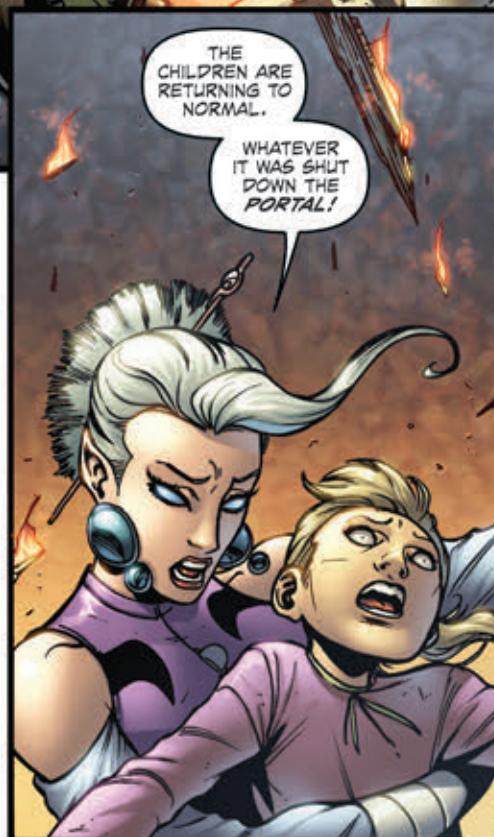
NO, SERIOUSLY, THIS
WAS THE LUCKY BREAK.

CHAPTER

3

KRAKA
THOOM





...FELL'S FIVE MAKES
ITS OWN LUCK.

ABOMINATION!

KHAL!
NO!

THIRTY SECONDS EARLIER.

AGH! FOOL! DO
NOT DISTURB THE
GATHERING!

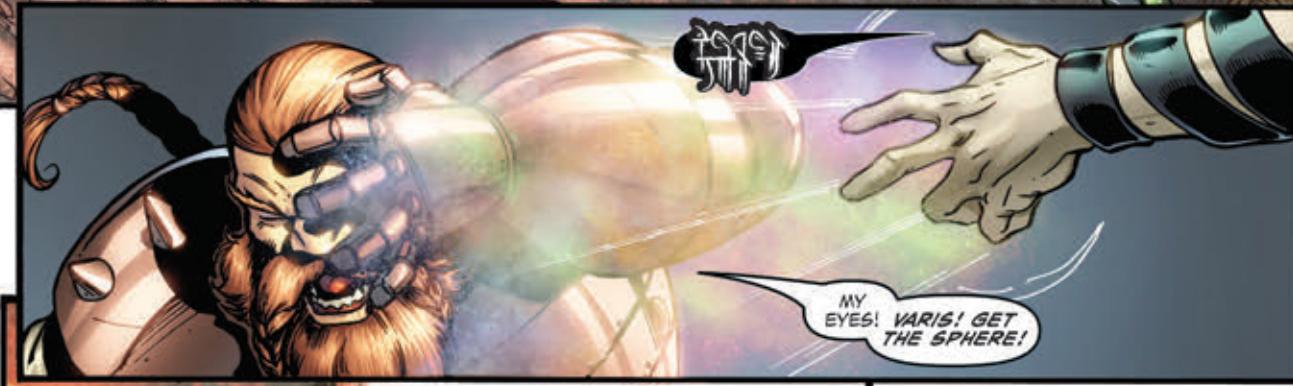
SWOOSH

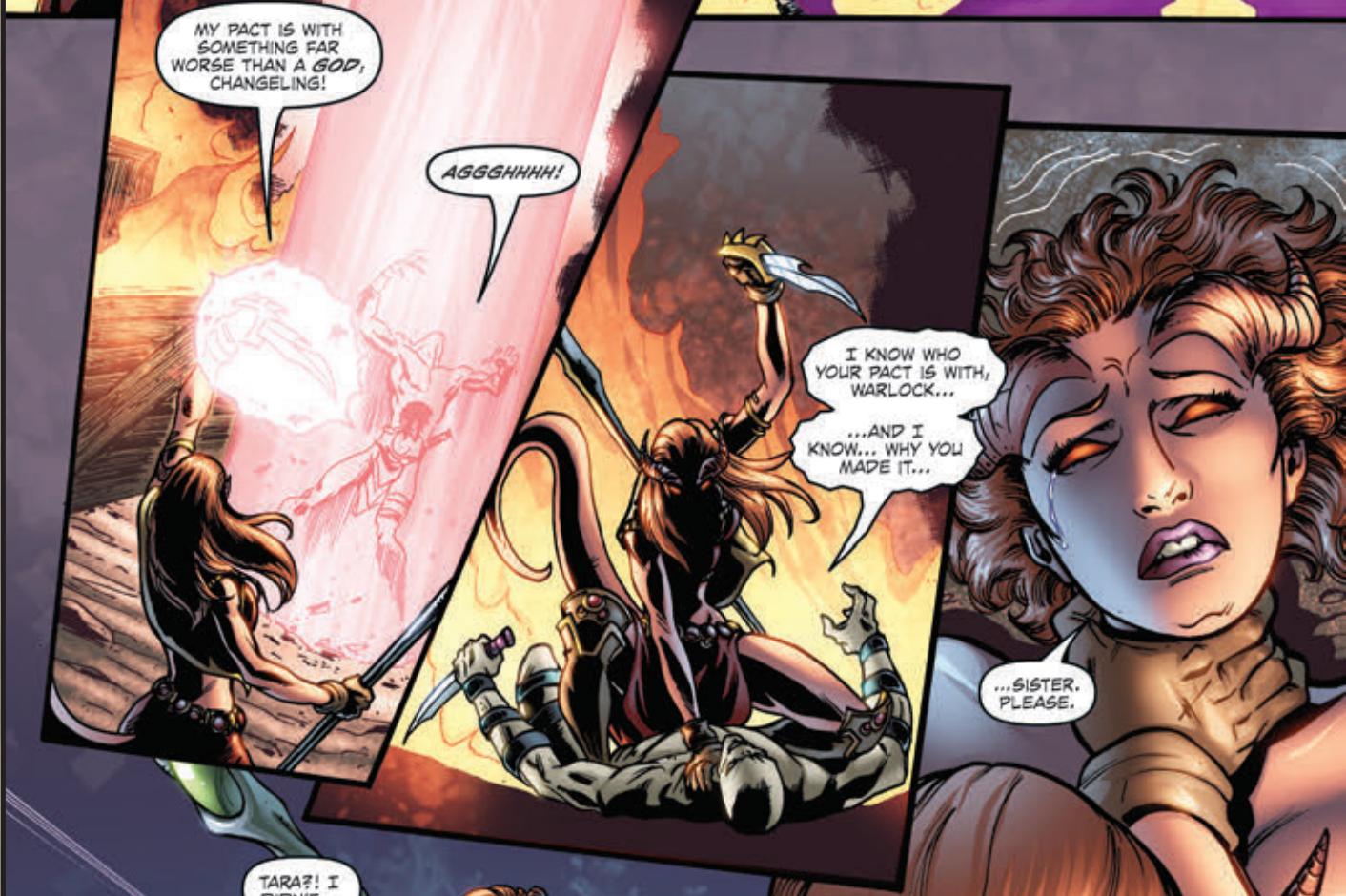
WHO ARE
YOU TO USE
FORBIDDEN
MAGICKS?!

I AM
WHOEVER MY
DARK LORD
DEMANDS ME
TO BE.

THUNK

GAH!













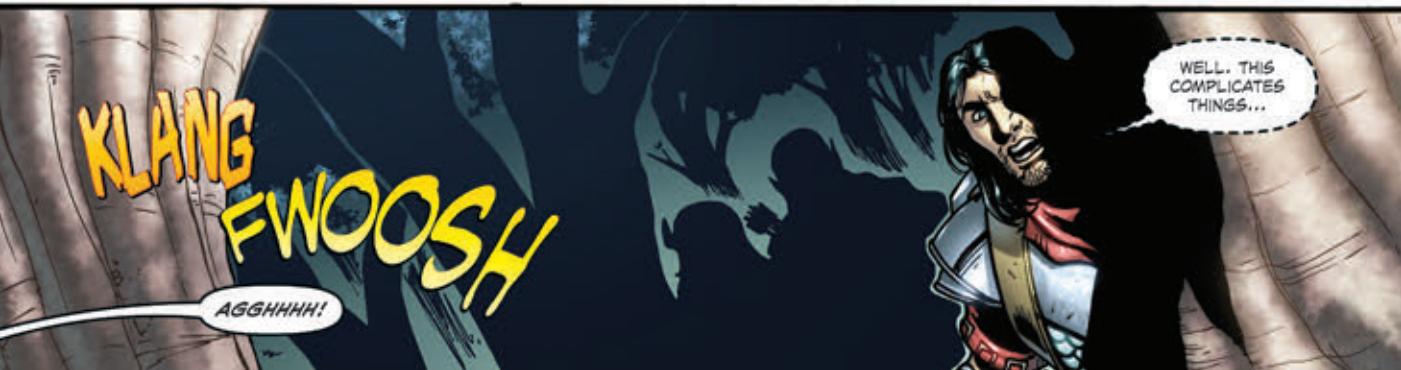
YOU'RE ALIVE! HOW UNEXPECTED!

YOU ALMOST SOUND HAPPY.









...ORCS, TWO DOZEN OF 'EM.

"NOT SCAVENGERS, EITHER.
THAT'S A CAPTAIN AND ONE OF
THEIR WEIRD PRIESTS. LOOKS
LIKE A UNIT FROM THE LAST WAR
HELD TOGETHER AS MERCS."





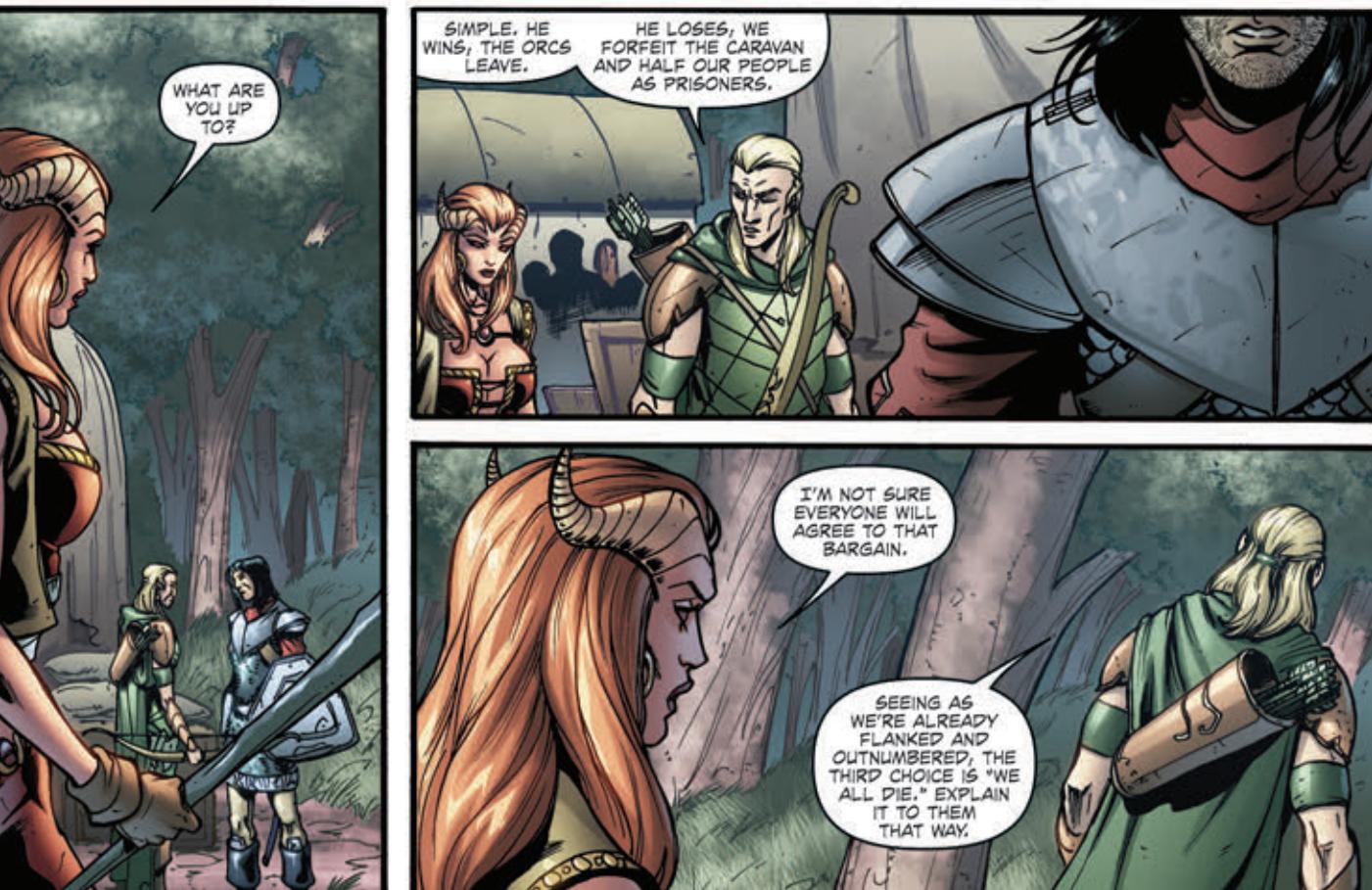


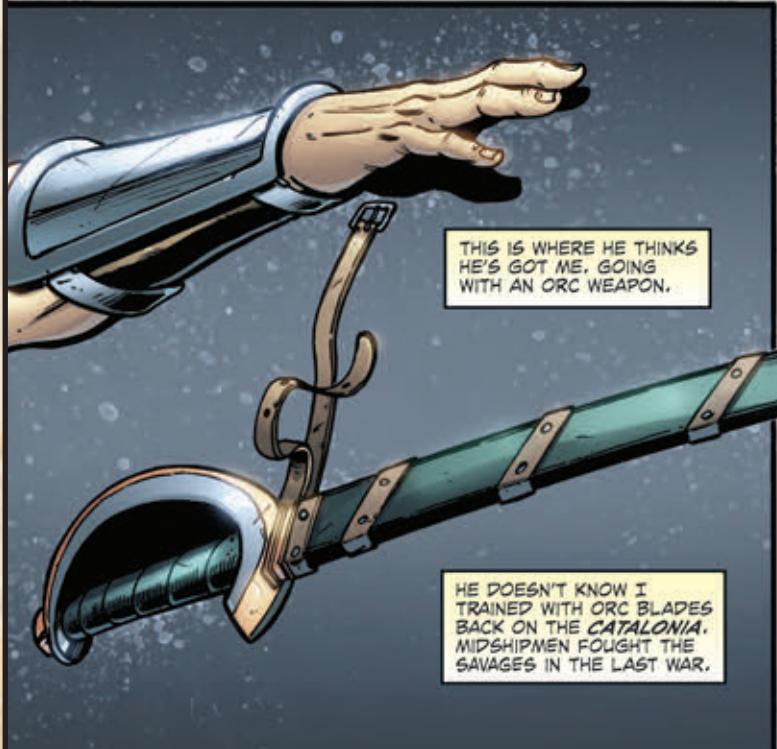
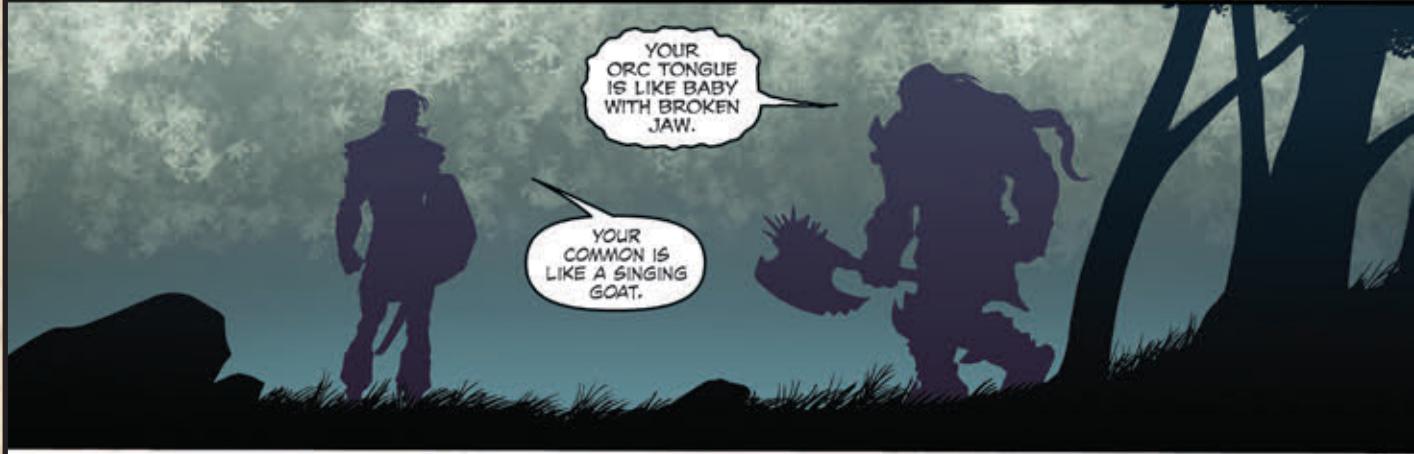












WHAT? A ROCK
PICK? ROCK HAMMER?
A ROCK'S NOT A
WEAPON—



NOT GONNA LIE TO YOU.

THIS GUY IS VERY TALENTED WITH A ROCK.







Art by Tyler Walpole



YEAH, HE'S GOING
TO KILL ME.

BECAUSE I HAVE
TWO PROBLEMS.



FIRST: HE'S BIGGER AND STRONGER. THE LONGER THE FIGHT, THE BETTER HIS ODDS.

SECOND: I'M TRYING TO MAKE THE FIGHT GO LONGER. SO, YEAH.



I NEED TO BUY VARIS TIME TO GET HIS JOB DONE...



...AND I TRUST THAT ORC PRIEST ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS THAN I TRUST BREE.



GET READY. WHEN GRUHN WINS, WE STRIKE FOR VICTORY.

IF HE FALLS, WE ALSO STRIKE, FOR VENGEANCE.



IS IT ME, OR IS ADRIC HOLDING BACK?

HE'S TOYING WITH THE ORC!

HIS LIFE REALLY IS A SERIES OF VERY BAD PLANS, ISN'T IT?



GRUHN
SQUEEZE UNTIL
EYES POP!

EYE POP
ALWAYS MEAN
FIGHT OVER!

GAHHHHHHHH



...THE TOTALLY UNEXPECTED.



GAHH! WHY?
GAHHHH!



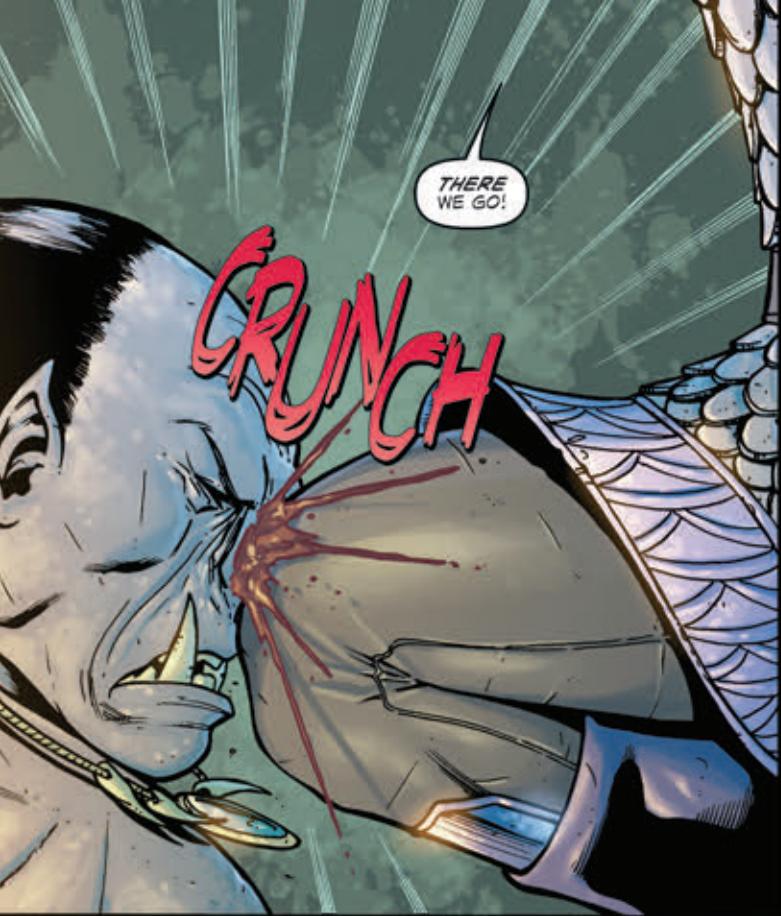
THAT NOT
RIGHT.



VERY, BAD,
PLANS.



OFF-BALANCE,
I'VE GOT ONE
SHOT AT THIS...





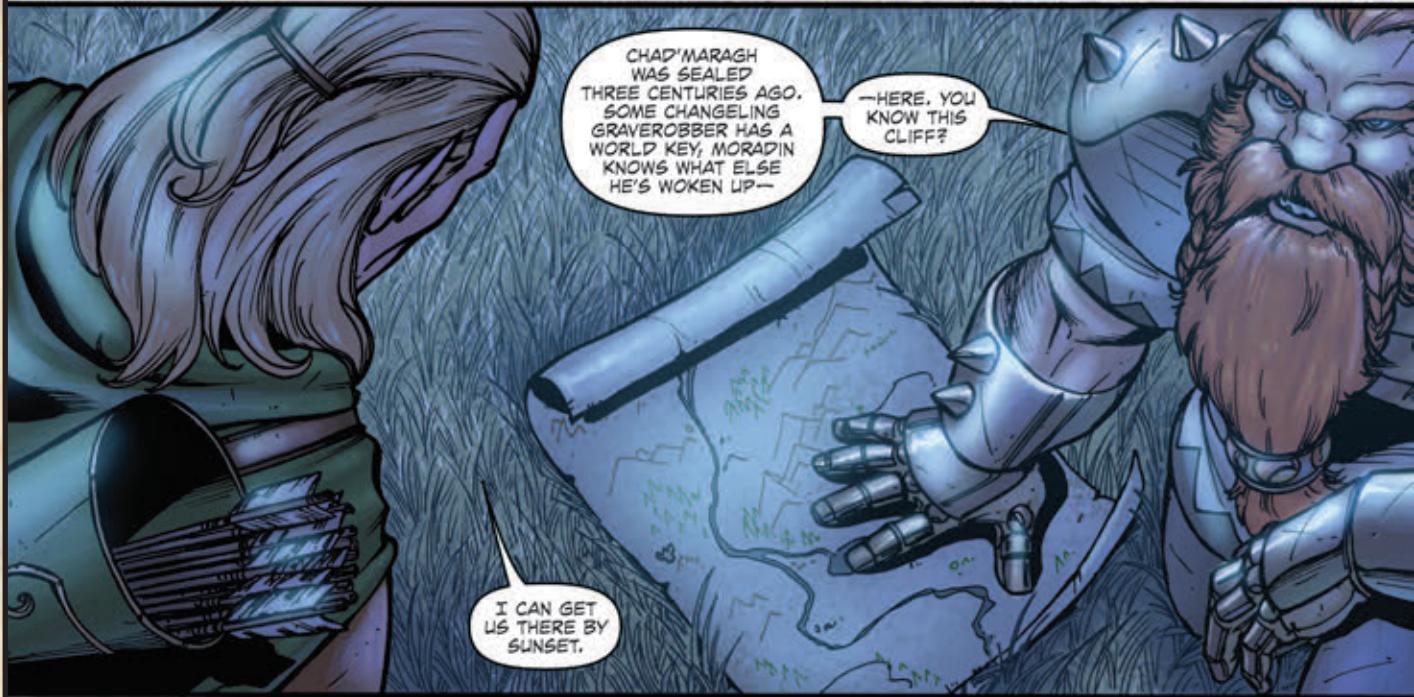


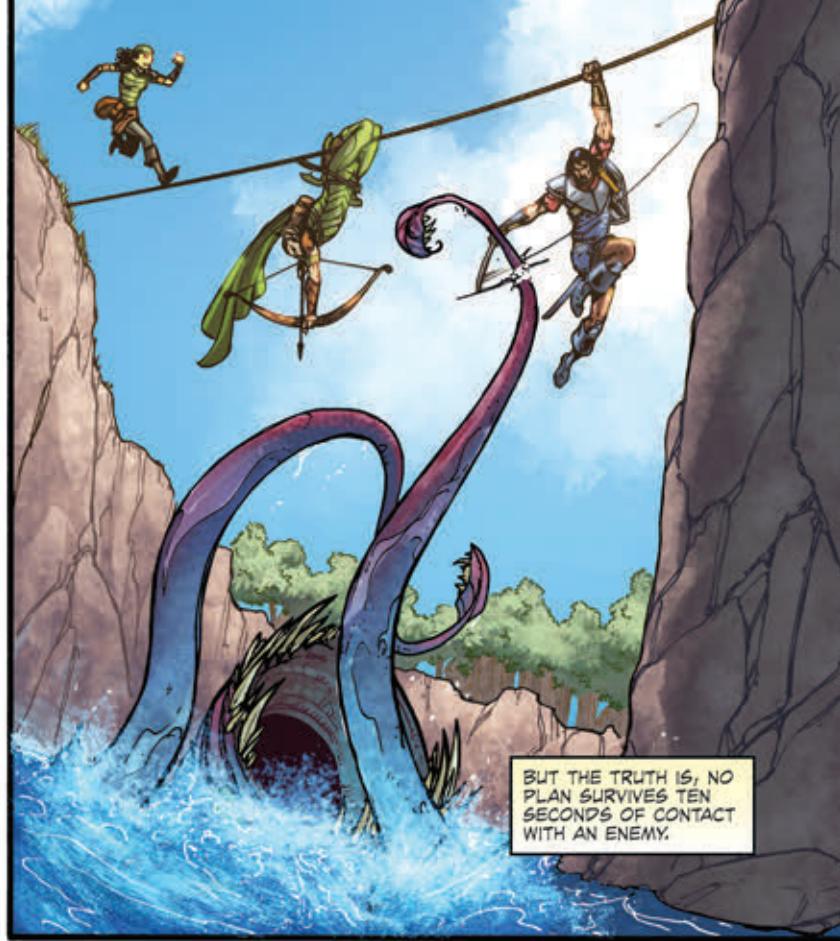














"—BREE IS GOING TO WANT TO KNOW WHERE TO CHECK FOR TRAPS."

EYES SHARP.
BEEN AN HOUR SINCE
VARIS CHASED THE
GUARD OFF, WITH NO
SIGN, SO HE'S PROBABLY
RIGHT ABOUT THE
REINFORCEMENTS.

MAYBE.

I'M GOING
TO GO WITH
"PROBABLY."
IT CHEERS
ME UP.

ANYTHING
ELSE WE NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT
THIS CHAD'MARAGH
PLACE, KHAL?

THERE IS A
RUMOR. INSTEAD OF
PUTTING HIS WORST
MURDERERS TO DEATH,
THE KING SENT THEM
HERE, TO BUILD THE
TRAPS FOR THE
DARK FORGE.

SO YOU'RE
TELLING ME THIS
MURDER FACTORY
FOR MAGIC MURDER
TOOLS IS FILLED WITH
MURDER TRAPS MADE
BY INSANE DWARVEN
MURDERERS.

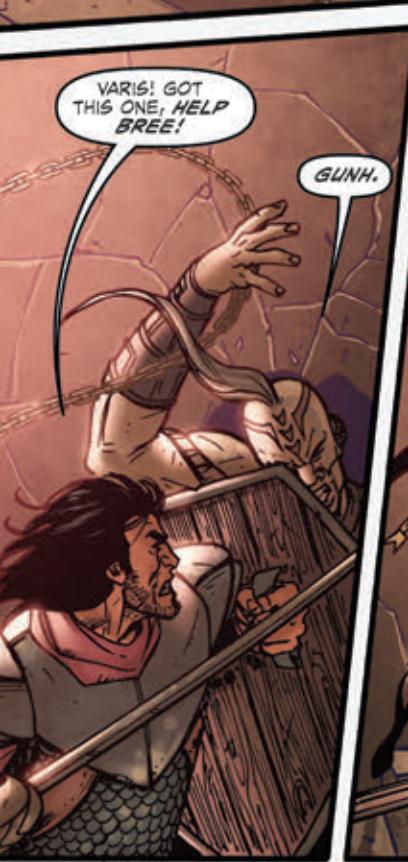
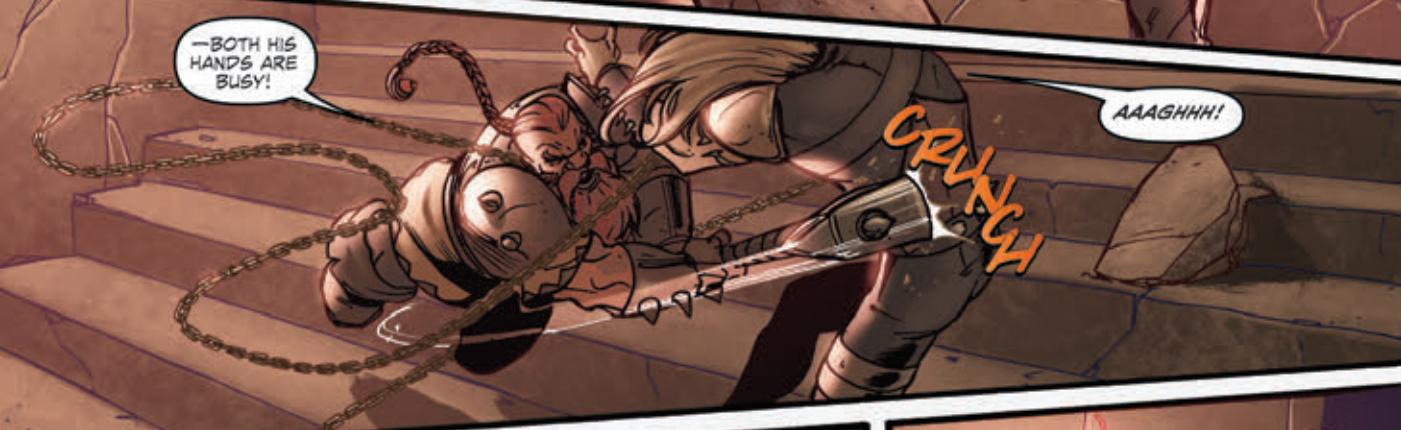
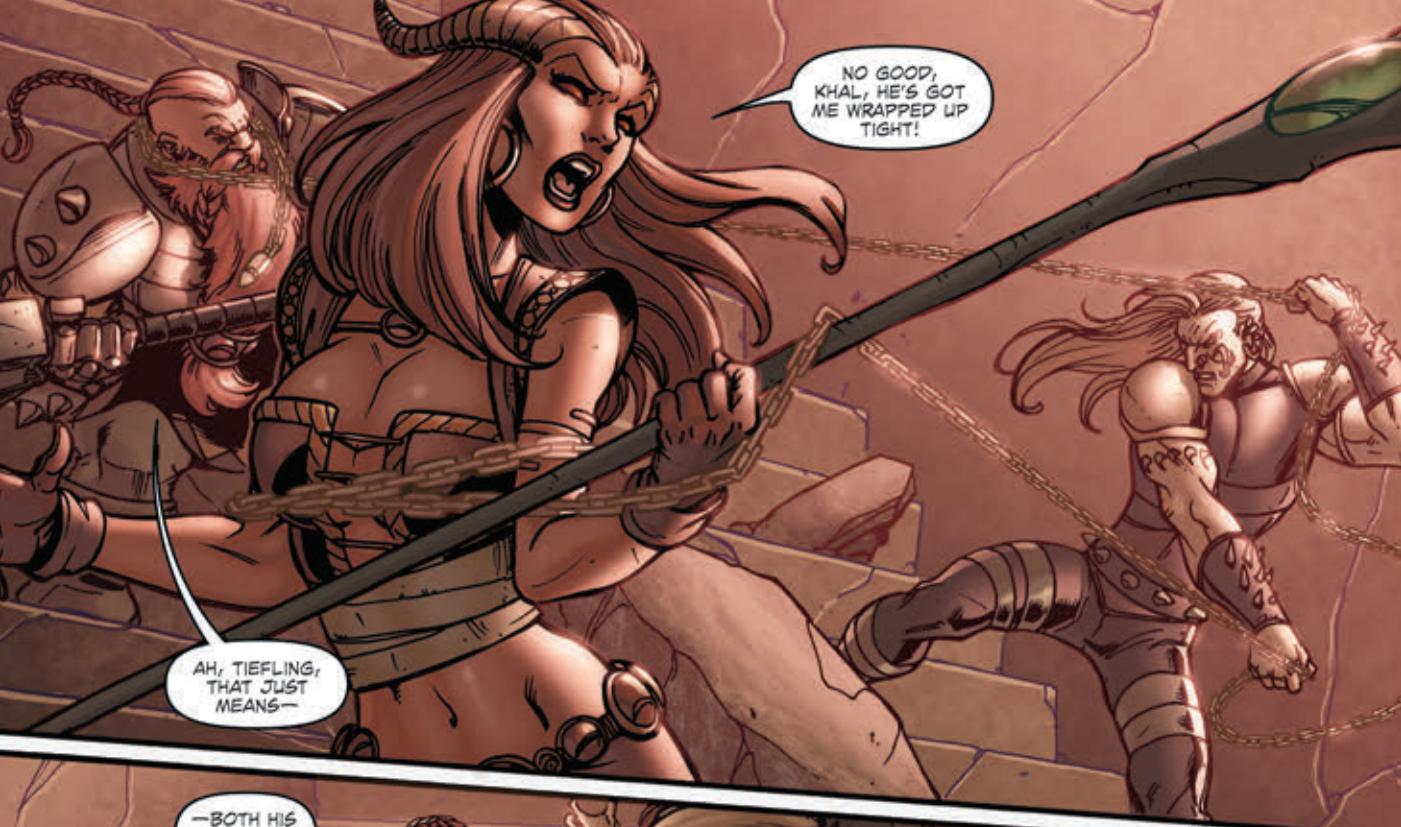
WELL,
"INSANE"—

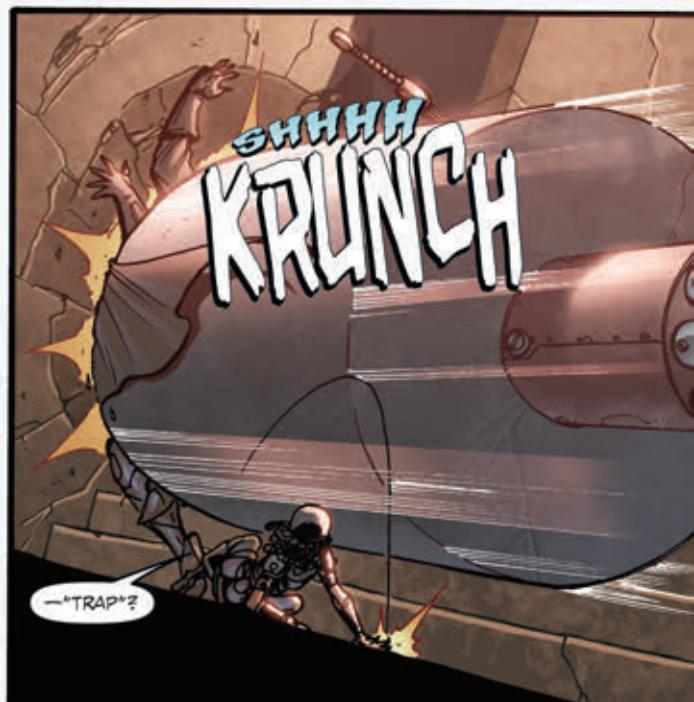
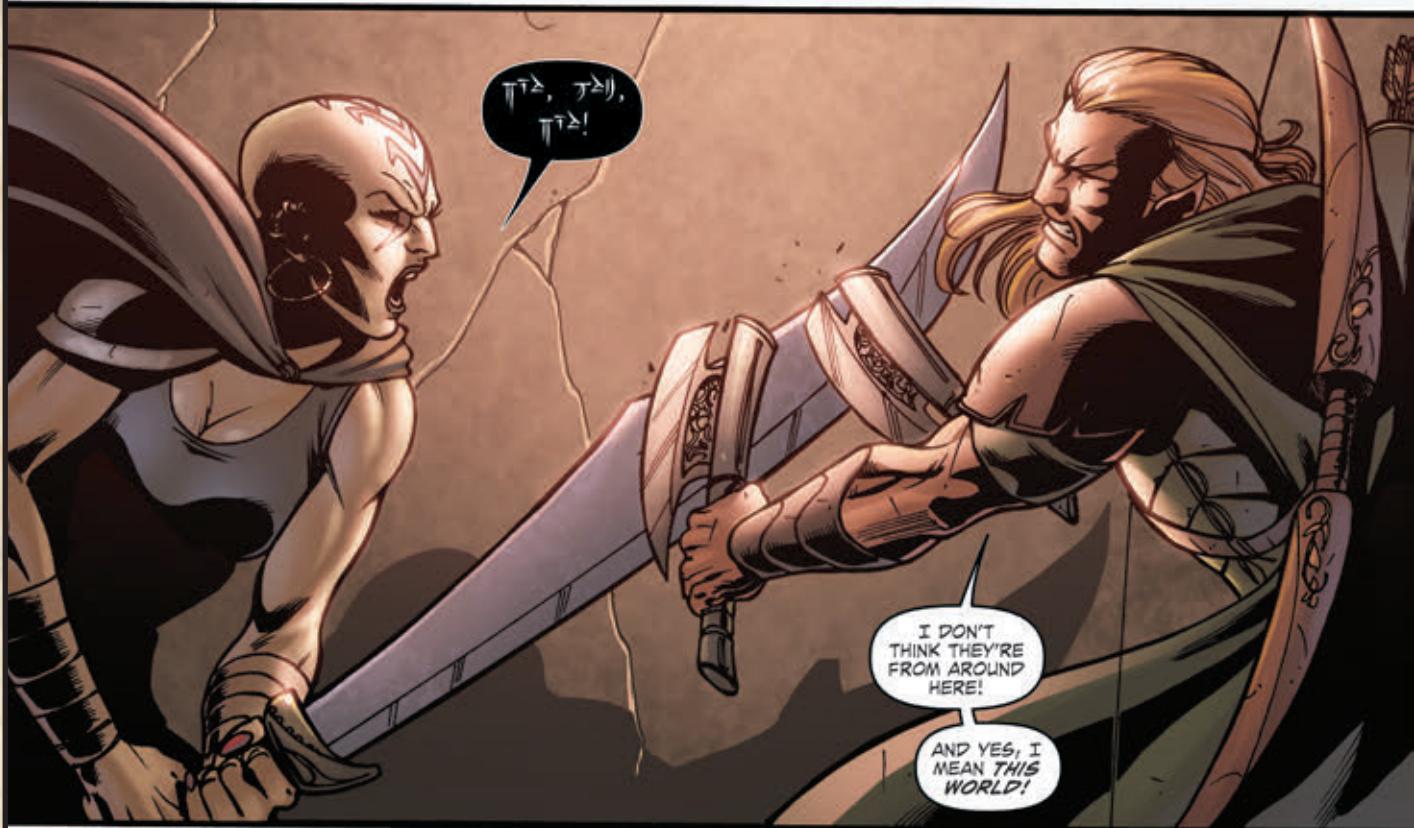
KILLED OTHERS
FOR NO GOOD
REASON.

AH, YES
THEN.
"INSANE."

—BREE IS GOING TO
WANT TO KNOW WHERE
TO CHECK FOR TRAPS.











WELL, THIS CAN'T
GET MUCH WORSE.

CATCHY PHRASE FOR
THE TOMBSTONE.







Art by Tyler Walpole



THERE IS **ONE** GOOD THING
ABOUT FIGHTING IN A RAPIDLY
FLOODING DWARVEN DEATHTRAP...

...MAYBE THE OTHER GUYS
CAN'T SWIM? I DON'T
KNOW, I'M REACHING HERE.







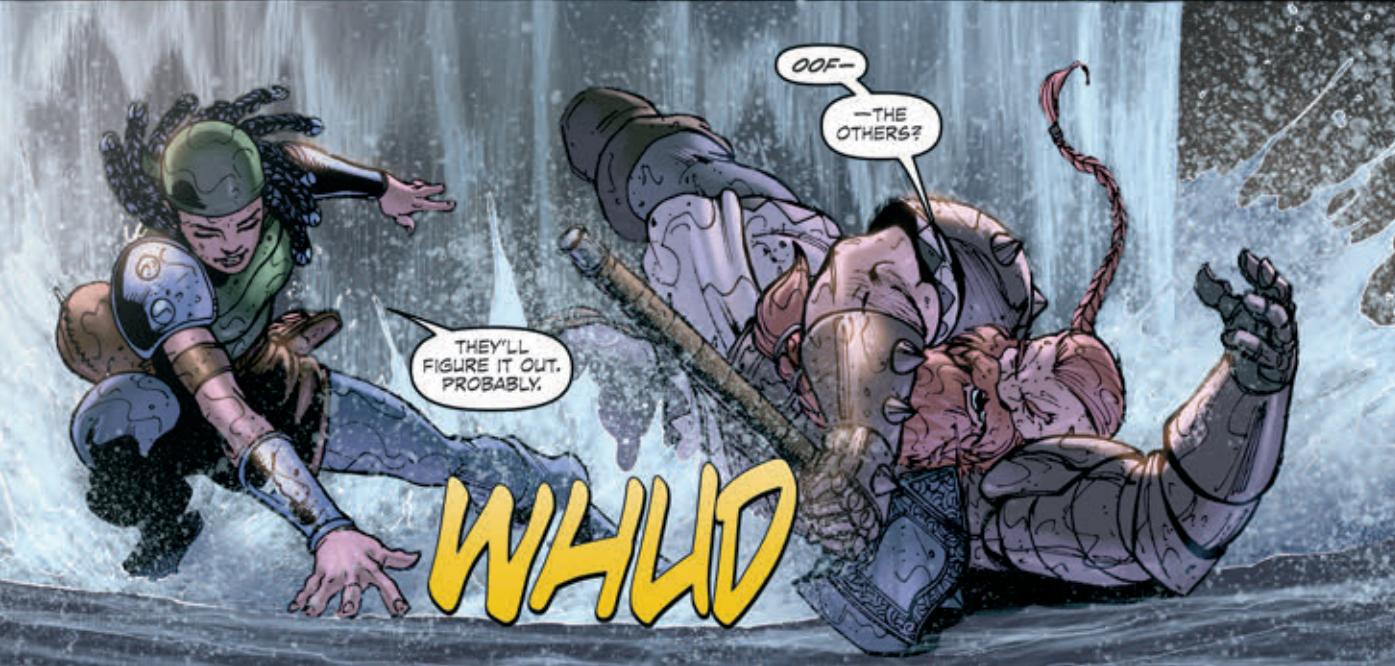


THOOM
THOOM

THOOM
THOOM
KKKKCCCCRR



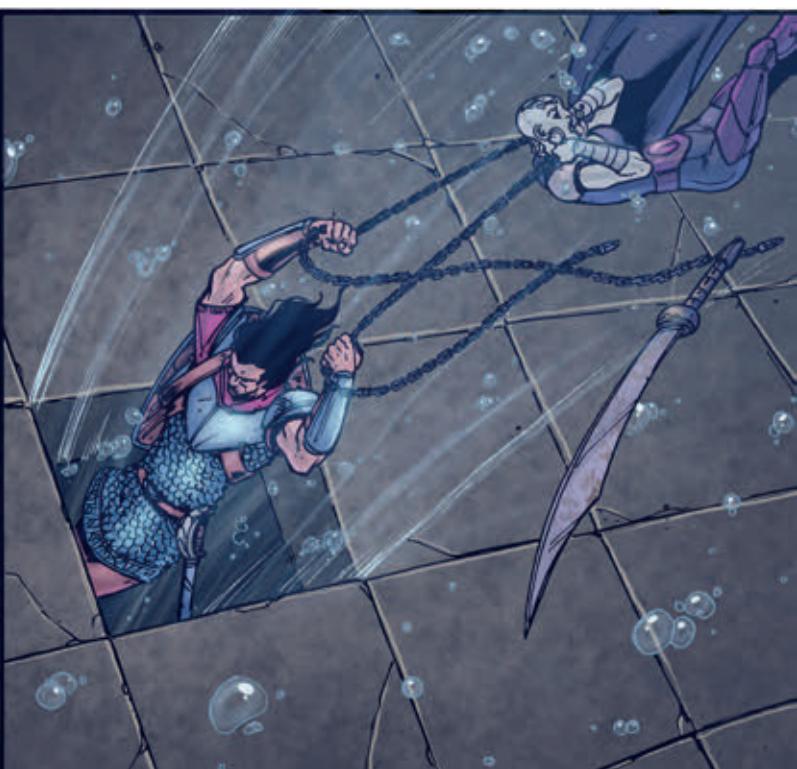
YEEE-
HAAA!



THEY'LL
FIGURE IT OUT.
PROBABLY.

OOF-
—THE
OTHERS?

WAUD









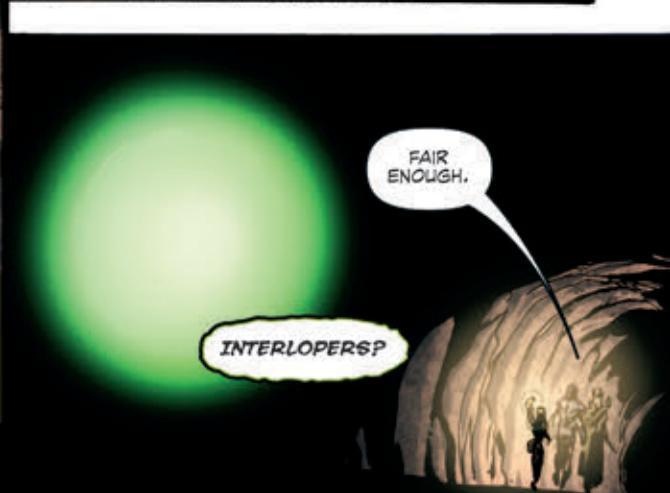






KLING
KLANG
FZZZT











MY PEOPLE MADE A DEAL WITH DEVILS AGES AGO TO WIN A WAR. WE LOST THE WAR, LOST OUR EMPIRE, AND GAINED OUR VISAGE.



"MY PARENTS DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO FINDING THE KNOWLEDGE WE LOST IN THAT WAR. I HELPED THEM FROM THE DAY I COULD WALK.

"LIFE IN THE BOOKS MADE THEM SO HAPPY.



"MY LITTLE SISTER, TARA, TURNED THOSE STUDIES INTO AN ART. SHE BECAME A WIZARD. I STAYED IN THE BOOKS WITH MY PARENTS...

"...UNTIL THE DAY THEY DIED.



KRAKA-THOOM

"IN A FLASH OF LIGHTNING, I GOT A GLIMPSE OF THE THIEF WHO'D KILLED THEM.

"ALL TO STEAL A SINGLE BOOK. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT WAS IN IT."

















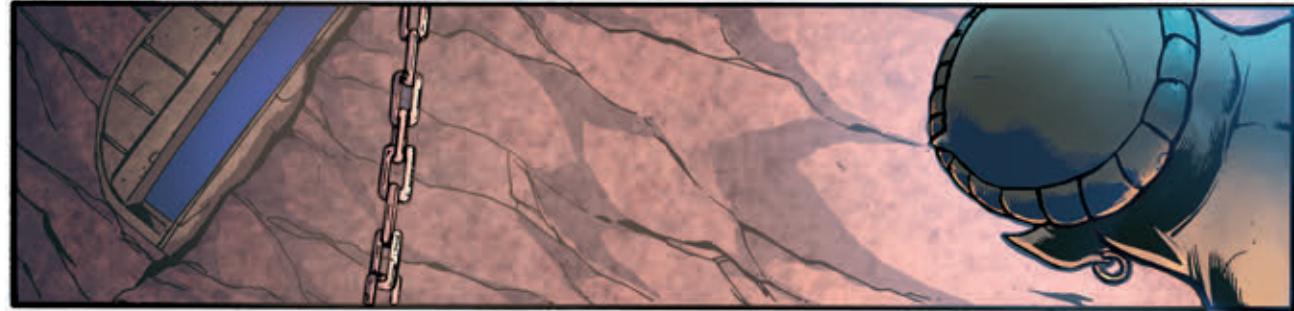
Art by Tyler Walpole



YOU KNOW, WHEN FACING AN INVASION FROM NOT ONE BUT TWO MYSTICAL PARALLEL DIMENSIONS...

...MY ABILITY TO OCCASIONALLY KILL OTHER PEOPLE WITH A BIT OF SHARP STEEL IS PROBABLY NOT ENOUGH TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.



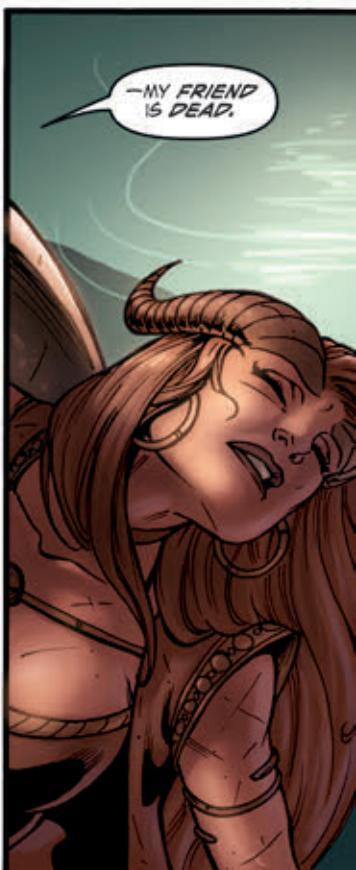
















THE BURNING
HEART OF
CHAD'MARAGH.
MOLTEN ROCK FROM
THE WORLD'S
CENTER IS ITS
BLOOD.

BOUND FIRE
ELEMENTALS ARE
ITS BREATH.

I WANT IT
TO EXPLODE.

IT IS IN A
CONSTANT STATE
OF NEAR-EXPLOSION.
THAT SHOULD NOT
BE HARD.

BREE,
YOU'RE GOING
TO—

NO,
NO WAY.
UN-UNH.

—ESCAPE AND
WARN THE LORD
WARDEN.

STRAIGHT TO
FALLCREST!

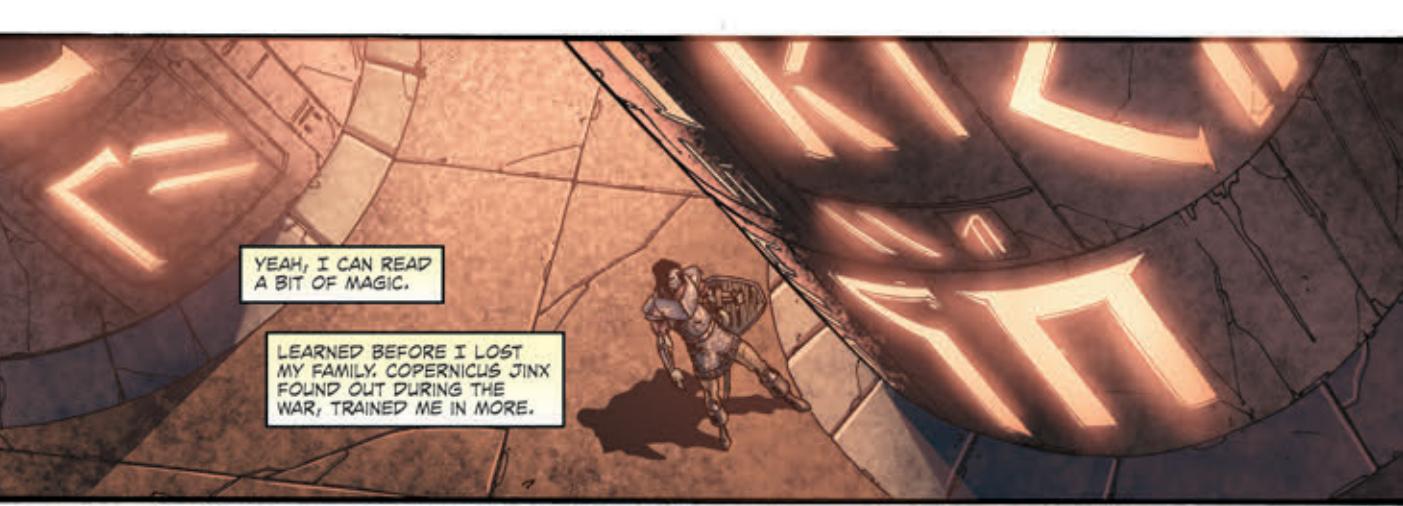
CAN'T
HEAR YOU!
BUSY
FOLLOWING
ORDERS!











YEAH, I CAN READ A BIT OF MAGIC.

LEARNED BEFORE I LOST MY FAMILY. COPERNICUS JINX FOUND OUT DURING THE WAR, TRAINED ME IN MORE.



KSSH-AFF

I KNOW JUST ENOUGH TO BLOW THINGS UP.

HE WAS GOING TO SEND ME ON A SUICIDE MISSION.



WHICH IS WHY HE TRAINED ME.



SOUNDS COLD, BUT TO BE FAIR...

KRACK

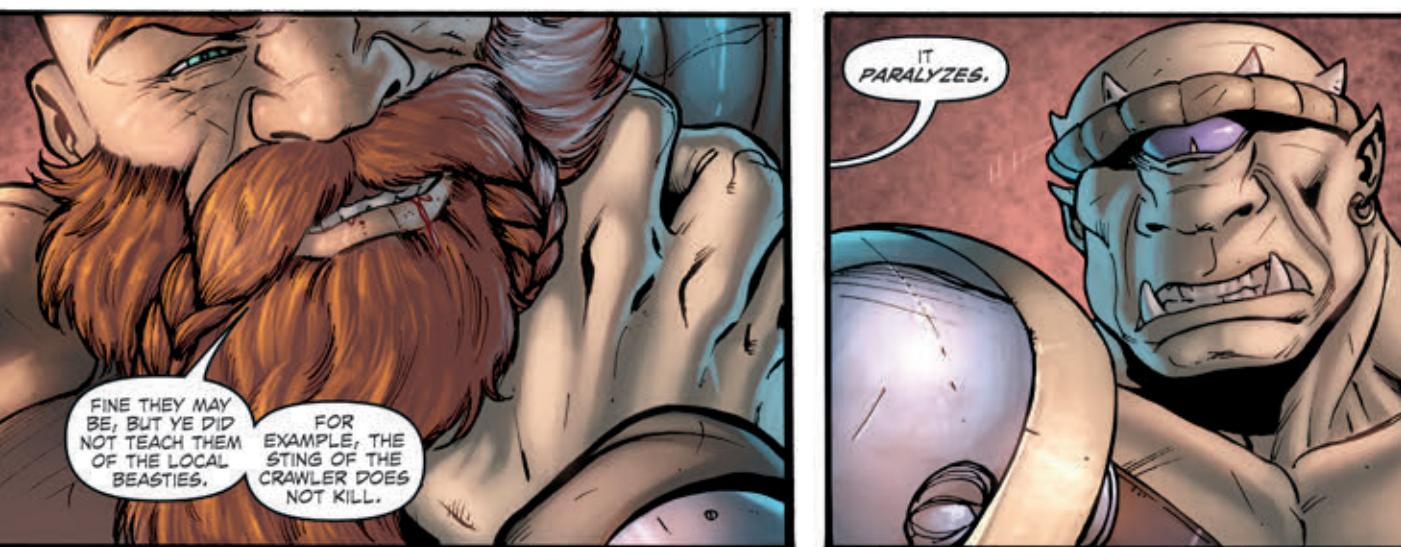


STIMISH TSCP

MY WHOLE LIFE'S A SUICIDE MISSION.

...I'M AN ADVENTURER.

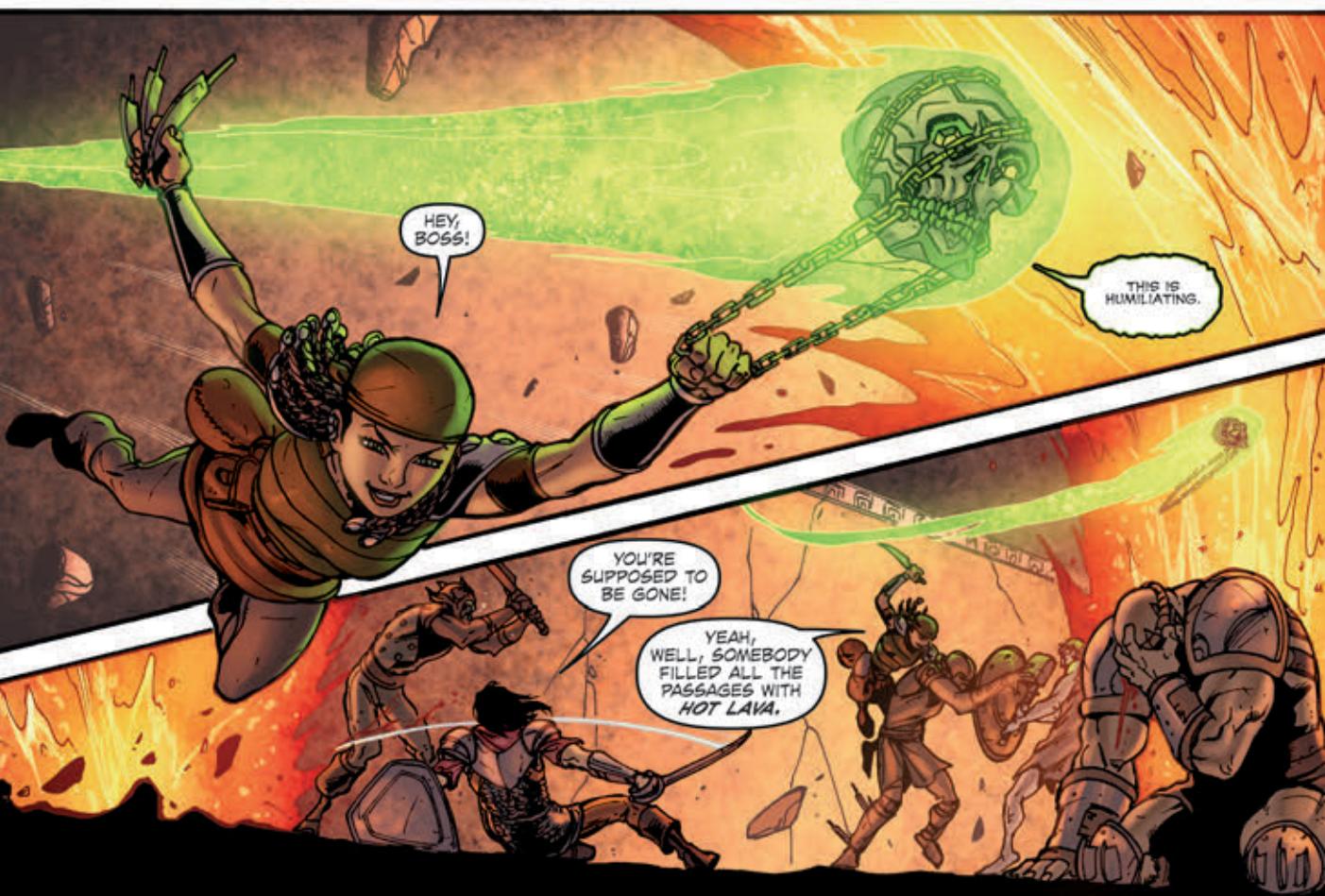
















LIKE I SAID, MY TALENT WITH A SWORD WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

-WE WILL BE CAST INTO THE VOID!

BUT MY TALENT AT APOCALYPTIC SCREW-UPS TURNED OUT TO BE JUST THE THING.

TIME BENDS UPON ITSELF!
FLASHBACKS! ANCIENT CITIES!
WET DWARVES! EXPEND A
DAILY POWER TO SEE IT ALL
IN THE NEXT VOLUME!

Art by Paul Renaud



DUNGEONS & DRAGONSTM

Comic & Game Adventure

Bad Day

by John Rogers, Andrea Di Vito, and Bill Slavicsek



The tavern is alive with drinks shared and talk of adventure. A strange noise emanates from under the floorboards, like giant scurrying rats. Suddenly, zombie-like creatures burst through the floor, sending patrons in all directions. But will you stand and fight?

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Comic and Game Adventure

Bad Day

by Bill Slavicsek

Cartography by Jonathan Roberts----

Introduction

The new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS comic follows the adventures of Adric and his companions from the town of Fallcrest and into the surrounding countryside of the Nentir Vale and beyond. In Issue #0, they followed gnolls into the Underdark and had to confront a black dragon. And that was just the beginning for the group!

In Issue #1, Adric and his band are having a really Bad Day. It's not just run-of-the-mill bad. It's Epic Bad. We've replicated three of the pivotal scenes in the story in the following three DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game encounters. You can use these as the foundation of a longer adventure of your own creation, or you can simply play the three encounters as a short delve that can be used to start off a really bad day for your own band of adventurers.

While Adric and his companions weigh in at the mid-to-high portion of the heroic tier of play, we've decided to set these encounters at the lower end of the scale, making them perfect for 1st- or 2nd-level adventurers. You can always scale up the encounters if you want to use them to challenge higher-level characters. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the *Dungeon Master's Kit* provide guidelines for adjusting the level of encounters.

Adventure Background

These encounters take place in the town of Fallcrest, in the Nentir Vale, as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the *Dungeon Master's Kit*. You can set it in any town or city in your campaign.

As the adventurers relax between quests at their favorite tavern (in this case, the Staggered Goat), they suddenly get drawn into the middle of strange occurrences that build and build until they're having a really bad day.

Make sure that these encounters take place in a location that the adventurers are familiar with and where they are well known. It doesn't quite work the same if they are anonymous mercenaries just passing through when things start to go bad.

Getting Started

Dungeon Masters need a copy of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game rules, which you can find in either the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set or the *Dungeon Master's Kit*. Players need a copy of *Heroes of the Fallen Lands* and a character sheet to make characters to use in the adventure.

Once you're ready to begin, check out "Encounter

1: They Came From Beneath the Goat" to get started. And wish your adventurers luck. They're going to need it!

Encounter 1: They Came From Beneath the Goat

Encounter Level 1 (525 XP)

3 zombified townsfolk

9 zombified townsfolk minions

To start the encounter, read:

It's a typical afternoon at the Staggered Goat. The tavern's common room is crowded and noisy, full of leather-clad men and woman of various races, drinking, eating, telling tales, and exchanging secrets in the recessed shadows at far from the Goat's main doors. A barmaid—a lovely half-elf that has served you before—dances toward you with a grin and asks, "What can I get my favorite adventurers this fine afternoon?"

The adventurers are enjoying a much-needed break in the Staggered Goat, a rough-and-tumble tavern in Fallcrest's Lower Quay district. Let the adventurers spend a few moments reminiscing about past exploits, planning upcoming adventures, talking to locals, or even discussing employment opportunities with the other customers before you dive into the heart of the encounter. Here are a couple of roleplaying opportunities you can use while the adventurers are relaxing in the Goat.

Kira the Barmaid

Let the adventurers roleplay chatting with Kira, the half-elf barmaid as she takes their orders. The Goat offers typical tavern fare, including dwarven ale, halfling mead, elven wine, and Nerathi spirits, as well as roasted skewers of meat, chunks of cheese, and loafs of bread.

Kira is friendly and a bit of a flirt, quick with compliments and smiles and lingering touches as she talks, but that only helps make the tips she receives that much more impressive. Hey, even a half-elf barmaid needs to eat and pay the rent!

Cobblegrim

Cobblegrim the dwarf regularly occupies a shadowy booth at the back of the Goat. He's a great source of rumors and he makes a point of knowing who's coming and going in the Lower Quay. For the price of a mug of strong dwarven ale from Hammerfast and a gold piece or two, he's happy to share some of what he knows with anyone who treats him with the deference and respect he feels he deserves.

Cobblegrim has also been known to serve as a broker for local adventurers, hooking up the right team with a wealthy patron whenever the opportunity presents itself. He's a great person to use to send

your adventurers off on their next quest for treasure and monster hunting.

Shara Redhair

The tall, striking woman warrior known as Shara leads a group of rival adventurers that includes such notable heroes as Uldane Forden the halfling thief and Albanon the eladrin wizard. She sometimes wanders into the Goat just to see what's going on and to check on the seediest part of the seedier part of town. She can outdrink and outfight any man or woman in the place, and she often spends an evening or two when she's in town doing just that.

The Bad Day Begins

After you lull the adventurers into a false sense of security with the mundane hustle and bustle of the Staggered Goat, you can then you hit them with the juicy part of this encounter—zombies! Or, more specifically, zombified townsfolk! See “Developments,” below, for more information about zombified townsfolk.

When the floor beneath the adventurers breaks open, read:

The floorboards beneath your feet suddenly split apart as something pushes its way up from under the Staggered Goat. Lots of something. Specifically, lots of hands. And arms. And then whole bodies emerge from the newly opened hole. Zombie bodies! The horde of zombies moans as they reach out to grab you.

Tactics

The zombified townsfolk emerge from the hole in the floor to attack the adventurers and anyone else in the tavern. At the beginning of each round, one zombified townsfolk and three minions crawl out of the hole and join the battle. They fight to the death or until the dark energies that have created them run their course.

Development

The townsfolk suffer from a transformation inflicted upon them by energy from the Shadowfell. This energy changes their appearance and befuddles their minds, making them susceptible to the suggestions of the villain behind this foul scheme—the wizard Kurche.

Near the end of the battle, dark energy flows out of the zombified townsfolk and they revert to their natural forms. That's when the dragonborn Captain Gondar and the Fallcrest Guard show up to find that the adventurers have slaughtered innocent citizens.

“In the name of the Lord Warden,” Gondar shouts, “hold! You have been caught in the act, and this time you will pay for your crimes!”

The Guard surround the adventurers and take them into custody. It's time to go see the Lord Warden and try to resolve this situation.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light in the tavern.

Crates and Barrels: These are filled with beverages, foodstuffs, and other mundane items. Squares containing crates or barrels are difficult terrain.

Fireplace: A fire burns in the large fireplace. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the fireplace takes 5 fire damage.

Stairs: The stairs lead to the upper level of the tavern, where a number of small rooms are available for the use of the patrons.



3 Zombified Townsfolk Level 1 Brute
Medium natural humanoid XP 100 each

HP 33; Bloodied 16 Initiative -1

AC 13, Fortitude 14, Reflex 11, Will 11 Perception -1

Speed 4

Traits

Zombie Illusion

The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.

Standard Actions

† Slam **♦ At-Will**

—Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 1d12 + 3 damage, or 1d12 + 8 against a grabbed target.

† Zombie Grasp **♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Reflex

Hit: The zombie grabs the target (escape DC 12) if it does not have a creature grabbed.

Str 16 (+3) Dex 8 (-1) Wis 8 (-1)
Con 13 (+1) Int 1 (-5) Cha 3 (-4)

Alignment unaligned	Languages —
9 Zombified Townsfolk Minion	Level 5 Minion
Medium natural humanoid	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
Initiative +1	
AC 15, Fortitude 13, Reflex 13, Will 11 Perception +1	
Speed 4	
Traits	
Zombie Illusion	
The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.	
Standard Actions	
♦ Slam ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
Str 15 (+2) Dex 8 (-1) Wis 8 (-1)	
Con 12 (+1) Int 1 (-5) Cha 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned	Languages —

Encounter 2: Escape from the Lord Warden's Keep

Encounter Level 4 (875 XP)

Captain Gondar (G)
 Lord Warden (W)
 6 Fallcrest Guard Pikemen (P)

Assuming the adventurers peacefully accompany Captain Gondar and the Fallcrest Guard from the Staggering Goat, they are brought before the Lord Warden of Fallcrest. The Lord Warden governs the town from Moonstone Keep, an old castle set atop a steep-sided hill.

If the adventurers decide to resist arrest, then Gondar calls the full weight of the town guard down upon them. Up to 60 Fallcrest guards can be roused relatively quickly, and a militia of 350 can be assembled if necessary. Make it clear that this is a battle that the adventurers can't win if they attempt to struggle.

When the adventurers arrive in the Lord Warden's hall, read:

You are escorted into a large hall within the keep and brought before the throne of the Lord Warden. He's a balding, middle-aged man with a keen mind and a dry wit. Captain Gondar and six Fallcrest Guard surround you as the dragonborn relates the charges to the Lord Warden.

“Disturbing the peace,” Gondar says, “destruction of property, murder.” He points toward the body on the nearby table, one of the zombies that attacked you at the Goat. The body appears to be that of a normal human. Dead, but normal nonetheless.

Roleplaying the Encounter

This encounter starts out as a roleplaying encounter, wherein Gondar presents the charges against the adventurers, the Lord Warden asks some questions,

and the adventurers attempt to explain themselves.

“Let's be frank,” the Lord Warden says, “the town welcomes adventurers and I expect a certain amount of murder. I encourage it, in fact, as long as it is properly directed. Outward. At brigands and monsters. Not at the citizenry.”

The Lord Warden acts reasonably. Gondar does his best to expose the adventurers for the murderers he believes them to be. And the Fallcrest Guard look on with impassive expressions and deadly looking polearms.

After everyone has had their say, the door to the hall swings open and the gnome known as Copernicus Jinx enters the chamber. “I'm horrified to hear of this unspeakable tragedy, and I have sensed a magical disturbance this day. Something dark. Allow me to get to the heart of the matter.”

Jinx examines the corpse and explains that the man was infected with shadow. More specifically, he was infused with the energy of the Shadowfell. Someone has opened a portal, and dark energies are flooding through.

Dark Energies

As Jinx finishes his explanation of what he believes has befallen Fallcrest, Gondar, the Lord Warden, and the guards are suddenly gripped by terrible convulsions. Read:

Dark energies begin to leak from the eyes of the Lord Warden and the guards, and even the mighty Gondar seems to be caught in the grip of the shadow magic. As the convulsions end, the group begins to moan and turn toward you. That's when Gondar unleashes his fiery breath weapon at you ...

Tactics

As soon as the Lord Warden and his guards change into zombies, they attack the adventurers. Even though the Fallcrest defenders have been zombified, their training remains as a reflex, and they continue to employ the weapons and tactics that they are used to.

Development

After a round of battle, Jinx shouts out, “The portal's open and more shadow is flooding through. I warded you against it, and you're welcome, by the way. Don't kill the guards. They're just possessed. Now get out of here and find that portal!”

If the adventurers can move through the doors or windows, they escape from the keep.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light from the braziers.

Gates: The metal gates are down, blocking the path out of the hall. A DC 19 Strength check is required to lift a gate.

Braziers: Fire burns in these large metal bowls. A brazier can be tipped (DC 12 Strength check) to cause a close burst 1. Any creature in the burst takes

5 fire damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Doors: The doors lead to lower and higher levels of the keep.

Windows: The windows look out upon the keep's courtyard, 20 feet below.

Captain Gondar (G) Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 150

HP 47; Bloodied 23 Initiative +4

AC 19, Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 14 Perception +2

Speed 5

Standard Actions

† **Longsword** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC, or +10 vs. AC while the dragonborn is bloodied.

Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage.

Minor Actions

© **Dragon Breath** (fire) ♦ **Encounter**

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +7 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d6 + 2 fire damage.

Str 16 (+4) Dex 15 (+3) Wis 12 (+2)

Con 15 (+3) Int 11 (+1) Cha 9 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic

Equipment scale armor, light shield, longsword

Zombified Lord Warden (W) Level 2 Controller

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125

HP 37; Bloodied 18 Initiative +2

AC 16, Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 14 Perception +1

Speed 4

Traits

⊗ **Shroud of Shadow** ♦ **Aura 3**

Within the aura, bright light is dim light, and dim light is darkness. Any enemy that enters the aura or starts its turn there takes 5 cold damage.

Zombie Illusion

The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Slam** ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage and the target is slowed (save ends).

Str 12 (+2) Dex 17 (+4) Wis 11 (+1)

Con 13 (+2) Int 10 (+1) Cha 12 (+2)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

6 **Zombified Pikemen (P)** Level 1 Soldier

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 100 each

HP 31; Bloodied 15 Initiative +4

AC 17, Fortitude 14, Reflex 13, Will 11 Perception +2

Speed 4

Zombie Illusion

The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Halberd** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 2 damage, and the pikeman marks the target until the end of the pikeman's next turn.

† **Powerful Strike** (weapon) ♦ **Recharge 5 6**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 2 damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

† **Interceding Strike** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: An enemy marked by the pikeman makes an attack that doesn't include it as a target.

Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 2 damage.

Str 16 (+3) Dex 14 (+2) Wis 11 (+0)

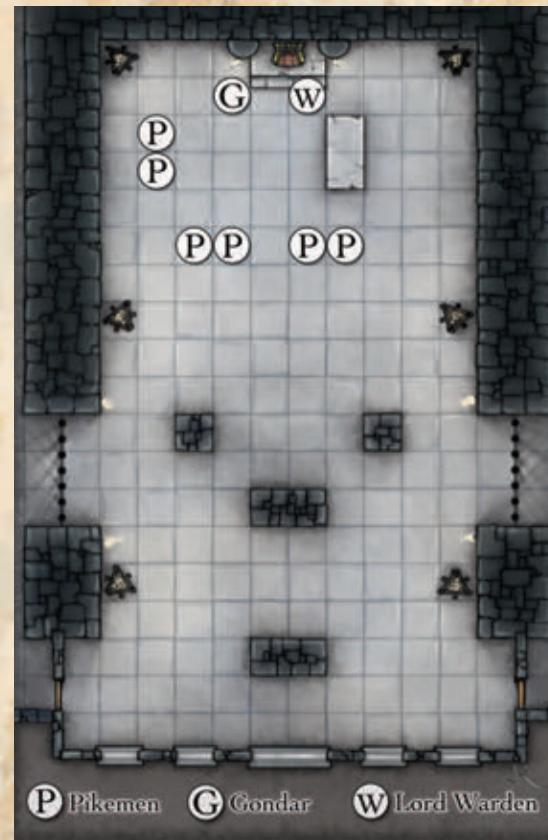
Con 15 (+2) Int 10 (+0) Cha 12 (+1)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

Equipment chainmail, halberd

Encounter 3: Burning Down



the Orphanarium

Encounter Level 3 (754 XP)

3 zombified bashers

8 zombified gnashers

Throughout Fallcrest, the dark energies of the Shadowfell have transformed the townsfolk into zombies—or at least zombie-like creatures! The adventurers must navigate through the town, evading or fighting off zombified townsfolk, as they search for the mysterious portal that Jinx has pointed them toward. Along the way, they begin to notice that the possessed people are all heading toward the river, and that provides a direction for the adventurers to follow.

In addition, a character can make a DC 19 Arcana check to sense that the dark energy-spewing portal to the Shadowfell is somewhere inside one of the ware-

houses along the coast of the river.

Feel free to run as many scenes between Moonstone Keep and the docks of the Lower Quay as you want, but eventually the adventurers reach a burning warehouse that rises over the river. Read:

In your search for the portal, you notice that all of the possessed townsfolk are running in the same direction—toward the Nentir River. One of the buildings on the riverside is on fire. That's probably not a coincidence. Moreover, the building houses the Orphanarium, where the orphaned children of Fallcrest are cared for. You sense that the portal is within the burning building, where a warehouse full of possessed children are about to be roasted alive.

Time to head into the Orphanarium and save the possessed children!

Inside the Burning Building

When the adventurers enter the Orphanarium, they are greeted by fire and smoke. Don't place any of the zombified townsfolk on the map yet. They appear in their assigned squares after the adventurers get a sense of the situation. Read:

Double doors open into a large open space that reminds you of the lobby of a fine inn—except for the smoke and flames of the fire. To the left, a long desk is unattended, and beyond it a wide staircase climbs to the second floor. Low benches are set against the far walls, and to your right several crates and barrels have been piled neatly so that they reach almost to the ceiling. You can hear cries and moans drifting down from the upper levels of the burning building.

Once the adventurers enter the burning building and begin looking around, the adult zombified bashers (possessed Orphanarium workers) emerge from their hiding places behind the front desk and the piled crates.

After a round of dealing with the fire and the bashers, the zombified gnashers (possessed orphans) leap down from above into the marked squares.

The Fire

The fire has not yet engulfed the building, but it is well on its way. Any creature that enters a burning square or starts its turn there takes 5 fire damage.

A character can attempt to douse a square of fire with a DC 19 Athletics check or a DC 12 Dungeoneering or Nature check. This requires a minor action and the character must be adjacent to the burning square. A character can attempt this up to three times in a round.

Tactics

The zombified bashers emerge from hiding to pound on the intruding adventurers. If possible, a basher attempts to push an adventurer into a burning square every time it hits.

The zombified gnashers leap down from above and try to swarm an adventurer. A gnasher uses its gnashing bite as soon as possible to attempt to clamp its teeth into a target. Note that multiple gnashers will attempt to clamp onto the same target, thus increasing the ongoing damage that target takes each round. One save stops all ongoing damage.

Development

When only a few of the zombified townsfolk remain, the adventurers hear and feel a great rumble emerging from beneath the Orphanarium. This can happen whenever you want, but a good time for it is when only one basher or two gnashers remain active. Read:

Suddenly the entire building begins to shake as a great noise rumbles up from beneath your feet. The flash of a huge fireball and the sound of a terrible ka-boom follow the terrible rumble, and everything around you begins to collapse and fall!

Next?

If that isn't the start of a really bad day, we don't know what is! Find out what happens next by checking out issue #2 of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS comic. In the meantime, use this set of encounters as the beginning of your own adventure about shadow portals and possessed townsfolk. The adventure is in your hands ...

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light from the fire.

Front Desk: The long desk is 4 feet tall.

Fire: Any creature that enters a burning square or starts its turn there takes 5 fire damage.

Stairs: The wide stairs lead up to the Orphanarium's second level.

Crates and Barrels: These are stacked 10 feet high and filled with foodstuffs, clothing, blankets, and other mundane items donated to the Orphanarium. Squares containing crates or barrels are blocking terrain.

3 Zombified Bashers (Z) Level 3 Brutes

Medium natural humanoid XP 150 each

HP 54; Bloodied 27 **Initiative +0**

AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 13 **Perception +0**

Speed 4

Traits

Zombie Illusion

The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.

Standard Actions

④ Bash **♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 1d12 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Str 18 (+5) Dex 8 (+0) Wis 8 (+0)

Con 14 (+3) Int 1 (-4) Cha 3 (-3)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

8 Zombified Gnashers

Level 3 Minions

Medium natural humanoid XP 100 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

Initiative –1

AC 13, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11 **Perception** +3

Speed 4

Traits

Zombie Illusion

The townsfolk has been infused with dark energy from the Shadowfell that makes him or her appear to be a zombie. If an adventurer examines a zombified townsfolk closely and makes a DC 12 Perception check, he or she notices that the zombie isn't rotting or falling apart.

Standard Actions

④ **Bite** ④ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 6 damage, and the gnasher shifts 1 square.

④ **Gnashing Bite** ④ **Encounter**

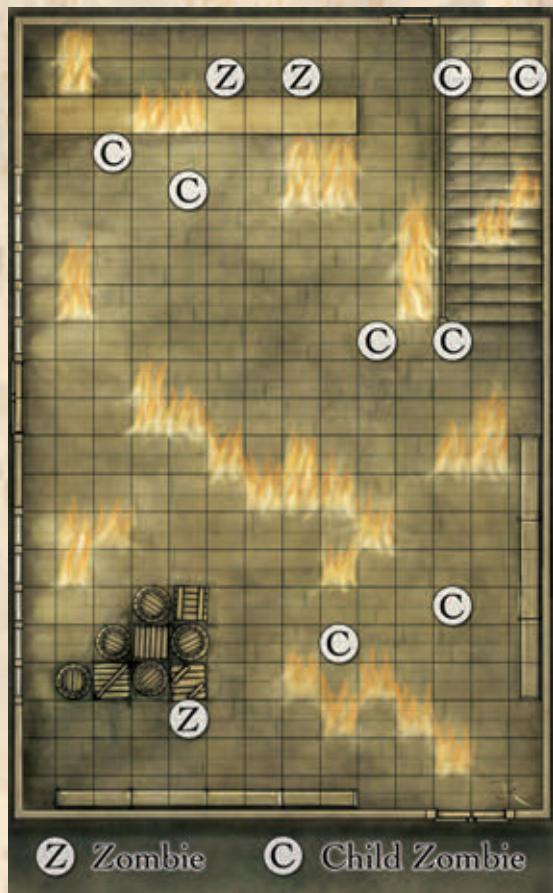
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 6 damage, and ongoing 3 damage (save ends) as the gnasher locks onto the target with its jaws and holds on tight. Increase this ongoing damage by 1 for each gnasher that locks onto the same target.

Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 8 (+1) **Wis** 8 (+1)

Con 12 (+2) **Int** 1 (–4) **Cha** 3 (–3)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —



DUNGEONS & DRAGONSTM

Comic & Game Adventure

Hide in Plain Sight

by John Rogers, Andrea Di Vito, and Christopher Perkins



The orphanarium is engulfed in flames and sinking into the depths of the river. Meanwhile, a dark ritual is being performed in caves beneath the building, possessing the orphans within. Can you save the children and stop the malevolent ceremony?

Licensed By:

IDW



Hide in Plain Sight

by Christopher Perkins
Cartography by Jonathan Roberts

Introduction

The new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS comic follows the adventures of Adric and his companions. In Issue #1, they defended the town of Fallcrest against a horde of zombies, only to discover (to their horror) that the zombies were actually townsfolk transformed by the dark energies of a Shadowfell portal hidden beneath a burning riverside warehouse.

In this issue, Adric and company rescue several orphans trapped in the burning building and come face-to-face with the villain responsible for opening the Shadowfell portal: a doppelganger wizard named Kurche. Kurche flees and infiltrates a merchant caravan, and that's when things go from bad to worse.

We've replicated three of the pivotal scenes in the story in the following three encounters. You can use these encounters as the continuation of the previous adventure, the foundation of a longer adventure of your own creation, or a short stand-alone adventure.

While Adric and his companions weigh in at the mid-to-high portion of the heroic tier of play, we've decided to set these encounters at the lower end of the scale, making them perfect for 1st- or 2nd-level adventurers. You can always scale up the encounters if you want to challenge higher-level characters. *The Dungeon Master's Guide*® and the *Dungeon Master's Kit*™ provide guidelines for adjusting the level of encounters.

Adventure Background

This adventure picks up where the Issue #1 adventure left off.

The following encounters take place outside the town of Fallcrest, in the Nentir Vale, as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the *Dungeon Master's Kit*. The setting is generic so that you can place the adventure near any town or city in your campaign.

The first encounter ("Trouble Below") opens with the heroes discovering a hidden cave beneath the burning warehouse. Realizing that his work in Fallcrest is done, Kurche the doppelganger makes a hasty retreat and leaves the heroes to clean up the mess. The second encounter ("Doppelganger Season") is a skill challenge in which the heroes follow Kurche's trail, leading them to a merchant caravan under attack by a ruthless band of orcs ("Gruhn's Gang"). How they fare in the skill challenge determines the difficulty of the third and final encounter.

Getting Started

Dungeon Masters need a copy of the *Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying Game* rules, which you can find in either the *Dungeons & Dragons Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set* or the *Dungeon Master's Kit* boxed set. Players need a copy of *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™ and a character sheet to make characters to use in the adventure.

Once you're ready to begin, jump right into the action with "Encounter 1: Trouble Below."

Encounter 1: Trouble Below

Encounter Level 1 (725 XP)

Kurche, doppelganger wizard (K)

1 explosion (see "Features of the Area")

1 pit trap (see "Features of the Area")

This encounter begins when the adventurers descend through a hole in the floor of the burning warehouse. The hole opens into an old smugglers' cave hidden underneath the warehouse.

Please read this encounter carefully, as there are a number of features that come into play during the encounter.

You need to keep track of the number of rounds that pass. At the beginning of the second round, burning timbers fall through the hole in the ceiling, dealing damage to anyone underneath and blocking that means of escape. An explosion occurs at the beginning of the fifth round, and the building overhead collapses at the start of the tenth round (see "Features of the Area" for details).

The pit trap remains hidden until triggered or otherwise discovered.

To start the encounter, read:

An evil power has turned many of Fallcrest's citizens into zombie-like horrors, and all signs point to a riverside warehouse south of town. The warehouse, now an orphanage, has caught on fire, and as you evacuate the last of the children from the doomed building, falling timbers punch a hole through the ground floor, revealing a secret cave underneath! From somewhere deep below, you hear maniacal laughter.

There's nothing more that can be seen or heard in the burning warehouse. Due to smoke and other debris, the adventurers must lower themselves down into the hole to investigate further.

It's a 10-foot drop from the warehouse to the floor of the cave below. Characters take 1d10 damage from the fall unless they use a move action to carefully lower themselves or make a trained Acrobatics check to negate the damage.

When the adventurers descend into the cave through the hole in the ceiling, read:

You discover an old smugglers' cave filled with crates and barrels. A circle of stones dominates the middle of the cave, and a pulsating sphere of dark energy hovers in the middle of the circle. A wizard cackles nearby, clearly enamored with the terror he has wrought.

The adventurers begin the encounter in the corner of the cave below the hole in the ceiling.

Tactics

The doppelganger uses *fireball* and follows up with *color spray*. Once per round, it uses *shiv* against an enemy that makes a melee attack against it. It uses its action points to aid its escape.

The doppelganger flees when first bloodied and covers its escape with *fireball*, if necessary. A *fireball* detonated inside the tunnel connecting the smugglers' cave to the river has the side effect of weakening the section of tunnel caught in the burst, creating a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the zone takes 2 damage from collapsing detritus.

Development

The heroes receive full XP whether they kill the doppelganger or drive it off. Subsequent encounters hinge on the doppelganger escaping with its life. If the adventurers prevent the doppelganger from escaping and it's captured or killed, you can skip the next encounter and save the final encounter for a future occasion. (You never know when you might need an orc ambush!)

Features of the Area

Illumination: Torches provide bright light.

Boat: A small boat with a pole is tethered to the end of the dock that runs alongside the warehouse. The boat can seat up to four Medium creatures and has a speed of 4.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 10 feet high in the cave and 6 feet high in the tunnel.

At the beginning of the second round of combat, burning timbers fall through the hole in the cave ceiling, attacking anyone in the 4 squares directly underneath. The building overhead is collapsing, and the ceiling hole becomes plugged by flaming debris that cannot be cleared.

Free Action

Falling Timbers (fire) ♦ Encounter

Attack: 2-square-by-2-square section under the hole in the ceiling (creatures in the area) +4 vs. Reflex

Hit: $1d6 + 6$ damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 2 fire damage (save ends both).

Miss: The target is restrained and takes ongoing 2 fire damage (save ends both).

Crates and Barrels: The barrels are filled with molasses and oil, while the crates contain foodstuffs



and other mundane items. Hidden among the crates and barrels is a random level 1 treasure (see "Treasure" in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the *Dungeon Master's Kit*). Squares containing crates or barrels are difficult terrain.

Doors: A set of locked wooden doors lead from the cave to a staircase that used to lead up to the warehouse. A fire in the warehouse has filled the staircase with flaming debris that requires 20 standard actions to clear. The doors can be unlocked with the proper key (see "Secret Room" below) or a DC 20 Thievery check. The doors can also be forced open with a DC 18 Strength check.

Explosion: At the beginning of the fifth round of combat, a large explosion rocks the building above. The double doors are blown open by a sudden wave of flames, heat, and debris. Any creature occupying the 2-square-by-3-square area on either side of the doors is attacked. Characters in the pit (see below) have partial cover against the attack.

Free Action

Explosion (fire) ♦ Encounter

Attack: Blast 3 originating from the double doors (creatures in the blast) +4 vs. Reflex

Hit: $1d8 + 11$ fire damage, and the target falls prone.

Miss: Half damage, and the target does not fall prone.

Pit Trap: This pit trap is disguised to look like a normal section of floor. Creatures adjacent to the pit can detect it with a successful DC 18 Perception check. (Use passive Perception scores unless the creatures are actively searching for traps.) The pit stays open once activated and is 20 feet deep.

Free Action

Pit Trap ♦ Encounter

Trigger: A creature enters the pit's space.

Attack (Free Action): Melee 0 (the triggering creature) +4 vs. Reflex.

Hit: 2d10 damage, and the target falls prone at the bottom of the pit.

Miss: The target returns to the last square it occupied.

Effect: The pit is no longer hidden.

Secret Room: Near the pit trap is a small secret room. Characters can detect the secret door with a DC 18 Perception check. (Use passive Perception scores unless a character is actively searching for secret doors.) The room is empty except for a wooden lever set into the far wall. The lever can be used to reset the pit trap or lock the pit's trap doors, thereby allowing creatures to enter the pit's space without triggering the trap.

Hanging on the lever is an iron key on a loop of frayed rope. This key unlocks the doors that lead up to the warehouse (see "Doors" above).

Summoning Stones: In the middle of the cave is a circle of jagged stones. A successful DC 16 Arcana check confirms that the area within the circle is suffused with dark energy seeping in from the Shadowfell. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the circle takes 5 necrotic damage and is weakened until the end of its current turn. Once the doppelganger flees or is slain, the circle of stones loses its magical traits and is safe to enter.

Tunnel: This partly flooded tunnel connects the old smugglers' cave to the river. The water hinders movement through the tunnel, which is difficult terrain. The mouth of the tunnel is obscured by reeds and requires a DC 14 Perception check to spot from outside.

Wooden Pilings: Six wooden beams support a burning warehouse that partly overhangs the river. The building collapses into the river at the start of the tenth round. Until it collapses, any creature underneath the burning building takes 5 damage at the start of its turn from falling debris. The area between the pilings is treated as difficult terrain because of the wreckage.

Doppelganger Wizard (K) Level 2

Solo Skirmisher

Medium natural humanoid XP 625

HP 148; Bloodied 74 Initiative +5

AC 16, Fortitude 13, Reflex 15, Will 14 Perception +7

Speed 6

Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Focused Mind

Any dazed or stunned effects on the doppelganger end at the start of its turn.

Shadow Stride

If the doppelganger moves at least 3 squares from its starting position on its turn, it gains concealment until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

④ Sly Dagger (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d4 + 8 damage.

Effect: The doppelganger can shift 1 square after the attack.

④ Color Spray (radiant) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d8 + 6 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the doppelganger's next turn.

④ Fireball (fire) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied

Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 8 fire damage.

Minor Actions

Change Shape (polymorph) ♦ At-Will

Effect: The doppelganger alters its physical form to appear as a Medium humanoid until it uses change shape again or until it drops to 0 hit points (whereupon it assumes its true form).

To assume a specific individual's form, the doppelganger must have seen the individual. Other creatures can make a DC 30 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.

Triggered Actions

Shiv ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy makes a melee attack against the doppelganger.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The doppelganger uses sly dagger against the triggering enemy.

Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +8, Insight +7, Thievery +8

Str 11 (+1) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)

Con 13 (+2) **Int** 16 (+4) **Cha** 15 (+3)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Equipment Dagger

Encounter 2: Doppelganger Season

Encounter Level 1 (100 XP)

This skill challenge takes place after the adventurers chase off the doppelganger and escape from the smugglers' cave under the burning riverside warehouse.

When the adventurers arrive in the Lord Warden's hall, read:

You escape the smugglers' cave just in time to see the burning warehouse collapse and slide into the river. Rescued orphans begin running back to town, leaving you to track down the villain responsible for this mess.

Skill Challenge: Tracking Kurche

After escaping from the cave, the doppelganger headed back toward Fallcrest. Along the way, it stumbled upon a town guard, murdered him, and usurped his identity. Upon seeing a merchant caravan heading out of town, the doppelganger decided to join it, offering its services as a sellsword. These are the facts, but the adventurers must discover what happened if they're to catch the villain.

This skill challenge determines how well the adventurers follow Kurche's trail. There's no question that they'll catch their quarry, but it could take longer than expected, and any delay could have unforeseen consequences!

This skill challenge is unusual in that there are only three checks, and they're made in a specific order. All of the skill checks are made as group checks (see the *Rules Compendium*™ for group check rules). In some cases, the heroes have multiple skills to choose from when making the check, but each

party member still makes only one check as part of any group check. If at least half of the adventurers succeed on the check, the whole group succeeds. Otherwise, the group gains 1 failure. At the end of the encounter, add up the number of failures to determine what happens.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Diplomacy, Endurance, Insight, Nature, Perception, Streetwise.

Finding the Corpse (DC 12 Perception): If the heroes succeed at the group check, they find the mutilated and stripped corpse of a town guard murdered by the doppelganger.

Fleeing Town (DC 12 Diplomacy, Insight, or Streetwise): If the heroes succeed at the group check, they conclude (based on their own instincts and quick conversations with the local militia) that the doppelganger avoided Fallcrest and hooked up with a merchant caravan that left town recently.

Catching the Caravan (DC 12 Athletics, Endurance, or Nature): If the heroes succeed at the group check, they make good time catching up to the caravan.

0 Failures: If the adventurers succeed at every group check, they earn 100 XP for the skill challenge, and “Encounter 3: Gruhn’s Gang” happens as written.

1–3 Failures: Regardless of the number of failures, the adventurers still earn full XP for this skill challenge. For each failure, reduce by 2 the number of caravan defenders in “Encounter 3: Gruhn’s Gang.”

Encounter 3: Gruhn’s Gang

Encounter Level 3 (840 XP)

Gruhn, orc terror (G)

Sheshak, orc slaughter-priest (S)

24 orc maggots (O)

Kurche, doppelganger wizard (K)

Davan, human merchant (D)

12 caravan defenders (C; see also “Skill Challenge Failure” below)

The adventurers track the doppelganger to an old trading post, where a merchant caravan is busy defending itself against a gang of orcs.

The adventurers begin along the bottom edge of the map, so that Gruhn is between them and the trading post.

Kurche the doppelganger is lurking among the caravan defenders in disguise. The doppelganger joined the caravan shortly before it arrived at the trading post. See “Encounter 1: Trouble Below” for the doppelganger’s statistics (should they become necessary), and see “Tactics” below for more information about Kurche’s role in this encounter.

The XP award for this encounter assumes that some number of orcs either escape or are killed by nonplayer characters.

Skill Challenge Failure

If the adventurers failed one or more of the group checks in “Encounter 2: Doppelganger Season,” they arrive late. Reduce the number of caravan defenders by 2 for each failure they gained.

When the adventurers arrive on the scene, read:

Through the trees, you see a roadside clearing in which six horse-drawn wagons encircle a ruined stone building. A small group of merchants and guards duck behind the wagons and crumbled walls, barely holding their own against nearly two dozen orcs. A particularly large and terrifying orc joins the fray. With greatsword in hand, he yells, “That’s right, maggots! Paint the ground with their blood!” Standing next to him is a scrawny but crafty-looking orc dressed like a wizard or priest.

In any given round, half of the orc maggots focus their attacks on the caravan defenders instead of the adventurers. If all the caravan defenders including Davan are dead, the orcs attack the heroes *en masse*.

Rather than resolve attacks between orcs and caravan defenders, roll a d6 for each side at the end of every round. Whichever side rolls lower loses one random minion. If the roll is a tie, both sides lose a minion.

Tactics

Gruhn tries to remain adjacent to Sheshak and uses *brunt of the attack* to absorb one attack per round directed at the slaughter-priest. Gruhn isn’t a coward, but if half of his orc maggots are slain, he breaks off the attack and orders his force to withdraw.

If Gruhn drops to 0 hit points, Sheshak becomes incensed and fights to the death. Any remaining orc maggots fight until Sheshak drops, at which point they scatter and flee. In battle, Sheshak keeps his distance while using *blood theft* to heal wounded allies.

Roughly one-third of the orc maggots engage in melee combat; the rest take cover and shoot arrows.

The doppelganger tries to blend in with the other caravan defenders. Although it protects itself and other nearby caravan defenders, the doppelganger doesn’t go out of its way to draw attention to itself, nor does it take any unnecessary risks (such as attacking a nearby character).

Davan and the caravan defenders take cover and attack orcs that get too close to them or the horses.

Development

Finding the doppelganger in the chaos of battle is difficult, to say the least. A character can, as a standard action, choose to watch one caravan defender and make a DC 30 Insight check. If the check succeeds and the defender being watched is Kurche in disguise, the character successfully identifies the doppelganger.

If the heroes defeat the orcs, Davan expresses his gratitude and awards them a random level 2 treasure (see “Treasure” in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* or the *Dungeon Master’s Kit*). Davan and his fellow merchants are horrified to learn that their caravan has been infiltrated by a doppelganger.

Orcs that are captured and interrogated only seem interested in the goods the merchants are transporting. They have no other motivation for attacking the caravan.

What’s Next?

Once Gruhn and his orcs are defeated or driven away, the heroes must return to the task at hand: confronting the doppelganger that has infiltrated the merchants’ caravan. This confrontation with the elusive shapeshifter kicks off the adventure appearing in Issue #3 of this comic series!

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Boulders and Deadfalls: Squares occupied by boulders and fallen trees are difficult terrain. These low obstacles also provide partial cover to creatures hidden behind them.

Standing Trees: Creatures cannot enter squares occupied by tree trunks. However, a creature adjacent to a tree trunk square can climb the tree with a DC 10 Athletics check. Creatures up in trees gain partial concealment.

Stone Hut: The walls of this former trading post are shattered and range from 3 to 5 feet high. The crumbling walls provide partial cover to creatures hidden behind them. Climbing a wall costs an extra square of movement.

Wagons and Horses: There are three covered wagons and three open wagons encircling the stone hut. Two horses pull each covered wagon, while each open wagon has a single horse tethered to it. The horses are trained to remain calm in battle, but if a horse takes damage, it bolts (taking its wagon and possibly another horse with it). See the *Monster Manual*® or the *Monster Vault*™ for horse statistics.

All of the wagons are loaded with crates and barrels. A creature can enter a wagon’s space either by climbing onto it or crawling underneath it. Wagon squares count as difficult terrain. The wagons also provide partial cover to creatures hidden behind or underneath them.

Orc Terror (G) Level 2 Elite Brute (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid XP 250

HP 92; Bloodied 46 Initiative +3
AC 14, Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 14 Perception +7

Speed 6

Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1

Standard Actions

④ **Greatsword** (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.



† Double Attack ♦ At-Will

Effect: The terror makes two melee basic attacks.

Minor Actions

Skin of Terror ♦ At-Will

Effect: The terror chooses an enemy in its line of sight. The terror gains resist 5 to attacks made by that enemy until the start of the terror’s next turn.

Triggered Actions

Brunt of the Attack ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An adjacent ally is hit by an attack.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The terror becomes the target of the triggering attack instead.

Skills Athletics +10, Endurance +9, Intimidate +9, Stealth +8

Str 19 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)

Con 16 (+4) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 16 (+4)

Alignment Chaotic Evil

Languages Common, Giant

Equipment Greatsword

Orc Slaughter-Priest (S) Level 2 Artillery (Leader)

Medium natural humanoid XP 125

HP 38; Bloodied 19 Initiative +2

AC 16, Fortitude 14, Reflex 13, Will 14 Perception +6

Speed 6

Standard Actions

④ **Morningstar** (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

⑦ **Blood Theft** ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +5 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2d6 damage, and one ally within 5 squares of the slaughter-priest gains 3 temporary hit points.

✿ **Wrath of Gruumsh** ♦ At-Will Recharge 4 5 6

Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +5 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target gains vulnerable 5 to all damage until the end of the slaughter-priest’s next turn.

Skills Athletics +9, Endurance +8, Religion +6, Stealth +7

Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 11 (+1)

Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 14 (+3)

Alignment Chaotic Evil

Languages Common, Giant



Equipment Morningstar

Orc Maggots (O) Level 2 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid XP 31 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion **Initiative**
+4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 **Perception** +6
Speed 6

Standard Actions

④ **Battleaxe** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the maggot's next turn.

④ **Longbow** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the maggot's next turn.

Skills Athletics +9, Endurance +8, Stealth +7
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+0)

Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment Battleaxe, longbow with 12 arrows

Human Merchant (D) Level 1 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid XP –
HP 27; **Bleeding** 13 **Initiative** +4
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 **Perception** +6
Speed 6

Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

④ **Longsword** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Effect: The merchant can shift 1 square before or after attacking.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Skills Diplomacy +6, Streetwise +6
Str 12 (+1) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 11 (+0)
Con 11 (+0) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 12 (+1)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Equipment Longsword

12 Caravan Defenders (C) Level 1
Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid XP –
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +4
AC 17, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 12 **Perception** +6
Speed 6

Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

④ **Longsword** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the caravan defender's next turn.

Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 9 (+1)
Con 11 (+3) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment Longsword, Chainmail

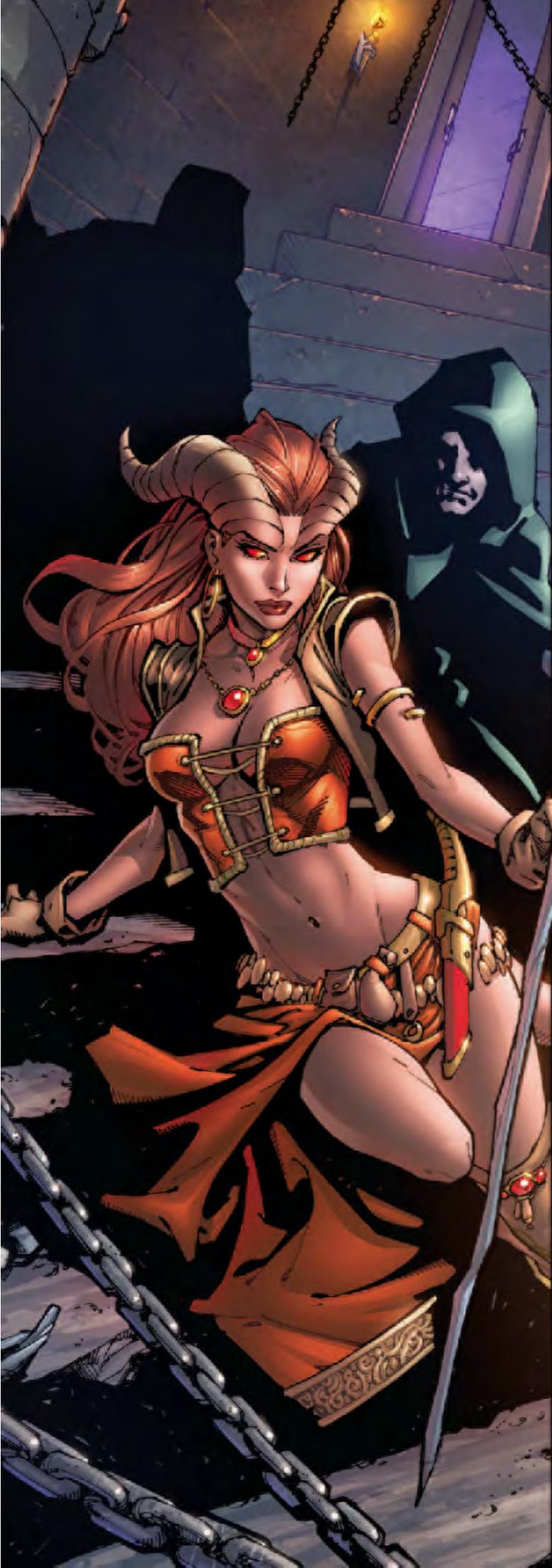


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