

Leland: Our hero- hmm, our party members find themselves in the small city of Zexah, each pursuing their own personal goals. I hesitate to call them heroes. You'll quickly learn why by the end of our tale, listener. Gozer, the Half-orc barbarian, and Shaft, the Halfling ranger, have travelled together from Drukhall.

With ties to a criminal network that freely operates within Drukhall, Shaft has accepted a bounty hunter job to capture a mysterious figure that has recently popped up in Zexah, known only as The Arcanist. With The Arcanist's identity and abilities unknown, a bit of extra muscle couldn't hurt. That's where our party's bruiser comes in.

Not one for many words, Gozer agreed to aid Shaft, for a price of course. We do learn that physical violence comes easy, and quickly to her, seeming to be a form of payment all of its own. Ousted from her orc tribe in the Vorgorrag Mountains after a failed coup against the chief, Klash Bone Collector, Gozer was left tribeless, lost and bored.

[Crowd screams from the street]

There's a disturbance in the streets of Zexah! Townspeople rush past Gozer and Shaft, clearing the streets to reveal an animated mass of stitched together body parts. Two torsos connected end to end to form an insect like, segmented body, standing on four haphazardly attached legs to the lower torso. It swings its six randomly stitched arms attached to its upper torso, attempting to crush an armoured human. Flashes of red and green burst from the human's gauntlets, hitting the fleshy monstrosity, keeping it at bay. His polished chest plate and helm reflecting the light from his attacks. At their feet, this battle raging above, lays an unconscious woman.

Standing on the other side of this battle in the middle of the street, Gozer and Shaft spot our party's glass cannon, the half-elf wizard Falzaren. Spending the majority of his life on the small island of Heracleon studying magic with the fabled scholars that attract many seekers of knowledge, Falzaren has left the comforts and safety of his home. Being the hub of all things magical in Aspara, it was inevitable that the rumours of experimental, unconventional magic would reach the shores of Heracleon. Rooted in their traditions of the "pure" ways of magic, these rumours were immediately dismissed by the elders of Heracleon, Falzaren's interest in them being denounced and disparaged.

Immediately, he is intrigued by this human's magic emitting gauntlets.

Falzaren: those are quite the buckler- I mean gauntlets you have there! Do you need any help here?

The Arcanist: Stand back citizen! I'll handle this!

Leland: Unseen by everybody in the street, the rogue elf, Bryn, lurks around the corner of a building, taking in the scene playing out before her. Still very young for an elf, Bryn was forced to grow up quickly in the Faellaren Forest. Orphaned at the age of thirteen during the occupation of the Paladins of Koltice, she quickly honed the skills needed to survive for nearly two decades on her own. Recent, tragic events, have forced her to flee the forest, narrowly escaping death during a heist gone wrong. Utilizing her own underworld contacts, she's accepted her first assassination job. Targeting one Sardos the Magician.

Taking careful aim from her hiding spot, Bryn lets loose an arrow, revealing her presence. Despite aiming for the abomination, she puts an arrow into the human! Causing him to falter, the abomination raining down blows with its six arms.

Shaft: Hey! That's my bounty!

Leland: Shaft exclaims as he charges Bryn, unsheathing his dual rapiers. Don't worry listener, this won't be the first inter-party conflict you'll witness during our tale.

Taking hold of her mighty greataxe in both hands, Gozer smiles,

Gozer: This fight look like fun.

Leland: She rushes in towards the abomination, swinging wildly!

Gozer: TOO BLLAAVVEEE!!

Leland: Bryn, now face to face with Shaft, nocks another arrow, firing it over the halfling's head, striking true this time, sinking it into one of the abomination's torsos.

Bryn: Bounty? . . . Just relax buddy, it was an accident!

Shaft: Oh, so you're just inept!

Leland: Shaft replies as he turns back towards the abomination, running in to join the fight with Gozer and the armour-clad human. The fleshy monstrosity turns to its new foes, lashing out at them both and delivering thunderous blows that knock them on their asses, unconscious.

A shimmering, magical hand appears next to the monster, smacking it, causing enough of a distraction to give the human time to recover from his arrow wound and grasp an amulet hanging from a chain around his neck. It emits a brilliant white light that blasts the abomination into pieces, it's stitching tearing apart from the force. The parts crumple to the street, no longer moving. Immediately, the human lays a hand on Shaft and Gozer, reviving them as they gasp awake.

The Arcanist: Ho there citizens! Thank you for the assist, but you should not have put yourself in such danger! That is a job for The Arcanist!

Leland: Shaft invites The Arcanist back to the Good Riddance Inn for a drink to thank him for his efforts, electing to use guile and quick wits to obtain his bounty, rather than unnecessary force. Despite Shaft's insinuations, The Arcanist refuses his offer of a reward, claiming that protecting this fair city is reward enough.

The Arcanist: Wherever there is a crime occurring, a citizen in need! You will find, The Arcanist!

Leland: With these words, The Arcanist vanishes down an alley, and into the ever-darkening night.

The unconscious woman stirs, coming to. Finally, able to catch a breath, they make proper introductions, learning each other's names. The woman's is Dr. Isabella Goode, Zexah's resident health professional. Thankful for their rescue, Isabella agrees to buy them all a drink, at Shaft's suggestion. And here, dear listener, our very incorrigible party is formed.

Starting a tab for Isabela at the Good Riddance Inn, the inn's hunch backed barboy, Chucky, serves them some drinks, and the party is filled in on the recent events in Zexah. Isabella explains that The Arcanist seemed to show up a little over a week ago, apparently to aid the people in the town, as Zexah doesn't have its own guard or law force. The people here seem to police themselves and are not very friendly to strange faces.

These words ring true with the party, as Isabella is the first Zexan to really give them the time of day outside of any establishments seeking patronage. Learning that Isabella has treated a number of people who have had encounters with The Arcanist, she quickly agrees to take Shaft back to her clinic to retrieve the information. She freely gives him a list of three names and addresses, doctor patient confidentiality apparently not a thing in Zexah.

Having conned his way into a free nights stay at the doctor's clinic, Shaft returns to the tavern the following morning and shares the names with the rest of the party. Bryn immediately recognizes the second name on the list, Sardos the Magician. . .

The party find themselves outside of a small "T" shaped building. A wooden sign with bright green lettering hanging over the door says "Sardos The Magician". They enter to find a long table full of trinkets and baubles. A human wearing a brightly coloured vest enthusiastically greets them, immediately spewing out a sales pitch on one of the items on display.

Sardos: Ahhh, lookit this! The Cap of Sultany! Said to bring its wearer pleasant, even prophetic dreams! For the low low price of ten gold pieces, but I'm losing on the deal!

Leland: Questioning Sardos about his encounter with The Arcanist, the party surmises that he doesn't know much more about the strange vigilante.

Bryn: Alright, are we done with this guy now? Good.

Leland: Bryn draws her rapier, eager to take out her target, and lunges forward to deliver a devastating blow to his vitals. Reacting quickly, Shaft draws his own sword and parries Bryn's attack. "

Shaft: What the hell?!

Leland: Sardos begins to plead for his life, cowering away from Bryn as she explains to Shaft that this is the way to get The Arcanist. They need to cause a scene to attract him.

Shaft: I'll run you through elf!

Leland: exclaims Shaft, giving Bryn a knowing wink.

Falzaren: Bryn! What are you doing? Why do you want to kill this poor man?

Leland: asks a concerned Falzaren.

Bryn: Shaft, you know we need a distraction for The Arcanist!

Leland: Bryn convinces Shaft and Gozer to step outside of the shop to speak to them in private, leaving Falzaren alone with an erratic Sardos.

Sardos: You can't let them do this to me! If I get out of this with my life, this can be yours!

Leland: Sardos picks up a small metallic cube with arcane etchings to entice Falzaren to save his life, as he nervously glances at the back door of his shop, inching towards it.

Falzaren: Look, I'm not going to let them just kill you, but I am interested in the items that The Arcanist has. So, I'm not going to let you run away either.

Leland: Outside the shop, Bryn offers Shaft and Gozer gold to stay quiet about her hit.

Without hesitation, Gozer says,

Gozer: Pay me.

Shaft: Just stay here for a sec

Leland: replies Shaft as he enters the shop again and slams the door shut, locking it from the inside, just in time to see Sardos make a break for the rear exit of the shop. Falzaren waves his hands in a practiced manner and lets out a ball of frost that sails high, missing Sardos, and smashing into the wall above the back door.

Shaft: HELP, SARDOS IS IN TROUBLE! WE NEED THE ARCANIST!

Leland: screams Shaft. Unable to enter the shop from the front now that it's locked, a frustrated Bryn moves around the building to enter through the back, to find a fleeing Sardos. Despite Shaft's cries echoing down the street, Bryn quickly draws her bow and expertly puts an arrow right into the back of Sardos' head, instantly killing him.

Her job completed, Bryn continues around the perimeter of the shop into an adjacent alley to keep a lookout for The Arcanist. Witness to all of this, Gozer follows her, demanding her hush money, happily pocketing it.

Shaft's cries have now drawn a crowd in the streets of Zexah as people have gathered around Sardos' body. Exiting the shop as well, Falzaren and Shaft see Isabella Goode heading down the street, pushing her way through the crowd to check Sardos' body, confirming that he's dead. Spotting Chucky in the crowd, Isabella motions to him and two others.

Isabella: There's nothing I can do here. Let's take his body to the mortuary.

Leland: Chucky and the others approach the body, getting a good look at the arrow protruding from Sardos' head. Shaft quickly pulls the arrow out before Sardos' body is taken away.

The crowds disperse, the party seeing no sign of The Arcanist. Suspicious that Sardos and The Arcanist may be one and the same, Shaft and Falzaren search his shop for information to confirm their theory. Finding a hidden door, it reveals a back room full of copies of the items displayed on the shop's tables. It's clear that Sardos was some kind of conman, selling false magical items.

Hitting a dead end at the shop, and not learning anything of value from the other two people on Isabella's list, the party decides to return to the place they encountered The Arcanist and the abomination. Their search here leads them to a rooftop that Falzaren and Bryn climb onto, finding a powdery residue around a shingle, broken by what appears to be some kind of impact point. Falzaren is able to deduce that the residue is magical in nature, as if it is some kind of by-product of a spell

activation. The powder continues across the roof, leaving a trail that points back towards the Good Riddance Inn.

Perhaps The Arcanist is staying at the inn? One bit of consistent information the party has gathered is that nobody in Zexah seems to know who The Arcanist is. He seems to be an outsider attempting to earn the town's trust as their protector. They also know that, according to the recounting of Arcanist interactions, they all took place at night.

Returning to the inn, the party decides to wait out the daylight hours, and to pick up the hunt at nightfall. It's not long after they have set out once again, that they're stopped in the street by a proclamation from the rooftops. It seems The Arcanist has been searching for them as well. He holds a familiar arrow in his hand, the arrow that Bryn mistakenly hit him with that first day in Zexah.

The Arcanist: Surrender the elf for the crime of murder, and the rest of you can go about your business. Your punishment elf, for taking the life of Sardos the Magician, is death.

Leland: The Arcanist leaps down from the roof, landing in front of them, still brandishing Bryn's arrow.

The Arcanist: The same type of arrow that took down Sardos.

Leland: Failing to comply with The Arcanist's demand, Shaft manages to get a shackle around his wrist, attaching the other end to his own, and running between The Arcanist's legs, tripping him up and knocking him prone. The rest of the party quickly makes short work of him, keeping him alive, but rendering him unconscious. Once knocked out, The Arcanist's appearance shimmers and fades, revealing him to be Chucky, the Good Riddance Inn barboy.

Shaft's bounty now collected, the party leaves Zexah under the cover of darkness, planning on heading to Drukhall, and set up camp for the night a few hours outside of town. Bound and shackled, Chucky awakens and the party question him about the items and his actions. Trying to strike a deal, Chucky tells them about a cave just north of Zexah where he found the enchanted armour.

Chucky: Look, I'll take you guys there. It has a ton more stuff in it. I just took what I could carry and got out of there! You can take all you want and let me go!

Leland: Agreeing to check out the cave, the party beds down for the night, setting up watches just to be safe. Shortly before dawn, on Gozer's watch, she hears the soft whinny of a horse coming from the west, the direction of Drukhall. Investigating, she finds the injured animal, it's orc rider dead and dragging behind it with its foot caught in one stirrup. Stopping the horse, Gozer immediately recognizes the orc's tribal colours as belonging to a tribe that has been long dead in the Vorgorrag mountains. The orc is covered in slashes and bites from some kind of beast, and tattooed on his forehead, is a strange symbol.

Unable to identify the symbol's meaning or origin, the party throws Chucky over the newly acquired horse, and head north east, to a small cave opening hidden by some underbrush. As they approach the opening, one of the three stone gargoyles that sit perched above the entrance comes to life! Swooping down on stone wings, the party reduces it to rubble. In the fight, Falzaren attempts to use the gauntlets and the amulet that The Arcanist was wearing. They malfunction and explode, dealing severe damage to the wizard and rendering the items useless.

Now in the cave, the party discovers a pile of assorted body parts in a large chamber lined with tables full of items and papers. Among the parts, is Sardos' body, his limbs not yet severed, but the body is missing its hands. The location of which are quickly discovered as half a dozen little hands come crawling out from under the tables, accompanied by a small, bi-pedal insectoid creature that appears from a small hole in one of the cave's walls.

Another fight ensues with Gozer flipping a table to block the hole, pressing her large half-orc frame against the bangs and scratching coming from the other side. Now clear of hostiles, the party is able to search the cave, discovering what look like diagrams and designs for the pieces of armour Chucky stole. The notations unreadable to the party, as none of them speak Sylvan. On the back wall of this cave, they find a wooden frame the size of a door, set into the stone. Identifying it, Falzaren determines it to be some kind of functioning portal but is strangely unable to ascertain its command word.

Theorizing over the presence of Sardos' body, the party comes to the conclusion that the cave may belong to Isabella, the "doctor" at work it seems. What do they have against Izzy, she's lovely!

Refusing to let Chucky go, despite holding up his end of the bargain, Shaft convinces him to come with him to Drukhall to meet his friend and promises him a pretty penny for his troubles. Clearly taking a page out of Sardos' book, this con job makes for easy travel to Drukhall. A place where both Bryn and Shaft now have a significant amount of money waiting for them.

Near the gates into Drukhall, the party passes another full-blooded orc on a wagon, heading east. Gozer recognizes more long dead tribal colours, and another familiar symbol tattooed on this orc's forehead. Pausing to question him, their curiosity getting the better of them, the orcs claims his tribe does indeed live, having business in Altenshic. A statement that strikes Shaft and Gozer as being quite odd, considering the orcs rarely venture further than Drukhall, which is nestled at the base of the Vorgorag Mountains.

Parting ways, they continue into the city, Shaft leading the way to see his "friend" as he puts it. Bryn gives him a smirk.

Bryn: I think we have the same friend

Leland: Arriving at the Tickly Servant Inn, Shaft and Bryn gain entrance to a back room to see their contact, Detmer the Dwarf. Stereotypically stout in stature, as dwarves are known to be, Detmer sits behind a large, wooden desk. It's polished stain reflecting the torchlight thrown from wall sconces on either side of the small, fifteen-foot room. Slightly surprised that two of his more. . . eccentric freelancers seem to have started working together, Detmer offers them both a job that pays extremely well. But I'm getting slightly ahead of myself. There's poor Chucky to deal with!

Detmer: The Arcanist I presume?

Leland: Detmer gestures to Chucky with one meaty hand, as he opens a drawer in his desk with the other, removing two scrolls. Unrolling each of them, Detmer nods his head to each one. Shaft and Bryn place their hands on their respective scrolls, a horizontal line of white light moves up and down the scroll, scanning each of their palms, confirming a successful fulfillment of their contracts.

Chucky: So, uh, I've met your friend here, I can go right?

Leland: Chucky nervously shifts his weight to either foot, throwing glances towards the flight of stairs leading to the main part of the tavern. Detmer gets up from his desk and moves to the wall on his right, pulling on an empty sconce. A section of the wall slides open, revealing a bare, closet sized room. Shaft draws his rapiers, criss-crossing them and placing the inside of the makeshift pair of giant scissors around Chucky's neck, easily guiding him into the room.

Shaft: No need to make this difficult, Chucky. Just go in the closet for a while answer a few questions, and we can hook up later, and you'll get your money.

Leland: With another pull of the sconce, the wall closes, muffling Chucky's protests.

Over the soft [thud thud thud] of beating fists against sliding wall, Detmer explains the sparse details of the new job. The mayor of Goldum has a problem with the Paladins of Koltice. While known throughout Aspara, the Paladins have little to do with northern cities like Drukhall, their presence kept to a minimum outside of the heavily guarded southern border that demarks their territory.

However, there have been two instances to the contrary in the past 35 years: The Sorrowful Isles Landing, and the Faelarran Forest Occupation. During both events, the Paladins erected mysterious towers that emitted an eerie blue light, bright enough to be visible from many miles away on clear, starless nights. The flora and fauna were greatly affected by this blue light, any life in the immediate area surrounding the towers was choked and smothered.

After only a year since the Paladins withdrew from the Faelarran Forest, their presence and tower activities have begun again outside of their territory. Two new towers have been constructed, the same blue light affecting the forest and wildlife outside of Goldum. The city itself now under constant attack from deranged and sickly beasts. The job is simple; get into the towers, find the artifacts that power each of them, and shut off the blue light. Payment upon delivery of the power sources to the mayor of Goldum.

Placing their hands on two new scrolls, Shaft and Bryn accept the job, recruiting Gozer and Falzaren with the offer of, unbeknownst to them, a paltry payment of gold compared to the total payout of a successful mission

Falzaren: Magical artifacts you say? Those definitely pique my interest.

Leland: The prospect of studying the power sources, rather than the offering of gold, proves to be a more effective incentive for Falzaren's aid.

Spending a day in Drukhall to rest and discuss their next course of action, Gozer suggests leaving the city at sunset.

Gozer: Nobody see us leave at night.

Leland: This simply stated sentiment proved not to be true. Unnoticed by the party, two cloaked figures slink out of the Tickly Servant after showing a particular interest in Bryn. . .

As planned, our four oddly matched adventurers attempt to take their leave of the inn, and the city itself, at sundown, only to be stopped in the road. The two cloaked figures from the inn flanking a well armoured human.

A grin spreads across his face as his eyes meet Bryn's.

Hank: Ello Poppet.

Leland: Bryn is momentarily stunned. Hank Applebees, the man responsible for the savage murder of her best friend, Ciari, stands before her. The sound of his voice triggering violent memories of his greatsword cleaving Ciari in two.

Hank: Give us the amulet, poppet. We know you have it.

Leland: Hank rests his hand on the hilt of his sheathed sword, a large tower is etched into his breastplate. The symbol of the Paladins of Koltice.

Seeing their way blocked, and severely lacking subtlety, Gozer initiates a fight as she lands a solid punch to Hank's chin.

Gozer: Gozer. Say. MOVE.

Leland: Wiping the blood from his mouth, Hank smiles as he draws his weapon. From the opposite end of the street, four more humans appear, all sporting the same tower symbol on their armour. Two more from a side alley. And still, two more behind them. The party is surrounded!

Finally snapping out of her daze, Bryn goes straight for Hank, her shock quickly turning to rage.

Bryn: I will get my revenge.

Leland: Falzaren takes a peppering of crossbow bolts as he conjures up a fog cloud, obscuring his enemies' vision and letting loose zooming darts of magical energy. Gozer bellows her war cry and makes short work of two Paladins. Shaft draws both rapiers and with great flourish, slides between Hank's legs to catch him off guard and land two quick stabs from behind.

The party's ferocious attacks are met with equally biting steel and piercing arrow, Shaft and Bryn falling, lifeless but still breathing, to the ground. Stepping out of his fog cloud, Falzaren sees three Halfling sized people appear in the alley behind a bow wielding Paladin of Koltice. They make quick work of him with their daggers. Only their eyes visible, one of them beckons to the wizard, his words slightly muffled from behind the cloth wrappings that seem to cover their entire body.

Darkling 1: We can help you! Come with us, quickly!

Falzaren: Then help my friends too, I can't just leave them!

Leland: Falzaren proclaims, as he slings another set of magical darts that finally fells Hank Applebees, who was severely wounded by Gozer and her powerful greataxe swipes. Grabbing Bryn's unconscious body, the three wrapped halflings start to drag her back down the alley they appeared from, towards an open manhole.

Falzaren: Gozer! These little guys are going to help us. Grab Shaft!

Leland: Easily slinging Shaft over her broad, half-orc shoulder, Gozer and Falzaren follow their small saviours, down into the sewer, off the streets of Drukhall. Once in the safety of darkness, the three helpers pull down the wrappings over their faces, revealing the elven like features of their Darkling

heritage. Hesitant to fully trust them, but left with no real choice, the conscious party members follow them, dragging the unconscious ones with them.

Revealing a hidden passageway in the sewer tunnel, they're led through a long series of twists and turns, long enough for Bryn and Shaft to regain consciousness. They sputter awake, questions of where they are and where they're going vaguely answered by the Darklings as they continue to lead them through this maze of tunnels.

Darkling 1: We help people leave the city. We can get you out. We have a wagon and Joolvee will take you away! Ohhh, we're close, can you hear Joolvee's music?!

Leland: The soft echo of instrumental music can be heard now. Its volume increasing as they progress closer to a metal ladder at the end of the tunnel they're currently in. A tunnel that is strangely lined with works of art; framed paintings hang from the stone walls, alabaster busts sit on pedestals, on display as if they were in a museum.

Shaft: Ahh, Joolvee's up there you say?

Leland: Shaft motions to the top of the ladder. The music now reaching its crescendo. The Darklings nod excitedly, seeming to sway and revel at Joolvee's music.

The ladder leads to the inside of a large "L" shaped barn. A wooden, covered wagon sits before a closed, sliding door. To the party's left, two stalls house a pair of horses quietly grazing on dried hay. Who could only be Joolvee appears, strolling around the side of the wagon, nimble fingers plucking at tightly wound lute strings. He ceases his play when he sees the party and does not speak. Unlike the smaller Darklings, Joolvee stands as tall as an elf. He too, is wrapped from head to toe.

One of the party's sewer guides moves to the wagon, opening a large lock that sealed the outwardly swinging doors on the back of it, revealing half a dozen chained prisoners. The Darklings draw their daggers, coercing the party into the back of the wagon. Still reeling from their encounter with Hank Applebees, the party finds themselves in no condition for another fight as they climb into the wagon.

Now trapped, but luckily not shackled like their new travelling buddies, the party is left in the wagon long enough to patch up some of their wounds and hatch a plan of escape. Taking short, but effective swings in the tight quarters of the wagon, Gozer manages to chop out a hole large enough for Bryn to get her lithe elven arm through to reach the lock.

As Bryn is blindly fumbling with her thieves' tools, they hear the rumble of the sliding barn door now opening, and a near inaudible skittering across the barn's roof. Now free, they're face to face with Joolvee and three orcs with familiar forehead tattoos. Shaft and Bryn immediately take to high ground, easily scaling up the back of the wagon, and a stack of hay bales, respectively. Allowing them to fire arrows and bolts while Gozer charges in, easily cutting down two of the orcs. Only to have three tiny, spider like creatures with long eel necks ending in a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth drop down from the roof, quickly surrounding her. They bite into her flesh, pumping her full of poison that nearly takes her down, her Relentless Endurance keeping her on her feet.

Joolvee strikes a resounding chord on his lute, letting loose a shattering CRACK at Shaft's feet, inflicting damage to the halfling and wagon alike. The frenzied yells from the prisoners within it adding to the

growing volume of the fight as Falzaren utters his magic chants and throws up his hands in a practiced manner, hurling a shimmering orb at Joolvee, engulfing him in flames.

A second, much larger, spider eel creature clinging to the barn ceiling drops down next to the wagon. It meets Shaft's gaze, clearly trying to influence him in some way. Shaking off its effect, Shaft leaps at the creature from the top of the wagon, letting loose a flurry of rapier stabs. All the while Bryn landing arrow hits on it and the last orc. With a final crush, stab and arrow shot, the party has once again got out of a scrape with their lives intact.

Quickly searching the bodies, it's clear that the orcs were paying Joolvee for the people in this wagon. How the spider eel creatures' factor in is not entirely clear, though it did seem as though the orcs were under their command.

Gozer: Some these more dead tribe orcs. But not this one.

Leland: Gozer gives one of the orc bodies an angry kick, recognizing it to be Klash, Bone Collector's right-hand orc.

Recovering a set of keys, Shaft throws them to the prisoners in the wagon, and the party saddles up the horses, riding out of there as fast possible, not keen on waiting for Darkling reinforcements from the sewers.

Finding themselves north of Drukhall, the cityscape dotted with torchlight in the distance, they spur the horses west, through the night, seeking refuge on the shores of a small lake nearly a day's ride away. Here, they lick their wounds, heal up, and follow a south flowing river, towards the blue towers, through a small mountain range near the city of Viksher.

Continuing with the river at their side, the party spots two goblins in the water ahead of them, opting for a detour around them over another potential conflict. Shaft's expertise in the mountains allows them to easily find a suitable path for the horse. It takes them up, ascending into the mountain, the goblins quickly disappearing from view below them, until they come to a small cave opening, the path extending past it another sixty feet ending in a sheer drop down the side of the mountain.

Curiosity, and the possibility of loot getting the better of them, they investigate the cave, discovering an expansive cavern with eight makeshift kennels housing large, ferocious dog like creatures called Worgs. Gaining their trust, Bryn satiates the beasts using parts of the previously dispatched ogre kennel master.

Bryn: How bout some finger food? Gozer, help me chop these off.

Leland: Continuing deeper into this mountainside, our party goes on to discover a larger cave system connected by an elevator platform that houses ogres, bugbears and hobgoblins.

It's here our pernicious party performs their first heroic deed of the adventure in saving two humans from becoming Worg food and getting them out of the cave. Claiming to have been panning for gold in the river, a group of goblins ambushed and captured them, only to hand them off to the ogres to be prepped for chow time. Despite Bryn's distrust of them, the party escorts them back down this mountain path. The party continues to follow the river south as the two humans travel north, unsure if they're happier to be out of the mountain, or away from Bryn.

Though they escaped the mountain with no more than a few scrapes and bruises, the mountains inhabitants were not quite done inflicting violence upon them. While distracted by a waving ogre eager to greet them, three goblins riding wolves sneak up behind them, quickly accompanied by second lumbering ogre, intent on taking them back to their mountain. Snapping, snarling jaws, and clanking metal quickly break the idyllic river scene (and that's just Gozer, the wolves barely made a noise!) as the party begins to make quick work of the goblin's mounts and the ogres.

Gozer swings a mighty blow at the largest of the goblins. Instinctively, it grabs his goblin buddy and thrusts it into the path of her axe, quickly dropping to his knees and laying down his weapons.

Thuft: You be new King! You strong! Thuft follow you!

Leland: Gozer smiles and forcefully pats the goblin on the head,

Gozer: Yes. Gozer King now!

Leland: And thus, dear listener, King Gozer's reign began. And her loyal subject, Thuft, joined the party. Warning his new king of more goblin scouting parties set to search the area should the one they just dispatched not return, the party very easily and proficiently cross the river with plans of seeking refuge in Viksher. It had been a couple of years since Shaft had visited last, but his on again off again. . . friend, Nina Darri, may be able to put them up at her establishment of ill repute.

The newly formed quintet arrives at the western gate of Viksher to find a guard warning newcomers of a dangerous sickness within the city. Due to the nature of the symptoms, extreme outbursts of irrational violence, all weapons must be confiscated and held at the gate for the duration of their stay in the city. Inquiring about his friend Nina, Shaft learns that Ms. Darri has unfortunately fallen ill and is being held at one of many makeshift triage centers around the city attempting to treat the ill and keep them from harming themselves or other townspeople.

Hesitant to even risk entering the city, the guard accepts a generous bribe to allow the party to carry any weapons they can adequately conceal on their person and hands them each a homemade surgical mask; a rag connected on either end by a short length of rope to fasten it to one's face.

Receiving directions to the triage center closest to Nina's place, the party don their facemasks and enter the city. Shaft immediately notices a looming clocktower in the distance towards the centre of the city. A marvel of a building considering its size, and the fact that its construction hadn't even been started on his previous visit to the city.

Even from outside of the triage center, the anguished and frenzied cries of its patients ring through the air. An orderly takes Shaft down a narrow corridor lined with closed doors, the rattle of chains underlying the now magnified yells and screams. Nina is found to be chained to her bed, her eyes filled with confusion and rage. She screams at Shaft to get her out of there, thrashing against the length of chain, lunging for him, her lips curled up in a snarl. Clearly not even recognizing Shaft, there is nothing he can do for her save for a few creature comforts.

Shaft: Can you make sure to take good care of her, maybe light an extra candle at night, that sort of thing.

Leland: With no other reason to remain in the city, the party quickly takes their leave and retrieve their weapons. Deciding to setup camp for the night just outside of the city, the party plans to continue east, to Goldum, to speak with the mayor in hopes he can provide them with more information pertaining to the blue towers.

That night, Gozer awakes to find the party gone. Klash Bone Collector stands before her.

Klash: Ha ha ha, I've found you halfie.

Leland: Gozer blinks, and kneeling before Klash is Laianna, the reason Gozer still lives after being defeated by Klash. The distraction Laianna caused allowed Gozer to slip away with her head still on her shoulders.

Gozer: Laianna, you're alive?!

Klash: She dies now for her treachery.

Leland: Klash raised his longsword above his head and Gozer charges! This time, besting the orc chieftain, sinking her axe into the bridge of his nose and forehead. Turning to Laianna's crumpled form, grasping her shoulder, Laianna's visage morphs into a purple skinned woman, small, sharp teeth visible in her maniacal grin as she thrusts a spectral clawed hand into Gozer's chest. Gozer's breath catches, her body stiffens, the hand seems to tug at something deep inside of her.

Gasping and bolting upright Gozer wakes up to Falzaren shaking her, attempting to rouse her for her watch. She instinctively swings a massive fist into Falzaren's face, the commotion stirring the rest of the party awake.