

-LUCIELLA ELISABETH SCARLETT-

TWO AROMANTICS

**SPEND AN ENTIRE DAY DOING EVERYTHING EXCEPT
EXPERIENCING ROMANTIC ATTRACTION**

*You are aromantic, and your best friend is aromantic.
There's only one thing to do: go and fight a dragon.*

~A 5E SOLO ADVENTURE~

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ARTIST

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CONTENT WARNING

This work contains mentions of arophobia/aphobia and of emotional abuse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Eternal gratitude to my aromantic friends across the world, who've given me the courage to tell without explaining and to trust in my own self-worth.

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INTRODUCTION

You are aromantic, and your best friend is aromantic. There's only one thing to do: go and fight a dragon.

Two Aromantics Spend an Entire Day Doing Everything Except Experiencing Romantic Attraction is a single-player adventure for a level 4 character. It includes some guidance to get you started, but assumes at least a basic understanding of the game system and your character's abilities.

For this game, you will be playing an aromantic character. This means that other aromantic characters will speak openly to you, will not see the need to explain or justify their orientation, and may even disparage alloromantic (non-aromantic) people at times. The aromantic characters in this adventure are not intended to perfectly represent all aromantic people, just as the alloromantic characters are not expected to represent all alloromantic people. A few useful terms are included for ease of reference, but readers unfamiliar with those terms are encouraged to perform their own research beforehand.

GETTING STARTED

You will need a 4th level character sheet and a set of dice, as well as a copy of the 5E ruleset. When creating your character, try to ensure that they are one that you can easily relate to. Avoid exaggerated personality traits or outlandish character options.

The adventure takes place in a “romantic fantasy” setting, in that although it shares many of the characteristics of traditional high fantasy, it lacks the grittiness common to such settings. The world is peaceful, prosperous and socially progressive. Even the common folk can expect access to fair trials, schooling, medicine and some simple magic.

RESOURCES

Stat blocks for NPCs that may join you for your adventure are included in Appendix 1 but can also be downloaded online for ease of use. All other stat blocks are embedded in the adventure text.

Downloads:

<https://luciellaes.itch.io/two-aromantics>

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/260855/>

GAME OVER

If you or a key party member dies during this adventure, this is a game over. Skip back to the beginning if you wish to play again. If, at any point, there are no other conscious party members with you, you automatically fail death saving throws.

TERMINOLOGY

An **aromantic (aro)** person either does not experience romantic attraction, or only experiences it rarely or in certain circumstances. An aromantic person can have any sexual orientation, sex and gender.

An **alloromantic (allo)** person has a romantic orientation other than aromantic, such as heteroromantic, homoromantic, biromantic, panromantic or so on.

Amatonormativity is the assumption that it is normal for every human to experience romantic attraction, to desire an exclusive (monogamous) romantic relationship and to elevate this romantic relationship above all other relationships, and finally, that those who do not conform are either unhealthy or immature.

1. MARGUERITE'S MESSAGE

You are shaken from your rest by the sound of a familiar voice: "Ring ring ring. Ring ring ring. Stone call. Stone call. Hello? Is anyone there?"

You blink your eyes in the darkness and spot your sending stone glowing nearby. It is late at night, and the disturbance is unexpected, yet you recognize the voice: the sending stone is one of a pair, allowing messages to be sent between you and your longtime friend and companion, Marguerite.

"Are you awake?" the voice calls insistently. There is a brief sigh, before Marguerite continues, "I know I'm sending this at a bad time. Sorry if I woke you up. It's just... uh... how do I put this?"

"Well, I'm contacting you to see if you'd be up for some adventuring tomorrow. You know, like old times? I hear there's a dragon that needs slaying. And it would be nice to spend some time together. As friends do. Until they don't. I don't know."

You hear a soft sound from the sending stone; perhaps Marguerite is clearing her throat. "If you have time, how about meeting me at Daisy's tomorrow morning? I'll be waiting there at the tenth bell. It would be good to see you again. It's been a while after all.

"Again, I'm really sorry – I shouldn't be contacting you at this hour. Ah, I suppose I should finish up quickly. Well, I'm not sure how much time is left for this message, but –"

Her voice cuts off abruptly. The magic of the sending stone flares and fades before you have a chance to respond.

* * *

It has been months now since you, Marguerite, and Jerys, the third member of your small party, settled down to a quiet life in the city. The original intent had been a brief pause to recover from your last adventure, but somehow, days stretched into weeks, until departure stalled indefinitely as Jerys shocked both you and Marguerite with the news of his engagement. With one thing leading to another, each of your party found jobs within the city, and, for a time at least, abandoned your

adventuring days. Yet it seems that Marguerite at least has not abandoned them entirely.

You head out from your home towards the café Marguerite mentioned, making your way there well before the appointed time. You spot your friend out the front. Her eyes are down, her expression gloomy, but she brightens at the sight of you.

“Did you get my message?” she asks unnecessarily. On your confirmation, she smiles, and beckons you inside.

Daisy’s Teahouse is a gloriously pink and frilly establishment covered in flower decorations. A waiter garbed in a lace apron beams at the pair of you and indicates towards an empty booth in the quieter sections of the café – beyond the long table where a cluster of gnomes hold an animated conversation over high tea. The waiter shows you to your table, produces a pair of gaudy menus and then moves away.

You glance over the page and find a dizzying array of teas, cakes and scones. No wonder Marguerite likes this place; she’s loved sweets as long as you’ve known her. Yet you notice that your friend isn’t even looking at the menu: she catches your gaze and comments, “I already know what I want.”

Well, you’d best decide quickly: the waiter is already on his way back. It looks like you can get a cake and tea set for 1sp:



Daisy's Teahouse

-TEA-	-CAKE-
ASSAM	CHOCOLATE GATEAU
EARL GREY	YUZU CHEESECAKE
SENGHA	STRAWBERRYSHORTCAKE
GENMAICHA	MATCHA PAVLOVA
HOJICHA	BLACK FOREST CAKE
PEPPERMINT	MANGO MOUSSE CAKE
CHRYSANTHEMUM	FIG AND LEMONTART
STRAWBERRY	APPLE FLAN
YUZU	LAVENDER TEACAKE

“Well, have you decided?” a voice pipes up. You jump – the waiter has returned with a swiftness that startles you. You quickly give your order and then look over to your friend.

“Bring me one of every cake you sell,” she announces. “And I’ll have an Earl Grey tea, please.”

To his credit, the waiter shows no surprise. “So that will be one earl grey tea, one chocolate gateau, one yuzu cheesecake, one strawberry shortcake, one matcha pavlova, one black forest cake, one mango mousse cake, one fig and lemon tart, one apple flan and one lavender teacake. Will that be everything?”

“Ah, I’ll have the strawberry parfait from the specials board too, please,” Marguerite adds. “That’s everything. Thanks.” The waiter nods and departs.

You pause to glance suspiciously at your friend. You knew about her sweet tooth, but her order still seems somewhat excessive.

“It’s just one of those days,” Marguerite tells you. “What? I’ll go back to eating healthy some other day. Sometimes you have to treat yourself.”

You wait patiently for her to explain. Absently, she swirls the glass of water before her. You see the sunlight from the open window dancing off the surface of the water.

“Jerys dumped me,” she says suddenly, then makes a face at her own poor phrasing. “No, not as in “dump” dumped me, but... ah, I suppose you could say that I was forcibly ejected from the friendzone?”

“You know about that new girlfriend of his – well, you know about his engagement at least. I mean, I’m not saying I’m against him getting married, because I’m not, it just seems like it all happened so quickly that I don’t... ah, I’m getting agitated again.

“I went and saw him the other day. Even if he doesn’t have as much time for us anymore, I still see him as a friend. I mean, I’ve known him even longer than I know you, and I’ve known you since...” she trails off, thinking.

Perhaps you can prompt her memory?

Where did you first meet Marguerite?

At a tavern	In high school	During the zombie outbreak
Marguerite laughs. "I remember that! That was a good fight. Not the one we were in, but the one we were watching. Ah, I never did get my coins back from that lousy drunkard."	Marguerite grimaces. "Oh man, high school was the worst. Don't even remind me. Do you remember when Perri learned how to cast the fireball spell? A nightmare. I still can't believe any of us graduated."	Marguerite nods solemnly. "Those were difficult days. It's hard to believe we made it through without a scratch. I guess if you survive an apocalypse together, you're bound to become friends."

The two of you pause to reminisce for a moment, before Marguerite shakes herself back into the present. "Well, see Jerys and I met a few years before then, and we've been friends ever since. I never really expected that to end.

"I haven't seen him in a while, and I missed him. So, yesterday I asked if we could spend some time together.

"Guess what he said?" Marguerite laughs bitterly. "I can't. It's not fair to Gisele for me to be spending time with other women."

"So, I said, what, did she tell you that? 'No, this is my personal decision.' Your personal decision to what? Shut off your best friend?"

"Ah, what do I know. Is that how allo people think?" Marguerite throws her hands up in the air in frustration.

You survey the fuming woman before you. Before you have a chance to think of something to say, the waiter reappears, bearing a trayful of teapots, cups and the first of many cakes to come.

"Oh wow, yum," Marguerite proclaims over the top of the artfully prepared fruit tart drizzled with raspberry sauce. "My complaining can wait, let's get into this."

Over the next several minutes, you are astonished again by the appetite of your long-time friend. You're not exactly sure where the mountain of food she devours disappears to, but

Marguerite seems to be enjoying herself. Occasionally she pushes a plate to you, offering a sample for your pleasure.

“So anyway,” Marguerite eventually continues, after a final spoonful of strawberry parfait. “About that quest I mentioned. I met someone at the tavern yesterday who told me about some trouble over in the mountains. Xe said that Alena could use some help. You remember Alena? If she needs help then there’s some shit going down.

“So, get this: apparently there’s a dragon up there. What I reckon is, once we’ve finished eating, let’s go meet up with Alena and see if we can help. Heck, I’m up for fighting a dragon if that’s what it takes. What do you say?”

Fighting a dragon? That sounds dangerous. But hey, you’ve got some free time, so why not?

Go to page 10.

2. JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS

Marguerite eventually finishes her assortment of desserts and offers a handful of coins to the waiter, shaking off your attempts to pay. “You can get it next time,” she promises.

Outside of the café is a bright and pleasant morning. Marguerite lets out a whistle, startling everyone nearby. As several irritated eyes shift towards her, a broomstick swoops down from the heavens to halt with a comical screech in front of the two of you.

“Well, hop on board, and let’s get going,” Marguerite instructs, swinging her leg over the broom.

You fly free from the city, soon leaving those curious eyes far behind. A glorious patchwork of green and blue stretches out below as you tilt your head back and enjoy the rush of the wind. Marguerite directs the flying broom at a leisurely pace and you feel no fear at all.

After close to half an hour’s flight, you reach the beginnings of the mountain range. The cliffs are formed of pale yellow-grey stone, speckled with plants that cling determinedly to their precarious perch.

As you continue on through the cliffs, Marguerite starts to sing. The song is familiar, and you consider joining in.

Is it karaoke time?

Heck yeah!	Hell no.
<p>You start to sing along, and Marguerite’s voice grows louder and stronger, bolstered by your support. You start harmonizing with her, and she pulls her hands from the broom handle to clap and click at the appropriate times in the song. She then tries to turn the broom, and both of you narrowly avoid falling to your deaths.</p>	<p>Marguerite has a beautiful voice. You’ve missed hearing it. You listen as she sings the ballad of a hero from long ago.</p> <p><i>I once met a man in a blizzard Who claimed to be some sort of wizard I was cold, I was wet And I got quite upset When he turned my friend into a lizard.</i></p>

Heck yeah!	Hell no.
<p>“Whew, that was close,” Marguerite pants. Somewhat sheepishly, she turns her head to you to suggest, “Maybe you’d better do the claps instead.”</p>	<p>“What a jerk,” Marguerite briefly comments, before continuing with the next song.</p>

Marguerite’s voice cuts off with a startled screech as a black bird swoops at her. She raises her hands instinctively to shield her face and the broomstick swerves dangerously in the air. Yet the bird is not interested in Marguerite – instead, it flies right past both of you and straight for the tail of the broom. With one swift snip of its sharp beak, it tears away a stick and then glides away into the cliffs.

“Damn it, don’t scare me like that!” Marguerite moans. “Do I look like a flying bird’s nest or something? Is that what this is? Eek!” Marguerite shrieks again as a second bird and dives towards the broom, followed by a third. “Hey! Stop that!” Heedless of her complaints, the birds snip away two more twigs.

“Ah! No!” Marguerite yells. “If you don’t stop that, the broom won’t last!” She glances over to you urgently. “Grab hold. I’m going to speed ahead,” she warns. She leans forward determinedly, and the broom surges onwards.

For several minutes, cliffs rush past in a sickening blur of green, gold and grey, before the broom suddenly slows. You grip the broom even tighter as Marguerite lets out a stream of expletives.

“Damn thing needs maintenance,” she mutters at last. “But at least we shook them off – uh oh.”

A gorge stretches out ahead of you, thick with vegetation far below, but with bare, unclimbable cliffs on either side – and there, clinging to the sparse, stringy weeds, the birds wait in their hundreds, or perhaps thousands. There is a brief, stunned moment when nothing happens, and then chaos erupts around you.

“Do something!” Marguerite yells to you, clinging to the broom for dear life.

ENCOUNTER IN THE SKIES

It's time to do something about these birds!

Running the encounter:

- The broom you are riding has an AC of 15 and 30 hit points. The stats for the swarm of ravens are below.
- Roll initiative for you and the swarm. Marguerite is busy steering.
- On their turn, the ravens attack the broom and steal sticks (HP). On your turn, you can retaliate.
- If you are capable of speaking to animals, you can use your turn to attempt a DC10 Charisma (Persuasion) check to shoo away the birds. Reduce the swarm's HP by the result of the check minus the DC.
- Once the swarm runs out of HP, go to page 13. If the broom runs out of HP first, go to page 15 – or, if you are able to fly or cast the *feather fall* spell, go to page 17.

SWARM OF RAVENS

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 24 (7d8 - 7)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages –

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny raven. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Beaks. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

3. VICTORY FLIGHT

The remaining birds disperse, evidently deciding that your sticks aren't worth the fight. Marguerite lets out a sigh of relief. "You did it. Not bad." She throws you a shaky grin. "Good to be back into the action, isn't it? Ah, it's been far too long since –"

The tattered broom wobbles suddenly and drops a few feet in the air. "We should probably get where we're going," a subdued Marguerite finishes instead. She carefully directs the broom towards a cave at the base of the gorge, patting the broom handle reassuringly in a way that suggests she is not entirely oblivious to the shaking and whining of the failing magic. "Good boy. You can do it," you hear her whisper, right before the enchantment falters, dropping the two of you into a bush.

"Ugh. Piece of junk," Marguerite complains from somewhere in the shrubbery. You pry yourselves free while retaining as much dignity as one can in such circumstances. Just as you are brushing the final twigs from your backside, a pair of dwarves burst from the cave nearby, spears pointed towards you.

"Halt! Who goes there?!" the first of the two demands.

"Singram, is that you?" Marguerite calls. "Ah, and Hemer too. It's been a while."

The beads of Singram's beard clink as he lowers his spear with a confused look. You see his eyes brighten with realization. "Marguerite!" he cries. "My, my, it has been a while! Hemer, you remember them, don't you? These are those adventurers that helped us out several months ago!"

"I'm the one who said they looked familiar," a surly Hemer reminds him.

"Ah! Yes, well..." Singram quickly changes the subject. "We saw something flying through the air and came to check it out. Didn't expect to see old friends around here, being chased by birds. Did no one tell you these are dangerous parts to be flying in? Birds are one thing, but I wouldn't want to be caught out in the open with that dragon still on the loose. Oh, but I guess you wouldn't have heard about that one."

Marguerite shakes her head “Actually we did. That’s why we’re here; we thought there might be something the three of us could do to help you all.”

“Against a dragon?” Singram eyes her doubtfully. “Well, if you say so. You’ll be wanting to speak to Alena first, I’m guessing. How about Hemer and I take you inside? It’s not far from here.”

Marguerite tosses a cheerful smile your way. “Sounds good,” she replies.

“Right, then off we go – wait, hold on a second: what do you mean by ‘the three of us’? Are you waiting on someone?”

Marguerite’s eyebrows knit. Well, of course, me, Jerys, and –” she cuts off abruptly. Singram waits, puzzled, for her to continue. Instead, Marguerite strides towards the opening in the cliff face. “Forget about it,” she throws over her shoulder. “Are you coming?”

“Hold up!” Singram calls out. He casts a glance your way, with a question lingering on his lips. It goes unasked as he hurries after your friend, out of the bright sunlight and into the belly of the mountain.

Go to page 19.

4. CRASH LANDING

As the final twig is plucked by a hungry beak, Marguerite makes a desperate dive towards ground level – too slow. The magic that holds you aloft gives way, and you and your companion find yourselves in the uncomfortable position of clutching a totally mundane piece of wood while hovering well above any solid ground.

Marguerite lets out her loudest scream yet as the two of you fall into the vegetation, snap through several branches and land heavily on the ground.

* * *

A voice sounds in your ear. Your jumbled wits struggle to make sense of the words, until, syllable by syllable, they string their way into a question: “Can you hear me?”

You blink your eyes open. The blur before you solidifies into the shape of a dwarf leaning over you. One of two dwarves, you notice; the other one is faced away from you, prodding the limp form of...

“Oh, I definitely had too much cake,” Marguerite moans. It seems your friend is in one piece, if a little shaken by the fall.

“Phew,” says the dwarf closest to you. His beard is braided with countless beads that clink against each other as he shakes his head. “Hemer and I saw you two flying in – thought we’d be digging graves this evening so this here is a nice surprise. What were you thinking? This isn’t exactly sightseeing central. It’s crazy birds by day, batshit bats by night, and if you’re extra lucky, himself might just come out and say hello.”

“Himself the dragon,” Hemer fills in helpfully. “Or herself. Themselves. Who knows? No one’s been able to talk to it.” He looks at you closely. “Hey, haven’t I seen the two of you somewhere before?”

“Hmm?” the beaded-beard dwarf takes another look, and realization dawns. “By the left butt cheek of –” he breaks off hastily. “Yes, of course you have – these are those adventurers who helped us out several months ago! Hold it, but wasn’t there another one... ah!” the dwarf runs and begins to frantically search the area. “Where’s Jerys?! He wouldn’t have... he didn’t...”

Marguerite makes a sound of disgust. “Ugh, forget about Jerys. He’s not here. More importantly, about that dragon: we were on our way to meet with Alena to see if we could help, but I lost track of where we landed. Can you point us in the right direction?”

The dwarves exchange insultingly incredulous glances. “Huh, the dragon,” Singram states. “You want to... well, I mean, it’s no flock of birds, but...”

“Just tell us where to find Alena,” Marguerite sighs.

“We can take you there,” Hemer offers. “It’s not far. If you feel up to walking.”

“Of course we’re up to walking,” Marguerite retorts with as much dignity as she can muster. “Come on, then, let’s get going.”

Unsteadily, you rise to your feet. You don’t feel great, but you can certainly walk.

Due to the fall, you are currently at 1 HP.

Go to page 19.

5. AWKWARD LANDING

As the final twig is plucked by a hungry beak, Marguerite makes a desperate dive towards ground level – too slow. The magic that holds you aloft gives way, and you and your companion find yourselves in the uncomfortable position of clutching a totally mundane piece of wood while hovering well above any solid ground.

Marguerite begins to panic. “We’re going to die! We’re going to die! We’re going to – huh?” It takes a long moment for her to recognize that with your grip on her arm holding her steady, you are in fact gently descending rather than plummeting to your deaths.

“Huh,” she comments. “I forgot you could do that.”

The two of you slowly and awkwardly make your way to the ground. There is only so much that you can control your path while supporting your discomfited friend, and while you manage to land on your feet, Marguerite immediately topples into a bush.

“Ugh. Those lousy birds. That lousy broom. Piece of junk,” Marguerite complains from somewhere in the shrubbery. Just as you are pulling her back onto her unsteady feet, a pair of dwarves burst from the cave nearby, spears pointed towards you.

“Halt! Who goes there?!” the first of the two demands.

“Singram, is that you?” Marguerite calls. “Ah, and Hemer too. It’s been a while.”

The beads of Singram’s beard clink as he lowers his spear with a confused look. You see his eyes brighten with realization. “Marguerite!” he cries. “My, my, it has been a while. Hemer, you remember them, don’t you? These are those adventurers that helped us out several months ago!”

“I’m the one who said they looked familiar,” a surly Hemer reminds him.

“Ah! Yes, well... odd circumstances, after all,” a flustered Singram replies. “Didn’t expect to see old friends around here, being chased by birds. Did no one tell you these are dangerous

parts to be flying in? Birds are one thing, but I wouldn't want to be caught out in the open with that dragon still on the loose."

"That's why we're here," Marguerite explains. "We thought there might be something the three of us could do to help you all."

The dwarves exchange insultingly incredulous glances. "Huh, the dragon," Singram states. "You want to... well, I mean, it's no flock of birds, but..."

"Just take us to Alena," Marguerite sighs.

"As you say... but hold on just a second, what do you mean by 'the three of us'? Are you waiting on someone?"

Marguerite's eyebrows knit. Well, of course, me, Jerys, and –" she cuts off abruptly. Singram waits, puzzled, for her to continue. Instead, Marguerite strides towards the opening in the cliff face. "Forget about it," she throws over her shoulder. "Are you coming?"

"Hold up!" Singram calls out. He casts a concerned look your way, with a question lingering on his lips. It goes unasked as he hurries after your friend, out of the bright sunlight and into the belly of the mountain.

Go to page 19.

6. ALENA'S PLIGHT

Hemer and Singram lead you into the caves and the bright sunlight quickly fades behind you. Marguerite murmurs softly and her sleeve brightens with arcane light. The natural roughness of the terrain gives way to a perfectly shaped archway of dwarven design: the beginnings of the subterranean city of Khulgarshold, ruled over by King Thelnor Thrashhammer and his daughter, Alena.

The air is warm, and grows warmer as you push deeper into the mountain, passing tens of dwarves who glance curiously at their unusual visitors. Some merely sit to chat within the carved alcoves of Khulgarshold, while others are hard at work at the forges and workbenches. Several hurry past you without a second glance, carting their precious wares to Thrashhammer merchants. A few recognize you and call out greetings as you pass.

"The princess should be just ahead," Hemer advises, as Singram knocks three times on the wooden door, wearing an expression of supreme self-importance. "Guests here for you, Your Highness," he proclaims.

An irritated yell from inside disrupts his pomp. "Send them in then! Door's unlocked."

"Well then," a slightly disgruntled Singram says, "in you go, I suppose."

"Hope to see you around later," Hemer pipes up. Marguerite smiles at him and reaches to open the door.

It swings open smoothly, revealing a fuming female dwarf seated behind a desk. Before you have time to even greet her, she begins to speak: "No, you may not enter the mines, yes the dragon is still there, yes, we are writing for assistance and – I say, Marguerite, is that you?"

"Alena. Long time no speak," she replies with a broad grin.

Alena visibly brightens. She abandons her desk and heads over to give each of you a crushing hug.

"Uh, we'll be on our way, then," Singram calls from the doorway. Wrapped up in Alena's tight embrace, Marguerite can only waggle her fingers in farewell as the two depart.

“You have twigs in your hair,” Alena says as she emerges from the hug, pulling one free from Marguerite’s red curls.

“Still?” Marguerite moans. She spots a mirror nearby and skips over to clear up the remaining debris from the fall.

“Difficult trip?” Alena asks.

“Ugh, you don’t know the half of it,” Marguerite replies, and yelps as a larger twig comes away with several strands of hair. She curses softly, then calls back, “Mind you, I hear you’ve gotten into some trouble of your own. What’s this about a dragon, then?”

Alena pulls a face. “If it’s not one thing, it’s another. The mines of Khulgarshold are a magnet for monsters, and I should know that by now. You remember you helped us out several months ago with some kobolds? Well, wouldn’t you know it, as soon as they’re cleared out, in comes a goblin menace. Chase them away, and here comes the great big lizard itself. I wouldn’t have thought there was much down there of interest to a dragon, but what would I know?”

“Ah, but that can wait,” Alena demurs. “It’s good to see you again, but both of you look terrible. And I mean that with the greatest respect and affection. Come and sit down for a moment. Catch your breath. Take a short rest if you will, and I’ll call for tea and some lunch. Why don’t you tell me what you’ve been up to since we last spoke?”

Take a short rest. Marguerite uses Song of Rest: if you expend hit dice to regain HP, roll an extra 1d6.
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It’s hard to track the time in this underground place, but you suspect at least an hour, possibly longer, passes as you chat over tea and cucumber sandwiches. Certainly, several dwarves pop their head in the room, spot the fact that you are in the middle of a meal, and then withdraw. You notice that Alena has chosen to sit in a position where she spots none of these intruders, and likewise chooses to ignore the moments when your gaze meets one of theirs.

“I’ve been fielding queries all day. They can wait,” Alena comments briefly, before returning to the matter at hand: a new

song Marguerite is attempting to write. “Nothing rhymes with ‘silver’. Scrap that whole line,” she cautions.

“‘Kilter’ is a half rhyme,” Marguerite argues. You forgot how that thread of the conversation began, but relax and allow yourself to be eased back in.

At last, the sandwiches are cleared away, and you return to the task at hand. “Right then,” Alena begins, “about that dragon.

“It’s still pretty small by dragon standards, but it packs a mean bite and a meaner breath. It flew in a few days ago – nearly scared the life out of one of my cousins! And wouldn’t you know it, the damn thing decided to squat itself in the mines. I suppose it thinks the whole place is its new lair.

“Anyway, we were in luck: the dragon came in after the end of the working day, and no one got hurt or stuck in there. Still, we can hardly go back in there if there’s a chance of getting chewed up by a great big lizard. Something’s got to be done about it, and quick, or we’ll run out of ore soon enough. Worse, it’s settled right over the entrance to the vaults – there’s treasure there, to be sure, but not the kind I would expect dragons to be interested in. That’s the heart of Khulgarshold, and the source of the flames that fire our forges. We can’t exactly surrender *that* to a dragon!

“Like I said, it’s not a big creature, at least not yet. If the three of us work together, I’m sure we can take it. I wouldn’t want to bring an army down there – there’s no space to move around, and no chance of surprising the beast with larger numbers. I want to move in quickly and quietly, and take it down before it has time to see us coming. What do you say? Are you in?”

“Heck yeah,” Marguerite enthuses before you even have a chance to respond. She has an odd spark in her eye – you recognize that mixture of curiosity and recklessness which tends to appear shortly before you end up in severe danger.

Alena produces four vials of bright scarlet liquid, and splits them evenly between you and Marguerite. “I’ll give you these, just in case,” Alena adds. “Hopefully we won’t get too beaten up, but it’s better to be safe than sorry. If you don’t end up using them in the fight, you can keep them for later.”

Alena gives you and Marguerite 2 Potions of Greater Healing each. If you drink a potion, you regain 4d4 + 4 HP.

“Well then, shall we be on our way?” Alena asks. You begin to follow her out, but pause as Marguerite tugs your sleeve for attention.

“One final thing before we leave,” she tells you. “It’s been a long time since we’ve fought together so it may be worth reminding you of a few things.

“To start with: when we fight, Alena and I will take your orders, so long as you don’t tell us to do anything too stupid. It’s ok – we trust you. Use reasonable judgement and we should all be fine.

“Alena is best in melee. I can fight that way if needed, but I’m better in a supportive role. Make sure to call on me if you need healing.

“You can use a combat grid if you like, but it’s just as easy to play using “Theatre of the Mind”. Just remember where everyone is positioned at the end of each turn – for example, so-and-so is near so-and-so. The dragon, or any other monsters we face, will have their own set of tactics that determine who they attack and how. For example, they may attack whoever’s closest, but if someone in the back appears to be more of a threat, they’ll be targeted first. Try to determine what’s most realistic: they game will be more fun if you play it honestly.

“Each of our abilities can be found in Appendix 1, starting on page 155, or in the separate document available in the downloads. I don’t know exactly what that means, and I suppose it’s better not to think too deeply about it. In any case, you may want to have a quick look at our abilities before you continue.” She shrugs. “Well, I think that’s everything. Let’s move right along.”

Go to page 23.

7. JOURNEY INTO THE MINES

Alena leads the way out of the meeting chamber and down past rows of workshops filled with industrious dwarves that call out to you as you pass, dipping their heads respectfully to their princess.

The passageway darkens once more, and Marguerite holds her glowing sleeve up to illuminate your path. The sounds of working dwarves fade into eerie silence, broken only by the obnoxious clanking of Alena's armor.

You are somewhat surprised by the level of noise she makes, seeing as how her light half-plate is clearly designed for stealth and ease of movement. The sound echoes throughout the chamber, as another sound echoes through your memory: that of Alena's own voice, advising caution.

Do you want to scout ahead?

Scout ahead.	Nope. Let's all clang along.
<p>You politely excuse yourself and make your way onwards. Alena seems unbothered, and Marguerite subtly gives you an approving nod.</p> <p>The appearance of the mines grows rougher and older further down, but you are reassured by the sturdy support beams, clearly laid by skilled architects: the mines of Khulgarshold are built to last.</p> <p>Guided by Alena, you follow the main chamber as it slowly slopes downwards, gratefully ignoring the countless low and narrow offshoots of individual mineshafts hewn into the belly of the mountain.</p>	<p>You're clanging. Princess Alena Thrashhammer is clanging. A cacophony ensues.</p> <p>Marguerite opens her mouth briefly as though she is about to protest, but then shrugs, reaches into her pouch, and pulls out a woodblock. You almost laugh as she taps at the tiny instrument, before she opens her mouth and lets out a death metal screech. Even as you jump with surprise, Alena joins in, with somewhat less skill yet no less enthusiasm. Together with the clanging and the jarring singing, you make your way further into</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Scout ahead.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Nope. Let's all clang along.</p>
<p>After several minutes of walking forwards and looping back to report to your friends, you peek cautiously around yet another bend of the corridor to find your target in sight.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Go to page 25.</i></p>	<p>the mines, following the rails of a central passageway that connects countless smaller mineshafts into one. The noise echoes strangely in the space, as though you have brought not three people but rather an entire army. Needless to say, stealth is out of the question at this point.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Go to page 27.</i></p>

8. SNEAKY DOES IT

The red dragon lies coiled before a broad, carved gateway. Though the trails thus far have been marked by mine cart rails, this area is instead paved with carefully cut stones beneath a high ceiling. It almost has the feel of some kind of temple. Clearly, you have reached the end of the mines and the beginning of the vaults of Khulgarshold.

You can hear the dragon breathing deeply and evenly. It seems, with a stroke of luck, that you have caught it unawares.

You head back to your companions, and beckon them forwards, pressing a finger to your lips. Luckily, it seems that one or both of the women have made adjustments to Alena's armor in your absence; it no longer clanks as she walks. Even with such adjustments, Alena is hardly stealthy at the best of times. Still, perhaps if you are very careful, you might be able to pull this off.

Opposed Check

Make a Wisdom (Perception) check for the dragon with disadvantage, adding its modifier of +4, then oppose this with Dexterity (Stealth) checks for each of you and your companions. Before making these checks, you may cast any spells or use any items to increase your Stealth modifier or that of either ally.

What was the result of the opposed check?

Everyone passes	At least one failure
The rhythm of the dragon's breath does not falter as you make your way into position. You signal to your companions and each of you prepares to strike.	A slight sound is all it takes. The dragon's eyes flicker open and it sights all of you approaching. In a flurry, it rises to its feet and then takes to the air, swooping towards you.
Surprise! For the first round of combat, the dragon is asleep and cannot act. You and each of your allies have advantage on attack rolls, and any	"Quick, attack it now!" Alena yells in a panic, and she rushes forwards.

Everyone passes	At least one failure
successful attack roll counts as a critical hit.	

NOW YOU'VE DRA-GONE AND DONE IT!

It's time to defeat the dragon!

Running the encounter:

- As before, roll initiative for yourself and each other character/creature.
- Each turn, decide where each character is and what they do, remembering to consider opportunity attacks and the dragon's fly speed.
- The dragon does not attack on its first turn, but instead attempts to speak with you in Draconic. If you can understand this language and wish to hear what it wants to say, go to page 31. If you do not understand, but wish to try to communicate anyway, go to page 54.
- If you attack, the dragon uses its fire breath on the next turn. At the start of each turn after this, roll 1d6: on a 5 or 6 it can use its breath weapon again. If not, it uses his bite. It attacks whoever it perceives to be the greatest threat, and attempts to flee if its HP goes below 20.
- Once the dragon has either fled or been defeated, continue reading.

ZYLVERDYN CRIMSONCLAW

Medium dragon

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive

Perception 14

Languages Draconic

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

How did you defeat the dragon?

Wrecked its shit.	Let it flee.	Knocked it out.
With one final, powerful blow, the dragon stills, and then crumples before you.	The battered dragon has clearly had enough. With a final cry, it dives through the narrow entrance. You can only hope it makes its way to the surface without causing any further trouble.	The dragon gives a pitiful screech and finally drops, unconscious, to the unforgiving stone floor. Marguerite winces. "Do you think we went a little too far?" she asks. "Or not far enough," Alena harrumphs, with no real heat.
Take a short rest.		
Go to page 59.		
Take a short rest.		
	Go to page 59.	Go to page 59.

9. LOUD AND PROUD

The three of you are enjoying yourselves so much that the minutes pass without your notice, and soon you stand in the center of a long, high-ceilinged chamber atop flagstones unmarred by mine cart tracks.

To the far end of the room, you see a huge stone archway with stairs leading down. Before you, and perhaps of more imminent importance, you see a fire-breathing dragon.

With all of the noise you had been making, it is perhaps unsurprising that the dragon is already wide awake and rearing by the time that you fully register its presence. As Alena had told you, by dragon standards, the beast is positively miniscule, yet by your own standards you are cowed. Its wings flare out as it hisses at you in Draconic.

Can you understand this language?

Yes	No
<p>“Stay back!” the dragon hisses. “The mines aren’t safe. A vile creature resides within.”</p> <p>You register the words with some surprise, and then look over to your companions. It is clear that neither of them understood.</p> <p>“I said stay back!” the dragon calls insistently. “Get yourselves away from this place! It will take dragons, or perhaps many tens of dwarves, to defeat this creature! You cannot hope to fight it on your own!”</p> <p>The dragon’s acrid breath sears your skin. You cough, and look again to your companions.</p>	<p>The dragon hisses once, and then again, stretching its wings out threateningly. Its acrid breath sears your skin and both you and Marguerite stagger back, shielding your faces. Alena does not. She charges forward, swinging her axe in a wide arc.</p> <p>“Back, you fiend!” she yells. The dragon rears back, perhaps in surprise or perhaps merely to ready its fiery breath.</p> <p><i>Continue reading to commence combat. If you prefer not to fight, go to page 54.</i></p>

Yes	No
<p>Alena is already surging forward. “Back, you fiend!” she yells. The dragon flinches as she prepares to strike.</p> <p><i>If you stop Alena, go to page 31. If not, continue reading.</i></p>	

NOW YOU’VE DRA-GONE AND DONE IT!

It’s time to defeat the dragon!

Running the encounter:

- As before, roll initiative for yourself and each other character/creature.
- Alena was first to act. She attacks before the beginning of the initiative order.
- Each turn, decide where each character is and what they do, remembering to consider opportunity attacks and the dragon’s fly speed.
- On its first turn, the dragon uses its breath weapon. At the start of each turn after this, roll a d6; on a 5 or 6 it can use its breath weapon again. If not, it uses his bite. It attacks whoever it perceives to be the greatest threat. It attempts to flee if its HP goes below 20.
- If you are able to speak Draconic, you can choose to skip to page 31 to talk instead of fighting. If you have already attacked, you must succeed on a DC15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to cease combat.
- Once the dragon has either fled or been defeated, continue reading.

ZYLVERDYN CRIMSONCLAW

Medium dragon

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive

Perception 14

Languages Draconic

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

How did you defeat the dragon?

Wrecked its shit.	Let it flee.	Knocked it out.
With one final, powerful blow, the dragon stills, and then crumples before you.	The battered dragon has clearly had enough. With a final cry, it dives through the narrow entrance. You can only hope it makes its way to the surface without causing any further trouble.	The dragon gives a pitiful screech and finally drops, unconscious, to the unforgiving stone floor. Marguerite winces. "Do you think we went a little too far?" she asks. "Or not far enough," Alena harrumphs, with no real heat.
Take a short rest.		
<i>Go to page 59.</i>		
Take a short rest.		
	<i>Go to page 59.</i>	<i>Go to page 59.</i>

10. WYRM CHAT

“Wait! Don’t attack!”

Your call echoes across the chamber, and Alena staggers to a sudden halt. “What?” she asks frantically, glancing between you and the dragon.

You step forward. “What did you say?” you ask.

“You can understand me?” the dragon asks. “Oh, thank goodness! I’ve trying to speak to the dwarves, but none of them seem to know Draconic! As soon as all this is over, I’m learning Dwarvish, or at least Common, I’ll tell you that.”

“What’s it saying?” Marguerite queries. Alena quivers in agitation, eying the dragon, who quickly gets to the point.

“The other night, I was flying and I saw a shadow creature terrorizing a village to the north-east. I swooped in and tried to help, but they screamed and attacked when they saw me. Amidst all the confusion, the beast slipped away into the night. I couldn’t make the villagers understand me, and regrettably, I was forced to flee.

“As I flew away, I saw the shadow creature again. This time, I was determined not to let it escape. It moved so swiftly, I was struggling to keep up, but I followed it across the countryside and over into the mountains.

“The caves got narrower and narrower, and for a time, I lost sight of it. I continued to fly into the mines, and at last I found it. Yet the foul creature had discovered something there as well, and when at last we met again in battle, it has shrouded itself in fire, and my own flames did nothing.

“Even if I could no longer fight it, I at least wanted to protect those dwarves... but of course, then we run into the language barrier once more,” the dragon concludes remorsefully.

Alena shifts impatiently. “Come on, don’t just leave us hanging; what’s it saying?” she demands.

Quickly you relay the dragon’s story. By the time you’ve finished, Alena’s battle-lust has subsided, and she nods thoughtfully.

“I wonder...” she muses. “I suppose it explains why the dragon was guarding this area.” She points down the stairs. “Those are

the famed vaults of Khulgarshold, but as I mentioned, the treasure we hold there is no regular gold, silver or gems.

“The first of our line, Khulgar Thrashhammer, found something in the depths of the mountain. Legend tells that the spirit of fire called out to him in his dreams, summoning him to the source. He called it *elshe harth* – living fire. *Elshe harth* was infused with some strange energy. Not arcane energy, at least not in the normal sense... rather, this fire was fire in its purest form – raw, elemental energy as it existed in the beginning days of this world.

“Take that flame, and you can produce armor and shields that won’t bend even to any normal heat, and blades that cut finer than any other. That is why the smiths of Khulgarshold are in such great demand.”

“So, this ‘living flame,’ Marguerite asks, “You think that whatever the dragon is talking about might have found the it?”

Alena shrugs. “It’s not impossible. There is still much that even the Thrashhammers do not know about *elshe harth*. And it’s true enough that monsters seem to like our mines a little too well. In any case, we can’t exactly ignore this,” she resolves. “We came down this way to defeat a dragon, and now we’re facing some sort of shadow creature instead? Well, no matter. Say, does your friend here have a name? And what are their pronouns?”

The dragon gives a hissing, spitting reply, which you hesitantly shape into syllables that your friends may understand. “Zylverdyn Crimsonclaw. He, him, his.”

“Well, then Mr. Crimsonclaw, I’m very sorry for the misunderstanding,” Alena says with a bow. The dragon cocks its head with confusion as it waits for a translation. “Would you tell us what you can of this creature?”

“There is little I can say,” you translate. “I saw it only briefly, and when I saw it again, its nature had changed entirely. I do know that it was immune to my flames. You look to be warriors yourselves, but – forgive me – I think you will struggle to contend with it in its current state. If you do intend to venture into the mines, you’d best be well prepared.”

“True enough,” Alena muses. “Our smiths are well accustomed to *elshe harth*, and I would think they know ways of handling it. No need to tell them exactly what for, of course. Going off to fight a monster alongside a dragon – the royal guard would have a field day with that one! Well, let’s go ask around and be back before anyone gets too nervous.” With her mind made, Alena begins to bound back to the entrance of the cavern.

“Oh! We’ll be back soon!” Marguerite promises back to the dragon, and you helpfully translate. Zylverdyn nods graciously, and curls up patiently on the floor. As you follow Alena back towards the main chambers of Khulgarshold, she murmurs, “He seemed friendly enough. To think that if you hadn’t been able to speak his language, we would have just gone ahead and attacked the poor guy.” Marguerite pauses to ponder this revelation. “I guess the moral of this story was that the real dragon was inside of us all along.” She hesitates. “We... we can trust him, right?”

It’s a fair question. Can Zylverdyn indeed be trusted?

Make a Wisdom (Insight) check:

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
<p>“I’m not sure,” you answer. Zylverdyn’s mannerisms are alien to you. You cannot catch any false note in his words, but nor can you be entirely confident that he speaks the truth.</p> <p>Marguerite does not seem happy with the response, but she accepts it with a nod of resolve. “I suppose we’ll just have to be careful.”</p>	<p>“I think so,” you answer. You can’t be entirely sure that Zylverdyn has told you everything, or even that he knows everything, but you are convinced that he has told the truth.</p> <p>“Good enough for me,” Marguerite replies, though she still seems somewhat puzzled by this turn of events. You suppose it’s only fair.</p>

Go to page 34.

11. NINE MONTHS FOR A LIFETIME

Alena corrals her troops in record time, and before you have time to do much more than blink in surprise over a fresh cup of tea, a contingent of dwarves are laying out items on the low table. “Not the scones,” Marguerite hisses, fiercely defending her afternoon tea from the thud of heavy supplies.

“What do you think of these, then?” Alena brandishes a pair of heavy-duty leather work gloves stitched with magical runes. “Totally heatproof. They’d have to be, when you’re dealing with fire like this.”

“Yes, yes, very nice, but I can’t exactly cast spells with mittens on my hands,” Marguerite says dismissively.

“Not mittens. Mittens don’t have finger socks.” Alena waggles them to demonstrate. “And punching works just as well as spells if you ask me.” She lets the gloves fall and picks up a jeweled amulet. “This one’s not quite as powerful, but it’ll make it a bit harder for you to get burned. Fashionable too.”

“Questionable fashion sense aside, why is all this stuff only coming out now? You didn’t think that it might have been helpful against a fire-breathing dragon? Honestly!”

The two continue to bicker idly as dwarves lay out an assortment of protective charms. You see another few pairs of work gloves, a few potion bottles and an oversized, engraved war axe. You also see several items which appear entirely mundane. A young dwarf beams as she presents a sketch of the Thrashhammer princess. “To keep you safe!” she says nervously, and then all but runs out of the room.

Marguerite watches with bemusement. “They really love you around here, don’t they?” she comments.

Alena laughs affectionately. “The feeling is mutual,” she replies. “I must say, the adventuring life sounds like a grand old time, but I could never leave my family behind for long. I don’t know how you do it.”

Marguerite looks away, fiddling with her teaspoon. “Ah, well, it’s not so difficult in my case, I suppose. We’re not particularly close.”

“Really? I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Don’t be,” Marguerite says sharply. “It’s not like I have to have a relationship with them. Don’t you think it’s weird that if someone carries you for nine months – before you’re even old enough to object – you’re then obligated to carry them for the rest of your life? People often say motherhood is a chore, but it sounds like a pretty sweet deal to me.”

There is a moment of stunned silence as Alena attempts to find a response. Before she can manage it, Marguerite says, “Forgive me. Where were we with all of these?” She attempts to lift the axe and grunts at its weight.

Alena hesitates. “About what you said: do you –?”

“What is this thing supposed to be?” Marguerite asks. “Impressive blade, I’ll give you that, but how are you supposed to hit anything with something this heavy?”

Alena relents. “You build up your strength and give it a good swing. Like chopping down a tree. Something you can’t do with a glorified matchstick.” She eyes at the artistic hilt of Marguerite’s rapier.

Marguerite scoffs. “I’ll make you a deal: if we end up having to fight any trees, I’ll give you the first swing. Until then, me and my glorified matchstick will do just fine.”

She turns to you. “Come on, let’s figure out what we need and get moving. Sir Crimsonclaw isn’t going to wait all day.”

You suppose she speaks truly, though you have known your friend long enough to recognize forced cheer when you hear it. Regardless, you comply with her request, and survey the gifts laid out before you.

GIFTS OF THE THRASHHAMMER CLAN

Choose from the below for yourself and your allies.

- **+1 weapon (any simple or martial weapon) x 1 per character.** This weapon has a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls.
- **Amulet of Fire Resistance x2.** While wearing this amulet, you have resistance to fire damage, including *elshe harth*.
- **Potion of Heroism x2.** When you drink this potion, you gain 10 temporary hit points that last 1 hour. For the same duration, you are under the effects of the *bless* spell.

- **Oil of Sharpness x1.** This oil can coat 1 slashing or piecing weapon or up to 5 arrows or bolts. Applying the oil takes 1 minute. For 1 hour, the coated item is magical and has a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls.
- **Ring of Evasion x1.** This ring has 3 charges, and it regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. When you fail a Dexterity saving throw while wearing it, you can use your reaction to expend 1 of its charges and succeed on that saving throw instead.
- **Spell Scroll of Cure Wounds.** If *cure wounds* is on your spell list, you may read this scroll to cast the spell without providing any material components. Reading the scroll requires the spell's normal casting time. Once the spell is cast, the words on the scroll fade, and it crumbles into dust. If the casting is interrupted, the scroll is not lost.
- **Work gloves x3.** Allows you to touch fire or hot metal items, including *elshetharh*, without burning yourself. Finesse weapons and spells with somatic components cannot be used while wearing these gloves.
- **Portrait of a Princess x1.** This poorly etched image holds the hopes and dreams of an admiring child.
- **Knitted hat x1.** Flaps on the sides keep your ears warm while the loving craftsmanship keeps your heart warm.

What is your passive Perception?

Less than 11	Greater than or equal to 11
<p>A few dwarves come through to speak with each of you. You are caught up in a fascinating conversation about the history of the Khulgarshold, which soon shifts into a discussion of some of the more outrageous acts of the Thrashhammer princess in her younger years.</p> <p>It takes some time for you to realize that Marguerite is no longer in the room. You glance around, somewhat concerned, before you spot her reentering the chamber with a nod and a laugh to one</p>	<p>A few dwarves come through to speak with each of you. You are caught up in a fascinating conversation about the history of the Khulgarshold, which soon shifts into a discussion of some of the more outrageous acts of the Thrashhammer princess in her younger years. Yet even as you begin to get to the juicy parts of the story, you spot Marguerite quietly rise from her seat and walk from the table.</p> <p>She is clearly trying not to draw attention to herself, even bending down slightly to</p>

Less than 11	Greater than or equal to 11
<p>of the dwarves. Her eyes are slightly red.</p> <p>“Ah, sorry, just had to step out for a moment,” she says when she notices your gaze. “Well, are we ready to proceed? We’re wasting daylight. Or at least, I imagine we are, though who knows down here?”</p> <p>She swings by the table and collects her belongings, buckling bags and weapons back into place.</p> <p>“Come on then,” she sings. “Mr. Crimsonclaw and his monster are waiting for us!”</p> <p>You shrug, collect your items, and follow your friend out of the room.</p>	<p>make her comparative height less noticeable. The door gives no sound as she swiftly passes the threshold.</p> <p>Alena notices your preoccupation and withdraws briefly from a side conversation. “Hmm... is she alright, I wonder?”</p> <p>“Say, I know that it’s a little different for everyone, but you’ve known her longer than I have,” Alena says. “Should we go and see how she’s feeling, or give her some alone time?”</p> <p>You pause to consider the question. Marguerite loves companionship, but it’s true also that she needs time to herself on occasion – and that her family is a sensitive topic indeed. Having to speak to both you and Alena at once might be overwhelming.</p>
<p>Marguerite has disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws until the end of her next long rest.</p>	<p><i>What do you think is best?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Follow her out of the room: go to page 38.</i> • <i>Ask Alena to talk to her: go to page 42.</i> • <i>Leave her alone for the moment: go to page 43.</i>
<p><i>Go to page 44.</i></p>	<p><i>What do you think is best?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Follow her out of the room: go to page 38.</i> • <i>Ask Alena to talk to her: go to page 42.</i> • <i>Leave her alone for the moment: go to page 43.</i>

12. TWO AROMANTICS

Alena nods with relief. “Yes, that would probably be best. I’ll clear up things here and wait for you to return.” You thank her, and quickly excuse yourself from the room.

Marguerite is nowhere to be seen. Hesitantly, you walk down the corridor, eyes shifting from side to side, until an elderly dwarf takes pity and jerks her thumb towards a door marked with a half-moon sigil.

The Thrashhammers spared no expense for the comfort and hygiene of their people. You open the privy door to a wide, circular chamber ringed with tidy cubicles. An enchanted water feature lies at the center, decorated with lovingly carved stone swans. Glimmers of red and brown peer through a veil of water; you realize that your friend is seated on the other side. The soft burble of the fountain covers your footsteps as you approach and take a seat.

For a long moment, Marguerite says nothing. At last, she comments, “You’re a meddler, you know that?”

How do you respond?

Friends often meddle.	Should I go away then?
“Yeah, I guess they do,” Marguerite agrees. “And you’re one hell of a friend, so that makes you one hell of a meddler.”	“No,” Marguerite sighs. “No, just let me complain for a moment, if that’s ok. I really don’t give you enough credit, do I?”

“I don’t know what’s happened to me, lately,” she tells you. “I’ve been so bitter... I don’t want to be like that. It isn’t me. I *hope* it isn’t me,” she qualifies. “Even Jerys... sure, I was upset that our friendship didn’t mean more to him, but I said some harsh things to, when all he was really doing was getting married.

“Getting married is supposed to be such a big celebration, isn’t it? You gather all your friends and family, spend huge amounts of money on a venue, a cake and a dress, all in order

to say goodbye. Because if our dear groom had any time for friends before the marriage, he certainly won't anymore."

She chuckles. "See what I mean about me being bitter? Ah, but you'll get it. Alena won't. She's a good friend, but there are certain things that aromantic people can see that allos don't. Isn't that a horrible thing for me to say? Aren't I nasty? She does her best, after all. I'm going to be sad when she eventually gets married, and she probably will. You know, if she has kids, she'll be a great mother. I hope I can visit her then. But I suppose she might be too busy.

"Just, when she was asking about my family... I mean, you know..." Marguerite struggles to find the words for a moment. "They're not good people. Well, I'm mostly sure of that. I wonder if I made the right decision, when we only get more and more distant each day.

"Is it just me that finds closeness difficult? It seems so easy for everyone else. You get born with a family, and you automatically love each other, without any effort. You walk down the street, and then bam! Love at first sight! Tada, you're engaged! Time to have some children, and then they'll love you too! Well, that's how it's all supposed to go.

"And here's the other thing..." she hesitates. "You and I... we're close... but now, with what Jerys told me the other day... I mean, I didn't have many friends to be begin with... ah, that is..."

"I don't know, maybe you'll think it's silly of me, but it's just... scary. Ah, forget about it. I've rambled at you for way too long. Say something, already."

How do you respond?

Calm down.	You're not alone.
<p>“Don't tell me to calm down,” she snaps at you. “Ugh, it's so frustrating. I thought you'd get it. Don't you dare tell Alena, or anyone else, but you know, sometimes I really hate being aro. There. I said it. I can hate it if I want, and I don't want to be told to change. I don't want to be told, “Don't worry, you'll find someone, someday. No, I <i>won't</i>. And that's <i>fine</i>.”</p> <p>You follow her gaze to the empty stall Marguerite is yelling at. Over at the entrance to the privy, a meek dwarven woman slowly backs away and closes the door.</p> <p>“I'm yelling at a <i>toilet</i>,” Marguerite whispers to you in a horrified tone. “Is this what my life has become?”</p> <p>You can't help but laugh at that, and Marguerite collapses into peals of laughter.</p> <p>“Ah, we should probably be getting out of here, I suppose,” Marguerite suggests. “Before either our dragon friend loses patience or I lose any more of my marbles.”</p>	<p>Marguerite's eyes jolt back towards you. “Oh, I didn't mean... yes, of course... I'm sorry.”</p> <p>She sighs and leans back in her seat – remembering a moment later with a grimace that she is dangerously close to the fountain's spray.</p> <p>“You know, other than you, I've only ever met one other aro, and they've long since left the country. There must be others, I'm sure. Where are they all hiding these days? Maybe they don't even know they're aromantic. I mean, I lived most of my life without even hearing the term, so it wouldn't be surprising at all if there were others like that.</p> <p>“You know what? When we get back, I'm going to go and find some others. Heck, we should really have a flag by now. Imagine how cool it would be if you could walk by a house and see a bit of cloth saying ‘aromantics live here’.</p> <p>“Ah, I'm getting ahead of myself,” she says ruefully. “Let's go back and help out Alena.”</p>

The two of you make your way out of the privy and back down the corridor to where Alena waits. Just as you are about to reenter, Marguerite stops you.

“I’m really grateful you came for me,” she says quietly. “I mean it. If there’s anything you need from me, just say the word. I know I may not be the perfect friend at times, but I’m going to do my best. Lean on me whenever you need to.”

She lets you go. After a moment to ponder her words, you nod, and reenter the chamber.

The two of you have advantage on Wisdom checks and Wisdom saving throws until the end of your next long rest.

Go to page 44.

13. A WELL-MEANING FRIEND ATTEMPTS TACT

“Me?” Alena asks incredulously. “You think I should talk to her? Huh. Well, if you say so.” She shrugs and follows Marguerite out of the room.

“Good thinking,” one of Alena’s many cousins comments. “She means well, even if she’s sometimes a little blunt.”

You can only hope Alena manages more tact than bluntness when speaking with Marguerite – who often holds more than a little bluntness of her own. You listen for several moments, but cannot hear any signs of a fight. You decide to wait.

* * *

Alena and Marguerite eventually reemerge. Alena is meek, somewhat cowed, while Marguerite is quietly fuming. You are not sure what sort of conversation transpired, but perhaps it is best not to ask.

“Well, shall we be on our way?” Marguerite suggests coolly. Alena readily agrees, and without much in the way of further discussion, the three of you buckle your weapons and bags back on, say your goodbyes to the dwarves in the room and head out.

The red dragon, Zylverdyn Crimsonclaw, is still waiting patiently. He brightens at the sight of you, and calls out a greeting which only you understand.

“Lead the way, then, Mr. Crimsonclaw,” Alena calls out. Happily, the dragon obliges, beginning to pad awkwardly down a staircase too narrow to fit its wings properly. Marguerite follows after, followed by Alena, leaving you at the end of the strange parade. Marguerite has her sleeve lit up once more, and as she drives Zylverdyn down at a swift pace, that light is quickly disappearing into the gloom. You steal one last glance back towards Khulgarshold, then turn to follow your friends further into danger and adventure.

Go to page 44.

14. IMPERFECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS

Alena continues to gaze at the door, though Marguerite has long since passed from view. The other dwarves are starting to back out of the room, perhaps sensing an appropriate moment to make themselves scarce.

“Is this really what’s best?” Alena ponders aloud. “I never really know. When do you pull your friends closer, and when do you give them space? Even if I did say something, what would it be? I don’t know that I’m the one to talk to her. I don’t have the right words. Obviously, I haven’t experienced what she has. What could I possibly say?”

“But if it were me,” she says, “I think I’d want someone to at least ask. Even if they weren’t perfect in how they did it. I don’t need “perfect” when it comes to real connections between people.” She looks over to you, and then back to the door. “I suppose you would know better than me,” she says finally. “You’ve known her for a longer time, after all.”

Marguerite reappears after several minutes. She says nothing of her absence, but quickly joins the review of Alena’s protective items. You sense that she is somewhat distracted. You also sense that she is not interested in responding to any questions.

“Ah, sorry, just had to step out for a moment,” she says when she notices your gaze. “Well, are we ready to proceed? We’re wasting daylight. Or at least, I imagine we are but who knows down here?”

She swings by the table and collects her belongings, buckling her weapons back into place.

“Come on then,” she sings. “Mr. Crimsonclaw and his monster are waiting for us!”

Marguerite has disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws until the end of her next long rest. If you wish, give yourself disadvantage as well.
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Go to page 44.

15. ELSHE HARTH

You pass through the stone archway and walk for several minutes with no sight of the end of the stairs. Luckily, the way is wide and tall enough that none of you feel cramped, except perhaps for the poor dragon traveling ahead of you. The passage is not quite large enough to facilitate his wingspan, nor are the steps wide enough to hold each of his claw-tipped feet. You are sure that the long journey on foot is uncomfortable for him, but he does not complain. Here and there, he pauses to sniff the air for signs of his quarry.

Time passes, and eventually a light begins to appear up ahead. Zylverdyn perks up, and begins to scurry faster down the steps.

“Careful! Marguerite protests. “We don’t need to announce our presence to the whole world!”

“I don’t know that we’ll be able to sneak up this time,” Alena comments. “You’ll understand when we get there.”

Zylverdyn is close to the end of the stairs when he pauses, gives the air one last cautious sniff, and growls softly.

“It is near,” he calls back softly in Draconic. “I will draw its attention. Wait inside the tunnel for now, and aid me when you see an opportune moment.” He does not wait for a response, but launches himself out of the tunnel. With a great beat of his wings, he takes to the air.

Marguerite cautiously makes her way to your side, and together you look out into the chamber beyond.

If Teelor was with you, he scoots away to wait in the stairwell, and flees at the first sign of danger.

Before lies an immense cavern. You are not sure how much of it is natural and how much is artificial; at first glance you see only the uneven shape of the cave, but as your eye wanders, you spot carved pillars and support beams blending elegantly into the stone.

At the center, still at least a hundred feet away, is a sheet of flame that rises from a stone basin all the way up through a hole in the cave ceiling. You see no source of fuel, and the flames give off no smoke. It reminds you more of a fountain than a pyre.

There is some sort of inscription in the base of the fountain, but you cannot see it clearly from where you stand.

“Nowhere to hide,” Marguerite mutters, and Alena nods glumly. You can see what they mean: there isn’t a single foot in this chamber that the light doesn’t reach.

Zylverdyn circles above. You and your companions watch his flight from the sides of the tunnel.

“Is it just me, or is he lost?” Marguerite whispers uncertainly.

“Couldn’t be. The tunnels don’t go further down than this,” Alena assures her, though she too watches Zylverdyn’s flight with some puzzlement. “Almost seems a little confused, doesn’t he?” she comments.

At that very moment, Zylverdyn lets out a screech and dives directly into the pillar of flame. Marguerite shrieks in surprise.

The dragon emerges from the other side with a burst of smoke and crashes to the floor atop a mass of darkness wreathed in roiling flame. Ash fans out in a dense corona and turns the air into a haze of red and grey.

“We’ve got to help him!” Marguerite says frantically. She starts to make her way out, but Alena halts her.

“Not so fast! It hasn’t seen us yet – we need to make this first attack count!” She squints her eyes. “Damn this smoke – what’s going on over there?!”

Make three Wisdom (Perception) checks: one each for you, Alena and Marguerite:

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
There is too much smoke and confusion, and you struggle to make out the shapes of the combatants. You see long, blackened limbs wreathed in flame. You hear Zylverdyn’s cries of pain mingling with the shrieks of the beast.	The creature holds a shape somewhere between that of a humanoid and a spider. Its back legs end in blackened hooves, while wicked claws tip each arm. Spiral horns rise from its head, and where a face perhaps should lie is only a hollow filled with rows of needle-like teeth.

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
Attack rolls that miss your target's AC by less than 5 points hit your ally instead. You can avoid this effect by rolling the attack with disadvantage. This effect lasts for the first two rounds.	Zylverdyn's scales are dark and cracked where they touch against the creature – he has been badly singed, and though he fights valiantly, he winces with every attack.
	You can see your foe clearly, and it has not seen you yet. You have advantage for your first attack roll.

Zylverdyn cries out again as you hesitate, and Marguerite winces. “We need to do something – now!” she urges frantically.

“Fine,” Alena snaps, though her eyes are no less anxious. “I just hope you know what you're doing. Are we ready? Then let's go!”

THE SHADOW BEAST OF THE VAULT

Defeat the monster in the depths of Khulgarshold!

Running the encounter:

- You, Marguerite and Alena have surprise for the first round. By the time you commence combat, Zylverdyn has taken 15 hit points of damage and the shadow beast has taken 7. Adjust their hit points accordingly.
- The shadow creature focuses its attacks on Zylverdyn in the first instance, turning its attention on you and your companions once you deal a significant blow. The Shadow Beast does not respond to attempts at communication.
- As soon as at least two creatures are in range, it uses Haze of Oblivion. Until this ability recharges, it uses its Multiattack.
- If you defeat the shadow beast, go to page 84.

SHADOW BEAST

Large undead

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances psychic

Condition Immunities exhaustion, charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages –

Corona of Flame. A creature that touches the shadow beast or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Blessing of the Living Flame. The shadow beast's flame attacks ignore resistances to fire damage and deal half damage to any creatures with fire immunity other than itself.

Illumination. The shadow beast sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.

Turn Immunity. The shadow beast is immune to any effect that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Haze of Oblivion (Recharge 6). Each creature within 30 feet of the shadow beast must make a DC14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

16. WALKING BOLDLY INTO UNKNOWN DANGER

As you pass through the stone archway, you feel a strange coolness brush across your skin. For a brief moment you have the sense that you are being scrutinized by eyes you cannot see. The discomfoting sensation passes well before you can begin to make sense of it.

“What is it?” Marguerite asks, noticing your expression.

Alena pauses in her stride and looks up to see you hovering on the threshold. “You feel it, then,” she comments.

“Feel *what?*” Marguerite complains.

Alena shrugs. “It is difficult to say. This place was ancient even in the time that my ancestors discovered it.”

As she continues down the stairs, she tells you, “As the story goes, my ancestor, Khulgar Thrashhammer, went digging into the mountains in search of ore. The area was rich with silver, gold and mithril – wealth that allowed him to establish his kingdom in this place. Over the years, the tunnels went deeper and deeper, and Khulgar began to hear a strange voice. It did not speak to him in Dwarvish, or indeed in any mortal language, but somehow, he understood: dig deeper, it told him. Come and find me.

“Khulgar followed his instincts. He abandoned work on the mines and instead directed the creation of a tunnel towards the location that came to him in his dreams. It was a long and difficult task, but at last he was able to meet with the spirit of fire.

“*Elshe harth*,” Alena tells you. “The living flame. Legend has it that Khulgar was able to speak to it somehow, but no others of my clan have heard its voice. Still, even if we cannot hear *elshe harth*, we recognize its power. The fires of the Thrashhammer clan burn hotter than any normal flame, In the hands of a skilled smith, it can be used to create items like no other. That is why the works of the Khulgarshold forges are in such high demand. The source of that flame can be found in the vault.”

You have been walking for several minutes already, but the end of the stairs remains out of sight. For a long time, you walk

in silence, before Alena speaks again. “I’ve been thinking for some time that there is something strange about this place... well, I suppose that in and of itself is not unusual. It’s always been a mystery. But I never had a good feeling about it. My father is proud of our treasure... of course he is. As was his mother before him, and all throughout our line. But I don’t know.”

She turns her gaze on you. “You felt it before, didn’t you? Something strange? What was your impression?”

You pause to consider the question. The moment passed so quickly that it is difficult to form the sort of opinion Alena is clearly looking for.

Make a Wisdom (Insight) check:

Result of <13	Result of ≥13
<p>You fumble for an answer, yet the truth is that you can recall little of that brief moment. You know that it felt uncomfortable, but perhaps that was merely the shock of the sudden intrusion. You shrug and relay this to your companions.</p> <p>“I see,” Alena says. Her gaze skirts away as she gives a short laugh. “Well, I’m not so sure myself. I can only sense it from time to time, and even when I get a strong impression, it passes too quickly to be sure. Then again, few within my clan can even sense the presence of <i>elshe harth</i>.”</p>	<p>You hesitate before giving an answer that hinges less on evidence and more on your impressions. At last, you choose to trust your instincts: “It... didn’t give me the impression of any kind of flame. It felt more like a <i>person</i>. And I don’t think they were happy with us here.”</p> <p>Alena takes some time to respond. At last, she comments, “So it’s not just me, then... I hesitate to talk about such things among my clan. It is our treasure, after all, but...” she shrugs. “I can only deny my own feelings for so long.”</p>

You have been walking for several minutes already, but the end of the stairs remains out of sight. Luckily, the way is wide

and tall enough that none of you feel cramped, except perhaps for the unhappy dragon scampering ahead. The passage is not quite large enough to facilitate Zylverdyn's wingspan, nor are the steps wide enough to hold each of their claw-tipped feet. They shuffle along uncomfortably, sniffing at the air like a hunting dog.

Time passes, and eventually a light begins to appear up ahead. Zylverdyn perks up, and begins to scurry faster down the steps.

"Careful! Marguerite protests. "We don't need to announce our presence to the whole world!"

"I don't know that we'll be able to sneak up this time," Alena comments. "You'll understand when we get there."

Zylverdyn is close to the end of the stairs when they pause, gives the air one last cautious sniff, and growls softly. The dragon waits for you to approach, and then gives a final nod, and launches out of the tunnel. With a powerful beat of their wings, Zylverdyn takes to the air.

"Ah! Wai-!" Marguerite begins to call, before Alena swiftly covers her mouth.

"Shh," she whispers. "Watch!" You follow her gaze out of the tunnel.

Before you lies an immense cavern. You are not sure how much of it is natural and how much is artificial; at first glance you see only the uneven shape of the cave, but as your eye wanders, you spot carved pillars and support beams blending elegantly into the stone.

At the center, still at least a hundred feet away, is a sheet of flame that rises from a stone basin all the way up through a hole in the cave ceiling. There is some sort of inscription in the base of the fountain, but you cannot see it clearly from where you stand. You see no source of fuel, and the flames give off no smoke. It reminds you more of a fountain than a pyre.

The fire brightens the entire cavern. You see the shadows of dragon wings dancing across the walls as the Zylverdyn circles the chamber.

"I think they're scouting," Alena murmurs. "But for what?"

“Mmph!” Marguerite complains. She pulls Alena’s hand away from her mouth and whispers back. “What are we waiting here for, then?!”

“Patience! Wait for our friend here to do their work. Not every fight is won by charging in heedlessly.”

Even as Alena speaks, Marguerite gives a cry of alarm: Zylverdyn screeches and charges heedlessly into the pillar of flame. There is a clash of claws and a shriek of pain as the dragon emerges from the other side in a burst of fire and smoke and crashes down atop a mass of darkness wreathed in roiling flame. Ash fans out all around until all you can see are vague shapes thrashing in the haze.

“Zylverdyn!” Marguerite calls frantically. “Damn this smoke – what’s going on over there?!”

Make Wisdom (Perception) checks for you and each ally:

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
There is too much smoke and confusion, and you struggle to make out the shapes of the combatants. You see long, blackened limbs wreathed in flame. You hear Zylverdyn’s cries of pain mingling with the shrieks of the beast.	The creature holds a shape somewhere between that of a humanoid and a spider. Its back legs end in blackened hooves, while wicked claws tip each arm. Spiral horns rise from its head, and where a face perhaps should lie is only a hollow filled with rows of needle-like teeth.
Attack rolls that miss your target’s AC by less than 5 points hit your ally instead. You can avoid this effect by rolling the attack with disadvantage. This effect lasts for the first two rounds.	Zylverdyn’s scales are dark and cracked where they touch against the creature. The dragon has been badly singed, and though they fight valiantly, they wince with every attack.
	You can see your foe clearly, and it has not seen you yet. You

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
	have advantage for your first attack roll.

Zylverdyn cries out again as you hesitate, and Marguerite winces. “We need to do something – now!” she urges frantically.

“Fine,” Alena snaps, though her eyes are no less anxious. “I just hope you know what you’re doing. Are we ready? Then let’s go!”

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Languages –

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Blessing of the Living Flame. The shadow beast's flame attacks ignore resistances to fire damage and deal half damage to any creatures with fire immunity other than itself.

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Turn Immunity. The shadow beast is immune to any effect that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Haze of Oblivion (Recharge 6). Each creature within 30 feet of the shadow beast must make a DC14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

17. A TRIO OF DUMB TOURISTS DO THEIR BEST

“Wait! Don’t attack!”

Your call echoes across the chamber, and Alena staggers to a sudden halt. “What?” she asks frantically, glancing between you and the dragon. The dragon likewise halts, guiltily lowering its outstretched claws. It speaks again in that unknown language of hisses and snarls.

“You know, I think it’s trying to tell us something,” Marguerite says hesitantly.

The dragon hisses yet again, and then lowers its head in frustration. A moment later, it jolts back into action with a burst of enthusiasm, scratching at the stone floor.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Alena yowls. “My ancestors built this place, you can’t just – hmm?”

The dragon points to its finished drawing with a flourish. You squint at the image, attempting to make sense of the poor etching.

Make a Wisdom (Insight) check:

Result of <10	Result of ≥10
<p>The dragon seems to have drawn some sort of large and wobbly duck. Perhaps it wants to go for a swim?</p> <p>You look up to see it pointing its claws back in the direction of the stone archway. “Over there?” you ask dubiously.</p> <p>Alena begins to walk towards the archway, but the dragon bounds in front to bar the way, and hisses at her.</p> <p>Alena glances back at you in annoyance. “I have no idea what it’s trying to say, but it’s getting on my nerves. What should we do?”</p>	<p>The dragon seems to have drawn some sort of monster, complete with crudely drawn flames that ring its form. As you look up, you see it indicating towards the stone archway it had been guarding.</p> <p>“Danger up ahead,” you conclude. “Maybe it was trying to guard the entrance?”</p> <p>Alena begins to walk towards the archway, but the dragon ahead to bar the way and hisses at her.</p> <p>“Come on now,” she says with exasperation. “If you do something like that, I’m only</p>

Result of <10	Result of ≥10
<i>To restart combat, go to page 30. To continue your attempt to communicate, keep reading.</i>	going to want to check out whatever's down there."

"It looks like it's guarding the way," Marguerite suggests. "I think what it drew before was some sort of creature... maybe the dragon doesn't think we can handle whatever's down there?"

"Well, maybe the dragon doesn't know who I am," Alena comments grumpily. "My people need access to the mines, and whether it's a dragon or whatever else blocking the way, it's up to us to clear the path."

"Come on now," Marguerite chides. "Just because we can't understand it doesn't mean we can come in and tell the dragon how to live its life – or *their* life rather. They're obviously intelligent. Say, I wonder if they have a name?"

"Go ahead and ask," Alena suggests sulkily.

Marguerite shoots her an irritated look and then turns her gaze back to the dragon. She points at herself: "Marguerite," she announces slowly and clearly. She gestures to Alena and to you, giving each name in turn.

The dragon appears to grasp her meaning. They point at their own chest and make another hissing sound.

"Shizzerdim?" Alena repeats.

"Silver Trim," Marguerite suggests with only slightly more confidence.

"Zzil-vrrr-dinn," the red dragon protests. "Mah-guh-rit, Uh-ley-nahh, Zzil-vrr-dinn!"

"Zylverdyn?" Marguerite tries again. The dragon seems satisfied. "Well then, Zylverdyn, won't you let us pass?" She moves forward, trying to express her meaning with gestures.

Zylverdyn growls, wings flaring out protectively. It may not understand you, but it clearly has no intent of moving.

"We're not getting anywhere like this," Marguerite comments. "Maybe they'll understand if we act it out?"

Alena baulks. "I don't act."

“Ugh. You’re no fun,” Marguerite pouts. She turns to you instead, eyes still dancing with mischief. “You’ll help out, won’t you?”

You inspect her enthusiastic expression, and have the distinct impression that you’ll regret it if you say yes to this. On the other hand, a sage once told you that ‘a life lived in fear is a life half lived’. Wise words indeed. So, what will it be?

Marguerite wants to do a pantomime. Are you in?

Let’s do this thing!	No way. I have dignity!
<p>“Heck yeah!” Marguerite says excitedly. “Alright, so what we want to communicate is that we’re brave and accomplished warriors and that we can handle whatever monster the dragon is trying to protect us from. So, I’m thinking: let’s reenact one of our great adventures! I’ll provide the music, but I’ll need you to run the narration. Sound good to you? Then let’s come up with a plan!”</p> <p><i>Pause and have a think about what sort of performance you and Marguerite will attempt.</i></p>	<p>“Dignity smignity,” Marguerite says dismissively, but she lets you off the hook. “Well, give me a moment to think about how this will go... let’s see now... if what I want to express is that we are capable adventurers, then the best way of doing so would be... hmm...”</p> <p>Reflectively, she pulls a kazoo out of her belt, followed by a set of colored handkerchiefs. You have no idea what she is planning, but you are sure it is indeed below your dignity.</p>

Make a Charisma (Performance) check for Marguerite, with advantage if you are helping.

Result of <15	Result of ≥15
<p>The performance falls flat, and the poor dragon looks even more confused than before. It scratches its head with its foot and surveys you bemusedly.</p>	<p>The performance lasts several minutes, and finishes with a flourish as Marguerite smashes her lute on the flagstones</p>

Result of <15	Result of ≥15
<p>Alena coughs politely. “Hmm... I’m not entirely sure you’re getting through. Is there anything else we could try?”</p> <p>Marguerite huffs with frustration. “Some dragons just don’t understand art.” She looks over to you. “Come on, help me out. Let’s keep trying... I’m sure we can get through, given time.”</p> <p><i>If you want to keep performing, continue below. If you want to try something else, go to page 58.</i></p> <p>Take 10</p> <p>You can succeed at any task if given enough time. After an extra hour of awkward charades, you eventually manage to get your message across to the dragon. Congratulations, you loser.</p>	<p>and raises her hand to the heavens with a screech of triumph.</p> <p>There is a moment of shocked silence, and then Alena starts to clap. The dragon joins in, clattering its claws against the stone floor and digging marble chips loose. It’s hard for you to gauge the expression of such an alien creature, but it lets out a sound that very much reminds you of a purr.</p> <p>Marguerite subtly casts a mending spell on her lute and gives a bow.</p>

At last, the dragon gets up on its haunches and begins to bound down the stairs. It glances back only briefly, indicating with its head that you are to follow.

“Well, that was... something,” Alena comments, and then adds, “I shouldn’t have doubted you.”

Marguerite smiles. “Come on, then,” she sings, “We’ve got work to do!” With a gleeful wave, she begins to skip after Zylverdyn, down the ancient stairs that lead into the belly of Khulgarshold.

You have gained an ally!

Zylverdyn’s stats can be found in Appendix 1 (page 155), right after those of Marguerite and Alena.

Go to page 48.

18. AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND

“I think I was overly hasty before,” Alena remarks. “You know, you hear a lot about how terrible dragons are, so as soon as you find one, you try to chase them off. I’m supposed to be the next ruler of Khulgarshold, and I like to think that I take that responsibility seriously. It doesn’t say much for me as a leader if I go ahead and unquestioningly accept that oversimplified spin about good and evil.

“And you, Marguerite... I hope you’ll take this the right way, but for all we’ve been spinning our wheels trying to get the dragon to understand us, I wonder if we put in enough effort to understanding them.”

“But I don’t speak Draconic,” a frustrated Marguerite argues.

“Well maybe it’s past time we found someone who does,” Alena points out. “Hmm... it’s by no means a common language around here. Orcish, maybe, Terran, maybe, but Draconic? Well, I’m sure that if we search, someone...” she trails off as a grin slowly spreads across her face. “Do you remember Teelor?” she asks at last.

Marguerite claps her hands and laughs. “No way!”

“Yes way. Let’s go see if he’s up for an adventure!”

Teelor... Teelor... you ponder the name for a moment, before it comes to you: Teelor was a kobold you met several months ago. Part of a group of bandits, Teelor had a change of heart and had decided to ally with the Thrashhammer clan. He seemed friendly enough... though hardly brave enough to want to go on an adventure. Looking at Marguerite’s excited face and Alena’s sly grin, you decide not to voice your doubts.

As Alena begins to lead the way out, Marguerite makes a final attempt to communicate. “We’ll be back,” she says, gesturing to the exit and then down to the spot at her feet.

You see the confusion lift from the dragon’s eyes. With a purr of approval, they curl up before the stone archway, the very picture of patience.

Go to page 71.

19. VICTORY!

Quiet settles over the hall once more, as you pick yourselves up from the floor and care for the worst of your injuries.

“My hair is singed,” Marguerite calls out mournfully, displaying the offending strands.

Alena has the gall to laugh. “Be glad the rest of you is intact.” You look over to see her standing at the stone archway, peering into the gloom beyond.

“What is it?” Marguerite asks curiously.

“Hmm... nothing, I suppose, only... it certainly seemed as though the dragon was determined not to let us pass. I wonder why?”

“This is supposed to be the Thrashhammer vault, right? Surely there’s something down there that a dragon would be interested in.”

“I doubt it,” Alena replies. “It’s not a ‘vault’ in the traditional sense. No gems, no gold...”

“Then what?”

“Well, it’s a long story, and perhaps it’s better to see for yourselves... how about I explain while we walk?” Alena suggests.

“Works for me,” Marguerite replies. The three of you begin to make your way downstairs.

As you pass through the stone archway, you feel a strange coolness brush across your skin. For a brief moment you have the sense that you are being scrutinized by eyes you cannot see. The discomforting sensation passes well before you can begin to make sense of it.

“What is it?” Marguerite asks, noticing your expression.

Alena pauses in her stride and looks up to see you hovering on the threshold. “You feel it, then,” she comments.

“Feel *what*?” Marguerite complains.

Alena shrugs. “It is difficult to say. This place was ancient even in the time that my ancestors discovered it.”

As she continues down the stairs, she tells you, “As the story goes, my ancestor, Khulgar Thrashhammer, went digging into the mountains in search of ore. The area was rich with silver, gold and mithril – wealth that allowed him to establish his

kingdom in this place. Over the years, the tunnels went deeper and deeper, and Khulgar began to hear a strange voice. It did not speak to him in Dwarvish, or indeed in any mortal language, but somehow, he understood: dig deeper, it told him. Come and find me.

“Khulgar followed his instincts. He abandoned work on the mines and instead directed the creation of a tunnel towards the location that came to him in his dreams. It was a long and difficult task, but at last he was able to meet with the spirit of fire.

“*Elshe harth*,” Alena tells you. “The living flame. Legend has it that Khulgar was able to speak to it somehow, but no others of my clan have heard its voice. Still, even if we cannot hear *elshe harth*, we recognize its power. The fires of the Thrashhammer clan burn hotter than any normal flame, and in the hands of a skilled smith, it can be used to create items like no other. That is why the works of the Khulgarshold forges are in such high demand. The source of that flame can be found in the vault.”

You have been walking for several minutes already, but the end of the stairs remains out of sight. For a long time, you walk in silence, before Alena speaks again. “I’ve been thinking for some time that there is something strange about this place... well, I suppose that in and of itself is not unusual. It’s always been a mystery. But I never had a good feeling about it. My father is proud of our treasure... of course he is. As was his mother before him, and all throughout our line. But I don’t know.”

She turns her gaze on you. “You felt it before, didn’t you? Something strange? What was your impression?”

You pause to consider the question. The moment passed so quickly that it is difficult to form the sort of opinion Alena is clearly looking for.

Make a Wisdom (Insight) check:

Result of <13	Result of ≥13
<p>You fumble for an answer, yet the truth is that you can recall little of that brief moment. You know that it felt uncomfortable, but perhaps that was merely the shock of the sudden intrusion. You shrug and relay this to your companions.</p> <p>“I see,” Alena says. Her gaze skirts away as she gives a short laugh. “Well, I’m not so sure myself. I can only sense it from time to time, and even when I get a strong impression, it passes too quickly to be sure. Then again, few within my clan can even sense the presence of <i>elshe harth</i>.”</p>	<p>You hesitate before giving an answer that hinges less on evidence and more on your impressions. At last, you choose to trust your instincts: “It... didn’t give me the impression of any kind of flame. It felt more like a <i>person</i>. And I don’t think they were happy with us here.”</p> <p>Alena takes some time to respond. At last, she comments, “So it’s not just me, then... I hesitate to talk about such things among my clan. It is our treasure, after all, but...” she shrugs. “I can only deny my own feelings for so long.”</p>

Marguerite shifts uncomfortably. “Come on. All of this is giving me the creeps.”

“Forgive me. I suppose it is a little much, all of a sudden,” Alena acquiesces. “I didn’t mean to imply that the place wasn’t safe, only that I think there is more to it than we know. I mentioned before that my family bears a great deal of pride for *elshe harth*. I believe that pride can be a blind spot. I’d like you to see it for yourselves – and to sense it if you can.”

“Are you sure we don’t need to take any precautions? I’m really starting to get a bad impression.” Marguerite turns to you. “Hey, what do you think?” she presses. “Are we really going to be alright down there?”

Alena glances back impatiently. It is clear that she wants to be moving. It is unusual for Marguerite to be the cautious one.

Marguerite is starting to get spooked, though Alena remains calm. What do you want to do?

Keep going	Turn back
<p data-bbox="139 292 525 428">“Don’t worry,” Alena assures a protesting Marguerite. “I’ve been down there plenty of times.”</p> <p data-bbox="139 432 525 568">“There wasn’t a great big dragon blocking the way those times,” Marguerite argues.</p> <p data-bbox="139 572 525 855">“All the more reason to solve this mystery as soon as possible,” Alena insists. “If there’s anything connected to that dragon down here, I want to know what it is. Until we figure it out, the clan could still be in danger.”</p> <p data-bbox="139 859 525 961">“I suppose,” Marguerite says uneasily, but she allows the matter to drop.</p> <p data-bbox="167 1004 350 1038"><i>Go to page 63.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="547 292 932 428">“Now hang on. I’ve been down there plenty of times, and it’s been fine,” Alena protests.</p> <p data-bbox="547 432 932 679">“Well, there wasn’t a great big dragon blocking the way that time, now was there?” Marguerite insists. “I’m not saying don’t go down there at all, just let’s be a little more prepared first.”</p> <p data-bbox="547 683 932 995">Alena’s eyebrows knit as a retort rises to her lips. Her sensible nature wins out in the end and she sighs. “Fine,” she expels. “Fine. I’m sure it’s nothing, but fine, let’s go back up and have a think about what we want to do next.”</p> <p data-bbox="547 1038 932 1140"><i>If you left an unconscious dragon upstairs, go to page 68. If not, go to page 77.</i></p>

20. THE FEARLESS AND THE FOOLISH

Time passes as you continue downstairs, and eventually a light begins to appear below. You cautiously make your way to the end of the stairwell and peer out of the tunnel.

Ahead lies an immense cavern. You are not sure how much of it is natural and how much is artificial; at first glance you see only the uneven shape of the cave, but as your eye wanders, you spot carved pillars and support beams blending elegantly into the stone.

At the center, still at least a hundred feet away, is a sheet of flame that rises from a stone basin all the way up through a hole in the cave ceiling. You see no source of fuel, and the flames give off no smoke. It reminds you more of a fountain than a pyre.

“Nowhere to hide,” Marguerite mutters, and Alena nods glumly. You can see what they mean: there isn’t a single foot in this chamber that the light doesn’t reach.

“Nothing for it,” Alena comments, and strides boldly out of the tunnel, armor clanking all the way. Marguerite winces, but quickly follows.

The stairwell had not been overly cramped, but the contrast between it and the huge chamber beyond is stark. You feel terribly exposed, and cannot help but continue to glance around in paranoia. Yet even as the space expands around you, the warmth presses in, and the light dazzles you.

Alena heads straight for the pillar of flame, appearing unbothered by its intensity. You shield your eyes and follow.

As you approach, you notice some sort of inscription in the stone basin. You squint your eyes to make it out, but before you can manage it, Marguerite, standing well back, gives out a shriek of horror as the column of fire explodes outwards.

Make a Dexterity saving throw:

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
You are knocked off your feet by the blast and skid across the cavern floor. The screams of your companions pierce your ears as you struggle back to your feet.	You leap back instinctively as flames billow towards you. A blast of hot air brushes against your face but you steady yourself and look ahead at the figure coalescing in the flame as it hisses and brandishes its claws.
You cannot act in the first round of combat.	

A creature of flame and shadow rears before Alena. Its back legs end in blackened hooves, while wicked claws tip each of six arms. Spiral horns rise from its head, and where a face perhaps should lie is only a hollow filled with rows of needle-like teeth.

THE SHADOW BEAST OF THE VAULT

Defeat the monster in the depths of Khulgarshold!

Running the encounter:

- In the first round, the shadow beast has surprise. It uses its Multiattack on Alena. On its next turn, and each time the ability recharges, it uses Haze of Oblivion. Otherwise, it uses its Multiattack on the closest targets. It does not respond to attempts at communication.
- You are in an unfavorable situation. If you wish to flee, you can use your turn to dash towards the stairs. The exit is 100 feet away. If you manage to make it there and keep running, go to page 66. A character that carries another medium creature moves at half speed.
- If you defeat the shadow beast, go to page 84.

SHADOW BEAST

Large undead

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances psychic

Condition Immunities exhaustion, charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages –

Corona of Flame. A creature that touches the shadow beast or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Blessing of the Living Flame. The shadow beast's flame attacks ignore resistances to fire damage and deal half damage to any creatures with fire immunity other than itself.

Illumination. The shadow beast sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.

Turn Immunity. The shadow beast is immune to any effect that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Haze of Oblivion (Recharge 6). Each creature within 30 feet of the shadow beast must make a DC14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

21. DESPERATE FLIGHT

You and your companions stumble desperately from the chamber as the monstrosity flails behind you. You dash upstairs, panting furiously, and climb and climb and climb. It is some time before you notice that your pursuit has ceased. You come to a stumbling halt and rest in the safety of the stairwell for a long moment.

“It – it must not want to leave the chamber,” Marguerite pants. “I think we’re safe here.” She shudders. “What was that thing?! Ah, I don’t know why, but when it came close to me, I felt so... so...”

“Cold,” Alena breathes. Her face is ashen.

You shiver. It was a strange sensation indeed. The chamber writhed with heat. The creature seethed with it. Yet as it approached you, something stilled in the air, and something truly cold touched your very mind.

Marguerite buries her face in her arms. You can see her whole body shaking. Even Alena seems surprised at the reaction. She moves an arm to Marguerite’s back, offering what comfort she can.

Looking at the two, and surveying your own bruises, you note that the three of you look grim indeed, though the day is still young.

“Don’t worry,” Alena is saying. You blink, and refocus on her words. “We’ll go back, and we’ll explain the situation to the others. I won’t make you go back there and –”

“No!” Marguerite cuts in suddenly, lifting her head once more. “No, I have to go back there. I have to fight it.”

“You’re hurt. We’re all hurt. It’s been a long day,” Alena says evenly.

“I’m going back,” Marguerite declares, rising unsteadily to her feet. “You don’t have to come with me, but I’m going back.”

“Why are you so thickheaded?!” Alena yells. “I’m worried about you!”

“Well, don’t be!” Marguerite shouts back. “I can take care of myself!” You can see her continuing to shiver, eyes wild. Alena’s anger disappeared as quickly as it came. Quietly, she replies,

“You don’t *have* to take care of yourself. That’s why you have friends. And I consider myself one of those, whether you do or not.”

“I never said –” Marguerite begins to protest. Alena holds up a hand.

“Let’s pause, and plan,” she insists. “I know I’ll feel better after another cup of tea.”

Without waiting for a response, the princess of the Thrashhammer clan begins to stride back up the stairs. Marguerite quavers, until you reach for her hand and gently guide her onwards.

You walk in silence for a long moment. When Marguerite finally speaks, her voice is so soft that it is difficult to hear. “That coldness... it reminded me of something. Something from long ago. I found it... frightening.” She grips your hand ever tighter, like a lifeline, and shakes her head. “I’ll feel better after another tea as well,” she announces, and leaves it at that.

If you left an unconscious dragon in the room above, go to page 68. If not, go to page 77.

22. AN AWKWARD REUNION

You make the long journey back up the stairs, only to be met with the reproachful glare of a bruised and battered dragon waiting beyond the great stone archway.

“Oops,” Marguerite says in a small voice, “I forgot about that part.”

The dragon growls softly. It shakes out its damaged wings with a wince, but makes no move to attack.

Marguerite looks over to you and Alena for assistance. “What are we supposed to do? Ugh. You know I never learned Draconic. Awful consonants, you know. Absolute hell to a singer. I don’t suppose either of you can help out?”

Alena is already shaking her head. You look over to the dragon as it twitches its tail and gives an unhappy growl.

Can you speak Draconic?

Yes	No
<p>“Ah! Brilliant!” Marguerite exclaims. “Well then, can you find out what it’s after?”</p> <p>You have only just begun to relay the question when the irritated dragon butts in, “What?! You can understand me?! Then what was all of that about, earlier?!”</p> <p>It’s a fair question. You glance guiltily back to your companions. To your relief, the dragon allows the matter to drop. “Forget about it,” it snarls. “We’ve got bigger fish to fry.</p> <p>“The name is Zylverdyn Crimsonclaw, if you care to learn it. Pronouns are he, him, his. What I was <i>trying</i> to tell</p>	<p>Marguerite grimaces. “There’s only so much we can communicate with charades. I guess if the dragon’s not harming anyone, we can just leave them be for now? Alena, isn’t there someone in your clan that may be able to speak to our friend here?”</p> <p>Alena pauses to consider the question. “Draconic isn’t really a common language here. Orcish, maybe, Terran, maybe, but Draconic? I doubt it. I can’t think of a single dwarf who...”</p> <p>She trails off, as a grin slowly spreads across her</p>

Yes	No
<p>you earlier was that there is a monster waiting below. I suppose you went and found it for yourselves. Or didn't. I hadn't intended to let you pass, but I suppose you've proven yourselves... one way or another.</p> <p>"I already know that the creature is too powerful for me to fight alone. But perhaps if we work together, something can be done.</p> <p>"Now, you'll want to go back up and speak to the other dwarves. I'll spare them my presence; it seems to cause undue alarm. See if they can spare any assistance. You'll want some way of protecting yourselves against those flames.</p> <p>"Mind you, hurt me again and I don't mind making a snack of you on my way downstairs," the dragon threatens. It is a somewhat pouting threat, and you suspect Zylverdyn has no intent on following through. You suppose his words are fair, considering what you've put him through. Somewhat sheepishly, you relay the message to your friends.</p> <p>"Mr. Crimsonclaw seems unhappy," Alena observes. She gives him a bow. "My apologies, good sir." Zylverdyn snorts his dissatisfaction.</p>	<p>face. "Do you remember Teelor?" she asks at last.</p> <p>Marguerite claps her hands and laughs. "No way!"</p> <p>"Yes way. Let's go see if he's up for an adventure!"</p> <p>Teelor... Teelor... you ponder the name for a moment, before it comes to you: Teelor was a kobold you met several months ago. Part of a group of bandits, Teelor had a change of heart and had decided to ally with the Thrashhammer clan. He seemed friendly enough... though hardly brave enough to want to go on an adventure. Looking at Marguerite's excited face and Alena's sly grin, you decide not to voice your doubts.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Go to page 71.</i></p>

Yes	No
<p data-bbox="139 218 548 497">“I suppose that’s our cue to be on our way,” Marguerite suggests. “Alena, the suggestion is a fair one: if the Thrash-hammers truly are masters of this ‘living flame’, then surely there is some sort of assistance the smiths can provide.”</p> <p data-bbox="139 505 548 672">“Of course,” Alena agrees. “Ah, but let’s not tarry too long... I have the sense Mr. Crimsonclaw is growing impatient.”</p> <p data-bbox="139 683 548 884">Marguerite shrugs. “He seems nice enough. Nicer than I expected, considering the beating we gave him. But I suppose anyone’s patience has a limit.”</p> <p data-bbox="361 930 548 959" style="text-align: right;"><i>Go to page 34.</i></p>	

23. TEELOR'S METTLE IS TESTED

Alena leads the way back up through the mines. The noise grows as you get closer to the famed forges of Khulgarshold. You hear the clanging of hammers, the clamor of hard boots on stone and the buzz of hundreds of voices. Just as you are almost at the main complex, Alena turns a sudden left into what appears to be a completely unremarkable mineshaft, save that it is low enough that even Alena is barely able to comfortably walk through. Up ahead, you find a rough wooden door fitted clumsily into the walkway.

Alena pauses a few feet away from the door, raising a finger to her lips as she turns her ear to listen. Copying her pose, you catch the sound of muttering ahead: "Where is it where is it where is it? Ah! Yes, yes! Wait, no, ah!"

"What is he up to this time?" Alena mutters. Without further ado, she pushes the door open.

Beyond lies a small and incredibly disorganized workshop. The place is only slightly larger than the mineshaft you entered from. You can see the rough workings on either side where the chamber has been unskillfully extended into crevices holding boxes and boxes of supplies: towering stacks of nails, bolts and rivets of all sizes, as well as all manner of tools of trade.

You find Teelor with his back to you, fumbling through another crate of tools and flinging them across the floor. The kobold wears a filthy smock atop a filthy jumpsuit, bedecked with bracers of even filthier tools.

As the creak of the door announces your presence, Teelor immediately wails, "Not taking new orders, no, no, no, not this time, it's a mess! A mess! Everything is ruined!"

"What are you looking for?" Alena asks.

"Size 42 spanner – the one with the quartz in the handle – ah, mess, mess, mess!"

"You're making more of a mess," Alena comments, but she scans the floor for the missing item.

Make an Intelligence check to choose the right tool. Add 4 if you have a relevant background or proficiency.

Result of <15	Result of ≥15
<p>“Is it this one?” “No, no, no!” Teelor snaps. “Don’t you know the difference between a spanner and a wrench?! Ah, this is hopeless! It’s all over!”</p>	<p>“Is it this one?” Teelor lights up at the sight. He quickly snatches the spanner from your hand and cradles it to his chest. “Yes, yes! This one!” he crows. “You’ve done it! I’m saved!”</p>

Teelor glances up from the offered tool and meets your gaze. His eyes flicker over to Marguerite and then Alena. “You!” Teelor gasps. “I mean no, I mean nothing, I mean I’m not even here! Goodbye!”

He leaps towards the small door at the opposite end of the workshop. Alena is already standing there, seemingly having anticipated this reaction. “What’s all this then? Aren’t you happy to see old friends?”

“Old friends?!” Teelor wheezes. He points a shaking finger at Marguerite. “That one’s crazy! Keep her away from me!”

Marguerite pouts. “It was an honest misunderstanding. And I apologized, didn’t I?”

“Hah! No, no, no, I’m not even here! Forget about me! Goodbye!” Teelor starts to head for the opposite door, finds Marguerite in the way, and turns to find Alena blocking his other path. His shoulders slump. Meekly, he queries, “And... and what would you be wanting of humble Teelor?”

“I need a translator to help us speak with the dragon in the mines,” Alena explains calmly.

“*Absolutely not!*” Teelor screeches. “You want me to talk to a dragon? No, no and no! No!”

“Come on now. It was only a week ago that you were boasting about your own adventures,” Alena replies.

“That was drunk Teelor. He’s a fool. Sober Teelor can’t be held responsible,” the kobold mutters frantically.

“You know, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you drunk,” Alena muses.

“Yes, very drunk, didn’t know what I was saying. Now if Princess Thrashhammer will just let Teelor pass –”

“Yes, of course, just one moment,” Alena agrees. “So we’re clear however, you’re not expected to fight. In fact, we’ll keep you well out of harm’s way. You’re just there to help us communicate. Simple, right? And in exchange, you get to brag to all your friends – honestly, this time – that you came face to face with a dragon and lived.

“But if you’re not interested, I won’t force you,” she finishes with a shrug. “Mind you, it would be *really* helpful if you could join us.”

Teelor fidgets. “Teelor never said he wasn’t interested.”

Unseen by the meek kobold, Marguerite rolls her eyes at you. The more patient Alena waits for him to come to a decision.

“You just need me to translate, right?” he qualifies. “Only that, and if there’s any trouble, you’ll handle it?”

“That’s right,” Alena assures him.

Teelor twiddles his thumbs and scuffs his feet on the floor for a long moment. At long last, he gives a nervous nod. “Mind you!” he snaps, “I’m not even here! Now – you!” He throws a sudden glare in your direction. “I’ve decided – you’ll be responsible for my safety. Can’t trust those other two, not after what happened last time!”

Marguerite begins to protest, then halts with a nod as she acknowledges the validity of his point. “Well, you heard the man,” Alena tells you solemnly, and somehow, it seems as though the matter has been settled.

You have gained an ally!

You’re not exactly sure why, but suddenly you have a sidekick. Teelor’s stats can be found in Appendix 1 (page 155). He is not interested in fighting, and flees at the first sign of danger. Until then, you gain the ability to understand Draconic as he clings to your back and whispers into your ear. You find it discomforting, yet undeniably helpful.

“Well then, shall we go and see what our dragon friend has to say?” Marguerite suggests.

Go to page 74.

24. TEELOR VS DRAGON

As you make the journey down through the mines once more, you find the dragon waiting where you left them, tail switching idly against the floor.

The dragon has had enough time to take a short rest. If they have taken damage, roll to recover their health out of a pool of 10d8 hit dice.

“Alright, now, remember, I’m not here,” Teelor hisses in your ear.

The dragon’s sensitive ears perk up, and their serpentine neck shifts to better inspect the kobold clinging to your back. They call out a trilling greeting.

“Move your mouth while I speak!” Teelor instructs, and begins to speak in Draconic.

Do you play along?

Sure, why not?	Yeah nah.
Teelor continues to hiss and spit into your neck. The sensation is rather unpleasant, but you obligingly move your mouth as best you can. It’s hard to gauge the dragon’s reaction, but it politely moves its head back into a position where it cannot view the kobold clearly, and nods as you pretend to speak.	Teelor notices nothing, and continues to speak in Draconic. The dragon nods along, watching the cringing kobold curiously over your shoulder.

“Alright, fine I’ve introduced you all. What do you want me to ask?” Teelor whispers in Common. You look over to your companions and repeat the question.

“Well, to start with, can you ask their name and pronouns?” Marguerite requests. “After that, what we really need to know is what they’re doing here, and what they want.”

“Zylverdyn Crimsonclaw. He, him, his,” you communicate via Teelor. “Thank goodness you can understand me. The other night, I was flying and I saw a shadow creature terrorizing a village to the north-east. I swooped in and tried to help, but they screamed and attacked when they saw me. Amidst all the confusion, the beast slipped away into the night. I couldn’t make the villagers understand me, and so, regrettably, I was forced to flee.

“As I flew away, I saw the shadow creature again. This time, I was determined not to let it escape. It moved so swiftly, I was struggling to keep up, but I followed it across the countryside and over into the mountains.

“The caves got narrower and narrower, and for a time, I lost sight of it. I continued to fly into the mines, and at last I found it. Yet the foul creature had discovered something there as well, and when at last we met again in battle, it has shrouded itself in fire, and my own flames did nothing.

“Even if I could no longer fight it, I at least wanted to protect those dwarves... but of course, then we run into the language barrier once more,” the dragon concludes remorsefully.

“So then, he was trying to defend us?” Alena marvels. “Ah, now I really feel bad about attacking him...” she bows low. “I’m very sorry, Mr. Crimsonclaw.”

The dragon cocks its head with confusion as it waits for a translation. You whisper to Teelor, who obligingly passes on Alena’s words.

Zylverdyn considers the words for a moment, and then haltingly speaks in Draconic.

“Don’t do it again,” you/Teelor translate. “Regardless, we have bigger problems at hand: I hear that you are the leader of this tribe, or his daughter at least. What can be done about the shadow beast of the vault? I will fight, of course, but my strength is not enough on my own. It seems to be immune to my flames. You look to be warriors yourselves, but – forgive me – I think you will struggle to contend with it in its current state. If you do intend to venture into the mines, you’d best be well prepared.”

“True enough,” Alena muses. “Our smiths are well accustomed to *elshe harth*, and I would think they know ways of handling it.”

Zylverdyn nods. “Indeed. If you will aid me, then make what preparations you may and then return to me swiftly.”

Alena looks over at you and Marguerite – and by extension, at Teelor, still clinging determinedly to your back. “Let’s be on our way,” she suggests. “Unless brave Teelor would prefer to chat a little longer.”

“I’m not even here!” Teelor squeals in protest.

Alena shrugs. “Thought I might as well ask,” she mutters. “Come on then.”

Go to page 34.

25. PREPARING FOR THE WORST

The noise of dwarven industry is almost deafening as you make your way up through the mines, through residences and up into Khulgarshold proper.

“Tea first. Then decisions,” Alena announces, and makes swift arrangements for a pot of tea and a platter of scones with cream and marmalade. She then politely excuses herself and goes to speak with an older dwarf wearing a bottle green coat. From the snatches of the conversation that you hear before they move away, Alena is passing on the news of your jaunt into the mines.

You turn to Marguerite to try to pick up a conversation, but your friend is already digging into an early afternoon tea as though the cakes of the morning are long since forgotten.

If you wish, you may take a short rest.

* * *

As you sip at your second cup of tea, Alena drops into an adjacent seat with a huff. Another dwarf stands behind her: a muscular woman with a prosthetic arm of steel studded with rubies and etched with arcane sigils.

“Honestly, my family are bunch of fusspots,” Alena announces. “Nonetheless, we’ve got a way forward, if you two are still up for some excitement.”

Marguerite swallows a generous mouthful of scone, marmalade and cream and asks, “What’s the plan?”

“Reinforcements,” Alena explains. “Let me introduce my friend here. Her name is Danylla. She is a captain in the royal guard with a squad of eight, which she has offered – nay, insisted – that we take with us.”

“Eight?” Marguerite repeats with a frown. “That seems like a lot. Do they sit around all day waiting for you to get into trouble?”

“The royal guard is fifty strong,” Danylla says with deep dignity. “Eight is a mere pittance.”

“And yes,” Alena adds dryly. “Which brings us to our next point: the armory. Now, I wasn’t entirely sure what to ask for in terms of protective charms or weaponry, so I brought a list of what’s available. Of course, we have all of the weapons and

armor you're used to, and I daresay you might find them a little better crafted if you're interested in an upgrade. I also asked about charms against fire – specifically the fires of *elshe harth*. As I mentioned, the living flame burns hotter than most, so I'd suggest not relying so heavily on any usual protections against the elements. There are a few useful items on the list here that may help. Take a moment to decide what you want, and I'll send instructions to the quartermaster.”

GIFTS OF THE THRASHHAMMER CLAN

Choose from the below for yourself and your allies.

- **+1 weapon (any simple or martial weapon) x 1 per character.** This weapon has a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls.
- **+1 armor (any medium or heavy armor) x 1 per character.** You have a +1 bonus to AC while wearing this armor.
- **Amulet of Fire Resistance x2.** While wearing this amulet, you have resistance to fire damage, including *elshe harth*.
- **Ring of Evasion x1.** This ring has 3 charges, and it regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. When you fail a Dexterity saving throw while wearing it, you can use your reaction to expend 1 of its charges and succeed on that saving throw instead.
- **Work gloves x3.** Allows you to touch fire or hot metal items, including *elshe harth*, without burning yourself. Finesse weapons and spells with somatic components cannot be used while wearing these gloves.

“So, what do you think?” Alena asks at last. Are we properly prepared?”

“I didn't count on having a whole squad coming with us,” Marguerite grumbles. “Say goodbye to any hope at stealth.”

“They'll follow commands,” Alena points out.

“So long as those commands are not overly reckless,” Danylla is quick to correct. Alena grimaces, but does not comment. “Back to my question,” she continues instead, “Do you think we've done enough to prepare?”

“More than enough,” Marguerite replies, but she looks to you for a final decision.

Are you ready to proceed?

Yes, I'm ready.	I want more guards.
<p>“Excellent, then let’s be on our way,” Alena says. “Danylla, if you would collect your squad...”</p> <p>“Of course,” the woman agrees with a bow.</p>	<p>Danylla brightens, even as Marguerite rolls her eyes. “Of course – excellent choice. I will let Casili know to bring their squad as well. If you would but wait a moment...”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Decide how many guards you want to bring, up to a maximum of 16 plus the second captain.</i></p>
<p>Stats for Danylla and the soldiers can be found in Appendix 1, starting page 155. You can choose to either individually control the soldiers or to use the “unit” stats provided.</p>	<p>Stats for Danylla, Casili and the soldiers can be found in Appendix 1, starting page 155. You can choose to either individually control the soldiers or to use the “unit” stats provided.</p>
<i>Continue reading.</i>	<i>Continue reading.</i>

Danylla leads the way downstairs, while the guards walk around you. Despite the added tension of your entourage, your second time down the stairs seems much quicker than your first, and soon enough you find yourselves peering out into the broad cavern which holds the living flame.

Is this your first time to the cavern?

Yes, I haven't been here yet.	No, I've been here before.
<i>Go to page 80.</i>	<i>Go to page 82.</i>

26. A GUARDED APPROACH

You are not sure how much of the vast chamber is natural and how much is artificial; at first glance you see only the uneven shape of the cave, but as your eye wanders, you spot carved pillars and support beams blending elegantly into the stone.

At the center, still at least a hundred feet away, is a sheet of flame that rises from a stone basin all the way up through a hole in the cave ceiling. You see no source of fuel, and the flames give off no smoke. It reminds you more of a fountain than a pyre.

A resolute Alena heads straight for the pillar of flame. You shield your eyes and follow.

As you approach, you notice some sort of inscription in the stone basin. You squint your eyes to make it out, but before you can manage it, Marguerite, standing well back, gives out a shriek of horror as the column of fire explodes outwards.

A creature of flame and shadow rears before you. Its back legs end in blackened hooves, while wicked claws tip each of six arms. Spiral horns rise from its head, and where a face should be is only a hollow filled with rows of needle-like teeth.

Danylla is swift to the front of the group. “Stay back, princess!” she yells back.

“Not likely,” Alena retorts, and she stands side by side with the captain as the beast lunges.

THE SHADOW BEAST OF THE VAULT

Defeat the monster in the depths of Khulgarshold!

Running the encounter:

- On its first turn and each time the ability recharges, the shadow beast uses Haze of Oblivion. On each other turn, it uses its Multiattack on the closest targets. It does not respond to attempts at communication.
- Danylla and Alena are at the head of the group. You may instruct the other guards as you wish, using either the individual stats or the unit stats outlined in Appendix 1 (page 155). The guards quickly stabilize anyone that begin to die, and auto-succeed on Medicine checks to do so.
- If you defeat the shadow beast, go to page 84.

SHADOW BEAST

Large undead

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances psychic

Condition Immunities exhaustion, charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages –

Corona of Flame. A creature that touches the shadow beast or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Blessing of the Living Flame. The shadow beast's flame attacks ignore resistances to fire damage and deal half damage to any creatures with fire immunity other than itself.

Illumination. The shadow beast sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.

Turn Immunity. The shadow beast is immune to any effect that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Haze of Oblivion (Recharge 6). Each creature within 30 feet of the shadow beast must make a DC14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

27. SECOND TIME LUCKY

Alena halts the party at the mouth of the cavern while she inspects the path beyond.

The pillar of flame roars up to the ceiling, yet the beast from before is nowhere to be seen.

“Slowly, now,” Alena breathes.

“It’ll see us no matter what we do,” Marguerite replies. “There’s nowhere to hide in this place.”

“Stay back, princess,” Danylla urges.

Alena pulls a face. “Take care, everyone,” she warns, but she allows Danylla and the guards to lead the way out into the cavern.

You see the flames shift as you approach. The shadow creature plunges out, scuttering strangely on its many limbs.

“Now!” yells the guard captain, as she brandishes her sword.

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Damage Resistances psychic

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Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages –

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Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Haze of Oblivion (Recharge 6). Each creature within 30 feet of the shadow beast must make a DC14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

28. A SUMMER DAY'S JOURNEY

The creature rears back with a screech that chills your soul. It gurgles and flails wildly, and someone – you're not sure who – yanks you back as one of its limbs draws dangerously close.

It gives one final screech, and the fires that dance across its skin flicker and then flare out in a blinding corona that scorches your eyes and your skin. Pain rushes through you – pain like nothing you've ever experienced. For one sickening moment it overwhelms your senses, but before you even have time to scream, even that sensation is stolen from you. You feel an odd disconnection from your own body. You can hear nothing. You can see nothing.

Have you been playing for a while? This might be a good time to take a break before you continue.

* * *

It occurs to you that your eyes are closed. How very strange. There was something very important that you were supposed to be doing; what was it again?

“Just how long are you planning to sleep?”

The playful voice cuts through your slumber. You open your eyes to a familiar face, with violet irises set in dusky skin surrounded by red curls. “The day's wasting,” Marguerite reminds you.

The sun is still low on the horizon, but it beams a warm light across the rich green countryside. The air is fresh and pleasant, carrying scents of grass and flowers and the sounds of birds, insects and flowing water.

“What's wrong? You seem dazed,” another voice comments, this one deep and lightly accented. You turn your head to see Jerys standing in the shade of a nearby tree. He is tall and lithe, with a pair of shortswords belted at his waist and a longbow slung across his back. His features are delicate, but you know just how quickly he can move into action when a fight breaks out.

“Summer is the season for daydreaming, I suppose,” Marguerite comments. She hands you some breakfast: a rosy apple and a bread roll.

Memory trickles in as you and your companions eat and then pack up the campsite. You were headed east, for a small village that has requested aid against ongoing bandit attacks. This will be the first real quest for your trio: it’s only natural that Marguerite is so full of energy. Still, even Jerys cannot remain dour in the face of the bright and beautiful morning. You see a smile curve across his lips as Marguerite takes her shoes off and splashes through the shallow stream beside your path, singing all the way.

“Don’t slip and fall,” he calls out.

“Pah. Baths are good for you; you should try it sometime,” Marguerite teases. Her eyes turn to you. “Come on,” she calls, “The water’s fine; why not take a dip?”

The stream only goes up to her ankles, flowing over water-smoothed rock. It glimmers enticingly, beckoning you in.

Do you join Marguerite in the stream?

Sure!	I’d rather not...
The water is wonderfully cool. You bend down to feel it on your hands as well, only to feel it spray on the top of your head. Marguerite splashes you again, and then dashes off giggling before you can retaliate.	“Hah! You’re no fun!” Marguerite tosses over her shoulder, but she appears unbothered as she skips ahead, throwing droplets in all directions. With a day this beautiful, you suppose it’s difficult to feel rejected.

There is a light splash nearby: you turn to see that Jerys has taken off his shoes and rolled up his breeches. “Too pleasant a day not to,” he concedes. “If I get injured or catch a cold, remind our friend I told her so.”

“What was that?” Marguerite calls back. “Something about your fragile constitution?”

“I was saying that shallow streams are often full of leeches,” he replies casually.

Marguerite yelps as she jumps out to frantically inspect her exposed feet. “You never mentioned *leeches!*”

“Many shallow streams are full of leeches, but this one’s probably fine,” Jerys clarifies, receiving a dark scowl in response. “They prefer still, murky water with a little vegetation. They wouldn’t like it much here. Still, you can never be sure, and that’s as good a reason as any to boil creek water before you drink it.”

Marguerite shudders. “Damn it, Jerys, I did *not* need to imagine that.”

As morning turns into afternoon, the day grows colder. Jerys sniffs at the air, and looks with concern at the grey clouds drifting in from the north. “There’s a storm coming,” he announces. “And not a small one either.”

Marguerite glances up at the clear skies overhead. “That seems sudden.”

“It does,” Jerys agrees. “But even the best weatherwatchers are sometimes foiled by nature’s designs. I was thinking we would be able to reach the village by sundown, but I’m not sure we’ll make it before the storm hits.”

Marguerite glances to the left – forest – and to the right – grassy plains. “What do you suggest?” she asks. “I’m not seeing a lot of shelter.”

“There are caves within the woods,” Jerys replies. “I don’t know that we’ll be *comfortable*, but we’ll be safe at least.”

“True enough, I suppose,” Marguerite says gloomily. You suspect she is less than enthused about the prospect of spending the evening huddled in a damp cave.

“It should be cleared up by tomorrow morning,” Jerys offers in consolation. “It would be better to arrive by day in any case; I suspect the villagers may be a little nervous about strangers arriving at dusk, these days.”

“You’re right,” Marguerite replies reluctantly. “Let’s get going then; we’ve got caves to spelunk.”

True as Jerys’s word, the storm hits shortly after he has navigated the way through the forest and into a sheltered mound of granite and obsidian. You can hear the mad whirring of wind through the trees, and the snapping of those branches

unfortunate enough to be subjected to its full wrath. Both sounds are muted in the cavern where you make your rest.

Jerys has chosen well. A small amount of rain makes its way into the cave, but beyond the entrance, the area is relatively dry – and bizarrely, somewhat warm.

“The ground is shallow here,” Jerys explains, tapping the pale rock beneath him. “Further into the forest are pools of hot spring water. This is only the edge of that region, but the rock stays warm all year round.”

“Makes me want to go exploring,” Marguerite comments. “I suppose we should do what we came for first, but what would you say to coming back here some time?”

“I don’t see why not,” Jerys replies. “Volcanic regions are truly beautiful – it’s worth seeing for yourself. Mind you, it would be wise to take a guide. Some of the pools are dangerously hot or corrosive, and the ground can be unstable. I’m not experienced enough for that sort of terrain.”

“Maybe we can ask around in the village,” Marguerite muses. “We should be able to find a guide in the region.”

“I expect so,” Jerys agrees. The conversation soon falls to comfortable silence broken by the background noise of the storm.

“This is nice, isn’t it?” Marguerite says suddenly. “Spending time with friends, away from the buzz of civilization. This is what I really wanted.

“What do you think?” she asks. “Are you happy like this?”

You had just begun to relax into the warm rock, but the question stirs something faintly unpleasant in your mind. You look over to your friend and see her waiting for a response. Jerys looks your way as well, just as expectant. Is your response truly so consequential?

Your friends are waiting for an answer. Are you satisfied with this?

Yes, I’m happy here.	Something is wrong...
“As you should be,” Marguerite agrees. “There’s no need to worry. In here it’s safe and warm, and	Marguerite’s smile slips slightly. “What do you mean? Jerys and I are here with you, and we’re on our way to a grand

tomorrow, when the storm clears up, we'll go on a new adventure.

"Rest up for now," she urges. "You must be tired. I'll take the first watch."

Well, why not? As Marguerite says, you are tired. There's nothing wrong with resting for a moment, is there?

If you choose to rest, go to page 89. If you refuse, go to page 90.

adventure. Isn't that good enough? What is it that you still need?"

"Are you feeling unwell?" Jerys asks. "These sort of weather shifts sometimes cause ill health. The best thing to do would be to get some rest. Marguerite and I can keep watch."

Your friends are looking at you with concern. Perhaps your unease is nothing. Perhaps you'll feel better after a rest. You feel so tired, after all. Surely there's nothing wrong with taking a rest?

If you choose to rest, go to page 89. If you refuse, go to page 90.

29. A VERY LONG REST

Marguerite smiles gently. “That’s it,” she coos. “Nothing to fear. You’re safe here.”

You are so very tired. There’s nothing wrong with giving in, now is there? You lay your head down. The ground is pleasantly warm, and when one of your friends lays a blanket over you, the last of that lingering unease fades.

This is what you wanted, after all. Wasn’t it?

You are safe. You are content. And there is no need to worry about what comes next.

Game Over

If you wish to play again, head back to the beginning.

30. MOMENT OF TRUTH

“No! something is wrong!” you insist, brushing aside Marguerite’s hands. It’s starting to come back to you now. This moment – this whole day – happened several months ago. You remember making it through the forest the next day, and arriving at the village. You remember completing your quest, and you remember journeying on through the volcanic valley, seeing pools of water in all colors – red, green, blue, gold... fantastical hues that you could not possibly forget.

But that moment is long past.

“You’re confused – you must be tired,” Marguerite tells you.

“Rest, and relax,” Jerys intones. He is smiling, but the expression is fixed in place. There is definitely something wrong here. How can you set things right?

What would you like to do?

Leave the cave	Attack!	Call for help!
<p>Marguerite’s composure vanishes. “Don’t!” she cries out. “It’s dangerous out there!”</p> <p>You can see what she means. The tempest whirls beyond the safety of your hideaway. If you step outside, there is every chance you will be swept away. Do you dare to risk it?</p> <p><i>Go to page 91, or choose another option if you prefer.</i></p>	<p>Marguerite flinches as you ready your attack. For a moment you hesitate; she is all too similar to the real Marguerite. Can you really be sure she is a fake?</p> <p><i>Are you sure you want to attack? If so, go to page 94. If not, choose another option.</i></p>	<p>“Someone! Anyone! Alena?!”</p> <p>Your cries ring out across the cavern and both Marguerite and Jerys look at you as though you have gone insane. Yet for a moment, you have the sense that there is someone else nearby. If you listen, you can faintly hear their voice.</p> <p><i>Go to page 97, or choose another option if you prefer.</i></p>

31. DARING THE TEMPEST

Ignoring Marguerite's protestations, you step outside the cave.

The noise is suddenly deafening. It roars against your ears like a savage beast. You've taken barely a step into the tempest and already the wind threatens to pick you up and toss you aside like a leaf. Determinedly, you squeeze your eyes open a crack.

Your vision is blurred. Briefly, you dismiss your impression as a result of the whirling storm, yet another explanation soon comes to you: you have not seen this place before. If the world inside the cave had been formed from your memories, then the world outside is unknown. On that stormy day, many moons ago, you never left the cave. You stayed inside, where it was warm and safe.

The ground at your feet remains somewhat solid, but not far ahead, the world dissolves into rain, wind and fog. You can faintly see the shapes of branches whipping through the air. If you can make it to the edge of the vision, perhaps the dream will end. Do you dare to try?

Someone is calling from behind you, their voice barely audible over the howl of the wind.

Make a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Result of <17	Result of ≥17
<p>As you turn, you see Marguerite at the entrance to the cave. You see her red hair whipping in the wind. The image glitches in and out of focus.</p> <p>Though you cannot make out her words, her expression is clear enough. She reaches out to you, begging you not to go. It is dangerous, she seems to say. Don't risk it.</p>	<p>"Don't leave me," Marguerite moans. "Please... don't leave me."</p> <p>You look back to see your friend waiting at the cavern. Her image glitches in and out of focus.</p> <p>"I'm scared," she tells you, with tears in her eyes. "Am I doing something wrong? Why doesn't anyone tell me what it is? I'll fix it if I can. Just say it: what's wrong with me?"</p>

Result of <17	Result of ≥17
You waver. Just what will happen if you ignore her advice?	You stare at her for a moment as two conflicting perceptions war within you. Is this your friend, or is it not? Are her words some sort of clue?

You take an instinctive step towards your friend, but something halts you in your place. This is not Marguerite. No matter how it may look like her, you know the truth. You cannot falter now. You turn from her, and you continue into the tempest.

The way coils and twists before you as you walk towards the area that exists beyond your memory. Even so, the rain and the wind that beats at you feels very real indeed. Every step is a battle against the elements – a battle that lies on the very edge of your abilities. The storm does not care about your determination, does not care about anything about you. You are not a foe to be fought, but rather an insect that it fails to even notice.

There is a sickening crack from overhead as a branch comes flying down. Caught in the storm as you are, you have neither the time nor the strength to react.

Make a Wisdom saving throw.

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
The branch slams into your shoulder blades, knocking you to the ground.	The branch slams into your back, and it takes you a moment to realize that somehow, you are unhurt. Glancing down, you see the spectral branch lying at your feet, fizzling softly with psychic energy.
Take 6 (2d6) psychic damage. If this renders you unconscious, this is a GAME OVER. If not, continue reading.	
You pick yourself up from the ground and continue to force your way through the storm.	

Result of <14	Result of ≥ 14
	no longer beats against you as it once did.

You take one last step, but instead of landing on solid ground, your foot sinks through the earth like it is made of air. You stumble forward and fall into the deep darkness of a world unknown.

Go to page 99.

32. NIGHTMARE OF DESTRUCTION

“Why?” Marguerite cries out. “Why would you do this?”

You know that this must be a dream. Surely, it must be a dream. And in a dream, one can do what they wish, without fear for the consequences.

Running the encounter:

- Your friends do not attack on the first round. From the second round, Jerys makes melee attacks, while Marguerite casts spells from a range.
- If you defeat both Marguerite and Jerys, go to page 96.

JERYS SELDENWOOD

Medium humanoid (half-elf)

Armor Class 15 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Skills Survival +4, Nature +3, Perception +4

Languages Common, Elvish, Goblin

Favored Enemy. Jerys has advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track orcs and goblins as well as Intelligence checks to recall information about them.

Natural Explorer. Jerys has a +2 bonus to Nature and Survival checks related to forests. Within this terrain, he cannot become lost except by magical means, and can find twice as much food as usual while foraging.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Jerys attacks twice with his shortswords.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

MARGUERITE HALEFIRE

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5, Dex +4

Skills Acrobatics +4, Performance +5, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Bardic Inspiration (3/Day). Marguerite can use a bonus action on her turn to choose one creature other than herself within 60 ft. who can hear her. Once within the next 10 minutes, the creature can roll 1d6 and add the result to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw that it makes. The creature can wait until after it rolls the d20 before deciding to use the Bardic Inspiration die.

Spellcasting. Marguerite is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, vicious mockery*
1st Level (2 slots): *dissonant whispers, healing word, faerie fire, thunderwave*

ACTIONS

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

33. THE AFTERMATH

You feel cold. The air is cold. The world is cold.

Two figures lie before you, still and silent. This was a dream, wasn't it? Well, why have you not yet awakened?

Was this just a dream?

Yes. None of this is real.	I'm not sure.
<p>The world shatters around you as you reject it with one last push. The images of your fallen companions dance around you like the shards of a broken mirror, sharp enough to cut deep.</p> <p>"None of this is real," you remind yourself, and steel your will as the last of the nightmare flickers out of view. Someone is calling to you. Someone nearby. Reality cannot be far from here.</p>	<p>Your thoughts slip away as the rain continues to beat down outside. It is so hard to think in this place. Your head hurts. Your body aches. You are ever so tired. Perhaps it would be better not to think about this any longer. Perhaps it would be best simply to pause and rest, until you wake once more in a world where everything makes sense again. You lay down on the stone and allow your consciousness to slip away into blessed, peaceful darkness.</p>
<p>You have disadvantage on all Wisdom checks and Wisdom saving throws until the end of your next long rest.</p>	<p>Game Over</p>
<p><i>Go to page 99.</i></p>	<p>If you wish to play again, head back to the beginning.</p>

34. MARGUERITE’S FEAR

As you continue to listen, the muffled words become clearer to you. “Focus on my voice,” it warns you. Simple enough to do, you suppose. The voice is low and gruff; it reminds you of Singram from Khulgarshold. As you have this thought, the world around you wobbles and blurs.

Marguerite’s hand is on your shoulder, shaking you. All of the sudden her grip seems less substantial, but the panic in her eyes is clear enough.

“Don’t leave,” she begs you. “Please – I’m scared.”

Is this an illusion? Or the real Marguerite? In that moment you are not so sure.

“Focus!” the voice calls sharply.

The world is churning and breaking up around you, but if you are quick, perhaps you can speak with Marguerite.

What would you like to say?

Say nothing	“Why are you scared?”	“I’ll see you soon.”
<p>You do not respond. Tears glisten in Marguerite’s eyes and she makes another futile attempt to hold you back before her arms lower in defeat.</p> <p>“I’m sorry,” you hear her say, as the world shatters around you.</p> <p><i>Go to page 99.</i></p>	<p>“There’s something wrong with me,” Marguerite says. “I don’t know what it is. I just don’t seem to be able to connect to people the way others can, and because of that, I end up alone. How do I fix it? I just want to know that – before it’s too late and there’s no one left to ask. Please – don’t go!”</p>	<p>Marguerite shakes her head sadly. “You won’t. You’ll forget all about me. It’s alright. It’s not as though you’re obliged to do otherwise. I’ll just... be lonely. That’s all.</p> <p>“No, forget I said anything,” she says. “Go on and do what you must. I’ll do my best too.”</p>

Say nothing	“Why are you scared?”	“I’ll see you soon.”
	<p>The mysterious voice calls to you sharply, and the image of Marguerite begins to distort. She reaches for you with tears in her eyes, but cannot quite reach. That image remains with you even as it fades from view.</p> <p><i>Go to page 99.</i></p>	<p>The tears are still glimmering in her eyes, but she makes an attempt to smile as her image shatters and the world grows dark.</p> <p><i>Go to page 99.</i></p>

35. KHULGAR'S PLEA

"Can you hear me now?"

An image blooms before you. You see a dwarven king dressed in fine armor, with an intricate crown resting upon his salt and pepper hair. A long, braided beard cascades over his chest. The draws a hand across his chest and gives a solemn bow.

"I am Khulgar Thrashhammer," he says. "Or at least, I was, for there is little left of me now. Forgive me, but there is little time, and I have much to tell you. I hope you will hear me out.

"I... did something deeply regrettable. It's not the kind of mistake I can ever make right, but if nothing else, I want to limit the damage." Khulgar takes a deep breath to steady himself, and then continues.

"Long ago, I led my tribe to these mountains. The rock was rich with metals, and the surrounding areas were perfect for crops. I thought that if ever there was a place for us to settle, it would be here in this place.

"We built out our homes at the same time as we began to build out the mines. I brought together those misfits and refugees with nowhere else to settle. It wasn't long after the war of course, so there was no lack of the hopeless and dispossessed. I had lost a daughter too, as well as my precious wife. All of us longed for community. A place to feel safe. A place to feel loved. And in the beginning at least, that's exactly what Khulgarshold was.

"I always thought the name was a little silly," he laughs. "Well, silly as it was, it proved popular. And my companions could be very stubborn. So, I got used to it after a while.

"The young kingdom flourished and grew, and many enthusiastic hands got to work making our realm more and more splendid. Yet soon we dug too deep, and uncovered something terrible.

"I was the first to notice it. It spoke to me in my dreams. I couldn't sleep. My friends used to ask: Khulgar, what's wrong? Your skin is ashen. Your eyes are sunken. What has happened to you?"

"I ignored them. I let the obsession take over. Dig deeper, I said, dig deeper. We must find the core. And so, we did.

“I still remember that moment. My pick broke through the rock first. I was ecstatic. I opened the hole wider, and we all climbed through. And as we did...” Khulgar pauses, seemingly struggling for words. “Forgive me. As we did, we found that creature. The one known as *elshe harth*.

“It was the discovery of a lifetime. I spoke with our architects for many days, and together we devised a system to bring *elshe harth* from the vault up to our forges. It was ingenious. The works of Khulgarshold would be the envy of all. At the time, none of us really knew what *elshe harth* really was, but we were so overcome with enthusiasm that we didn’t care.

“Nothing seemed to change at first, but then a strange illness started to appear. Those afflicted would slowly... fade away. Their spirits would fade away, that is.

“It baffled our healers and herbalists. The disease left no fever, no spots, no nothing. The victim would simply sink away under its influence, sleeping more and more, until they could not bring themselves to wake.

“I hid from the truth for a very long time... I didn’t want to recognize that the thing that I had brought to my own tribe, what I had dreamed to be their salvation, could be something so terrible.

“*Elshe harth* truly was a fitting name for it. The living flame. We foolishly treated that being as a tool with no mind of its own, and by the time I realized what had caused the disease, it was well beyond my ability to stop it. There was only one thing I could do: call for help from those more powerful than I.

“I’ve always had a sense for the presence of spirits. Perhaps that was how I had been able to hear *elshe harth* in the first place.

“I told no one of my intent. I simply slipped away one night, and I visited the living flame alone. There, in that chamber, I opened the doorway to the spirit realm. The angels came to me, and helped me to seal away the spirit of the living flame. In the end, the casting was too powerful and it cost me my very life. I thought it a fair price, to put right the wrong that I had inflicted.

“So I told myself at least. I lingered, and watched as my body was discovered. They mourned for many moons. I watched my

family cry for me, and I could say nothing. I... wish I could have left them some sort of explanation. I made many mistakes, but that may have been my greatest one.

"I contented myself with the peace that followed. It has lasted far longer than I could have hoped. But that peace will soon end.

"The creature that came into the mines recently, was a being made of souls, just like *elshe harth*. When it fused with the living flame, the monstrosity that had been sealed away for centuries burst free, and began to gather its strength. The dragon did his best to fight the creature, but could do little in the end but bar the way for others.

"I am but a spirit now. I cannot fight it directly. Yet, if you will face this creature, call on me and I will offer all the aid I can."

Khulgar holds out his hands, and light gathers in his palms. It forms itself into a key of gleaming obsidian.

Add "Obsidian Key" to your inventory.

"A focus, for spirit magic," he explains. "As you are able to speak with me, you must have some capacity for this sort of magic, even if you do not yet know it. Only you could hear my call. I must rely on you, and trust that you will do what is right.

"My time is up, it seems," he adds, with a wry smile. Before your eyes, his form is already beginning to fade. "Please," he begs one last time, "Save my people. Do what I could not."

He vanishes, and a new scene begin to stream out from where he stood. You hear one final thought from the dwarven king: "My descendent... she looks so much like my daughter, Elmina. Please tell her that I am sorry... for everything."

Go to page 102.

36. THE LIVING FLAME BURNS BLUE

You cringe back, shielding your eyes. The blue light pierces your eyelids without mercy.

Blue?

You are lying on harsh, uneven stone, washed with cobalt. You turn your head to take in the scene.

A vast rocky chamber stretches out before you. In the center, a pillar of blue flame roars all the way from floor to ceiling and into the chasm above. At the base of the fountain is an inscription. You read it now for the first time: ‘In memory of Khulgar Thrashhammer, beloved king and father.’

This is surely the chamber of *elshe harth*, yet its golden glow has been taken over by an eerie blue. You are given no further time to consider this fact, before you are tackled from one side.

“Don’t fucking scare me like that,” Alena hisses as she draws you into a tight hug. You can feel her shaking. Her hold is a little too tight – it’s hard for you to breathe. You suffer through it until Alena abruptly draws away.

Her expression is grim. “Marguerite isn’t waking,” she informs you.

Over her shoulder you see another form. Marguerite lies limply, with her eyes closed. Her expression is peaceful, and does not change in the slightest when Alena turns from you and gives her another shake. When you lean in, you can hear the sound of her breathing – some comfort at least.

Should anyone else be here?

Where’s Zylverdyn?	Where are the guards?	We came alone.
A coil of reddish rock shifts nearby, and gives a soft, unhappy groan. In your initial scan of the room, you somehow missed the shape of the	“Many of the guards were injured, or were suffering a similar affliction,” Alena explains softly. “I ordered them all back to the main	The chamber is silent. Even the blue flame of <i>elshe harth</i> makes no sound. With the vast chamber stretching out on all

Where's Zylverdyn?	Where are the guards?	We came alone.
fallen dragon. Zylverdyn's scales are dull, scorched by incredible heat. One paw lies limp and useless at the dragon's side.	complex. Well, I tried to, at least." She nods her head in the direction of the exit. A lone dwarf stands guard near the stairs, stalwart and uncomplaining. Blue light glimmers off the rubies of Danylla's prosthetic arm. "She's too loyal for her own good," Alena comments softly.	angles, you, Alena and the lifeless form that is Marguerite could very well be alone in the entire world.
Lingering Injuries Zylverdyn's injuries are painful, but not life-threatening. They can be mended with at least 10 HP of magical healing.		

"I don't understand what happened," Alena says. "We defeated the creature lurking in the flame, I'm sure of it. But I don't know what happened next. I must have blacked out for a moment. I woke up here, and both you and Marguerite were..." She shudders. "It's like no illness I've ever seen. It's as though her spirit is simply... gone." She looks over to the wall of flame that is *elsharh*. "And then there's this," she adds. "What do you make of this? Hang on – what's that you're holding?"

Alena's eyes are fixed on the obsidian key clutched in your hand. You quickly explain your meeting with Khulgar and her eyes widen.

"Spirit magic, indeed," she muses. "This is all a little strange to me... but if it's our way forward, it's better to just take the leap at this point. We've got to do something, and quick."

Alena is looking at you for help. You turn the key over in your hands. Khulgar gave you no instructions about this part, yet somehow the key feels deeply familiar. It quivers in your hand.

What do you do?

Start chanting magic words.	Point the key at Marguerite.	Ask Alena for help.
<p>Nothing much seems to happen, at least not immediately. Alena watches you patiently, though somewhat dubiously. Perhaps she is not sure what to make of your incantations.</p> <p><i>Make a DC13 Charisma (Performance) check:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Success:</i> Alena seems impressed by your arcane ways, though they have little effect. • <i>Failure:</i> Alena watches with barely veiled pity. "Perhaps we should try something else?" she suggests gently. <p><i>Try another option.</i></p>	<p>The key starts to vibrate in your hands. You can feel something pulling at you. The quality of the light changes, and a soft murmur begins to sound in your ears.</p> <p>Alena places your hands on top of yours. "Let's go and find our friend," she tells you.</p> <p>The pull of the key grows impossible to resist. With Alena's firm grip on top of you, you relax, and let it take you where it will.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Go to page 105.</i></p>	<p>"Spirit magic is a means of communicating with souls that lie between this world and the next," Alena tells you. "Marguerite is still breathing, even though I cannot wake her: her soul must still be somewhere nearby. Perhaps you can use that key to bring us to wherever she is.</p> <p>"The first king trusted you: trust yourself. Trust your instincts. Just focus on the key, and focus on Marguerite."</p> <p><i>Try another option.</i></p>

37. MARGUERITE'S PLAYGROUND

The key is gone from your hand when you open your eyes to the new scene.

A cobblestone street stretches out before you. Patches of unkempt grass dot the way, trampled by the passage of shoes and wagons alike. Shops are messily clustered along the sides of the road while all types of people mill around, chattering and bartering. The noise and the scents of the marketplace hit you in a sudden blast, yet your abrupt arrival draws no attention from those around.

"Where do you think we've landed now?" Alena murmurs to you. She stands at your side, quizzically surveying her surroundings. "I don't recognize any of this," she comments.

Make an Intelligence check.

Result of <13	Result of ≥13
You shake your head. You are sure that you have never been to this place in your life. Perhaps it is indeed significant to your friend in some way, but without exploring further, you cannot possibly know why.	You look around you. You have never seen this place, but as you look around, you recall Marguerite speaking with you and Jerys one night, describing the place she grew up in. Aulensdel lay midway between the size of a town and a city, placed close to the borderline between countries. You note the tall clocktower that casts its shadow across the town: Marguerite remembered it well.

"Are you lost?"

The voice comes from right behind you. Alena jumps, and gives a soft curse.

The speaker is a small girl – perhaps six or seven years old. Her red hair and violet eyes seem strangely familiar.

Who might this be?

"Who are you?"	"Marguerite?"
<p>"Aren't you supposed to introduce yourself first?" she points out. With a quick glance at Alena, you begrudgingly comply. Seemingly mollified, the girl says, "Well, then I'm Marguerite Elensbrook."</p> <p>Elensbrook – you haven't heard that name in a while. Marguerite changed her surname some time ago.</p>	<p>"Huh? How do you know my name?" the girl asks. Her surprise seems genuine; it is clear that she does not recognize you.</p> <p>"Well, it's only fair that you tell me your names too," the young Marguerite grumbles. You glance over to Alena, who shrugs. Each of you give your names.</p>

"So then, *are* you lost?" Marguerite insists, once the business of introductions is complete. "Where do you want to go? I know this town well. I can guide you."

"What are we supposed to do now?" Alena mutters to you. "Grab her and run?"

"Oh, so you're kidnappers then," Marguerite comments nonchalantly. Alena jumps again. Perhaps she had underestimated the young girl's hearing.

"If you are kidnappers, you're not very good at it," Marguerite remarks. "You're supposed to be a little inconspicuous, and maybe convince me to trust you. I read about this sort of thing, you know. Did you bring any sweets?"

"Don't eat things strangers give you," Alena tells her sharply. Marguerite only shrugs. "You're not so scary," the girl informs you. "Well, if you didn't bring any snacks, do you at least want to play a game before you kidnap me?"

"We're not going to –" Alena lets the rest of her statement fall away with an indignant huff. She turns to you. "Well, what do you think? Do we humor her? Seems as though we won't get far unless we do."

Your thoughts flicker briefly back to the chamber where *elshe harth* awaits, and where Marguerite lay unconscious, breathing

shallowly. Do you have enough time to be playing games with this girl, or is there something else you need to be doing?

Do you play a game with Marguerite?

Sure! Let's play!	Not right now.
<p>"Great!" she exclaims. "I'll explain the rules then..." <i>Go to page 108.</i></p>	<p>Marguerite scowls. "If you don't play with me, I'll scream, and the Watch will come," she threatens. "They don't take well to kidnapers." "We're not kidnapers, damn it!" Alena groans. "Excuse me. Let me speak with my friend for a moment, will you?" Marguerite nods slyly as Alena takes you to one side. "Look, I get it," Alena whispers, "We want to bring her back, and fast, but remember: this is Marguerite's world, and her rules apply here. Let's just play her game for now, and maybe we can learn some clues." <i>Go to page 108.</i></p>

38. HIDE AND SEEK

“We’ll play three rounds of hide and seek,” Marguerite explains. “You two can work together if you like. If you find me all three times, you get to kidnap me. If not, then you have to buy me one of every cake in the patisserie in the south of town. And I’ll eat them all in front of you, and you won’t get any.”

Alena lets out a snort of laughter; it’s a very characteristic threat that you are sure the young Marguerite is only too willing to follow through on.

“The bell in the clocktower rings once every hour,” she continues. “It rang a few minutes ago now, so you’ll have a little less than an hour. Each time I hide, you have to shut your eyes and count to one hundred – I’ll know if you cheat! And no asking the people on the street if they saw me, got that?! Don’t worry: I’ll hide outside. You don’t need to worry about me running off into shops or anything. Ok, that’s everything! Are you ready to start?”

“One question, young Marguerite,” Alena replies. “Let’s say we can’t find you before time runs out. Where do we wait for you?”

“That’s easy,” the girl replies. She points to the structure towering over the marketplace: the great clocktower, ticking away the minutes. The time is three minutes past two.

“There’s a statue of a cat at the base of the clocktower. When I hear the bell, I’ll head over. Don’t forget about your promise!”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll buy you whatever cake you want,” Alena agrees with a sigh. “They’ll rot your teeth, mind you.”

Marguerite flashes you a grin, demonstrating her very clean and non-rotten teeth. “Close your eyes and start counting,” she instructs.

The two of you comply. “One... two... three...”

Would you like to listen for Marguerite's footsteps? If so, make a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Result of <12	Result of ≥12
There is a soft scampering, but the noise of the street overwhelms the sound of Marguerite's footsteps, and you lose track of her quickly.	You hear the sound of small feet scampering away. They move ahead several steps and then veer to the left.

"Ninety-nine... one hundred," Alena finishes at last. The two of you open your eyes. The street bustles before you, just as before. The young girl is long gone.

"Hrm... normally I'd suggest we split up to search, but I wouldn't want to risk it here," Alena says. "This place may look normal, but we need to remember where we are: this is not the real world, but something built out of Marguerite's memory. It may not be all it seems. Let's proceed with caution."

She glances from side to side, taking in the bustle of trade and the many offshoots from the main street. "Now just where did that cheeky brat go?"

The time is 2:05. Note this down now, and track the time as you begin to search.
--

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the clocktower.

Left!	Straight ahead!	Right!
<i>Go to page 110.</i>	<i>Go to page 111.</i>	<i>Go to page 112.</i>

39. AULENSDEL SIDE STREETS

You turn off the main street into one of its branches. Shops line this direction as well, but the marketplace grows less crowded as you venture out.

“Let’s see... she couldn’t have gotten too far in this short time,” Alena tells you as she looks across the street. “Hmm... that looks promising...”

Alena is pointing towards a rather ugly fountain where water streams from the gaping mouths of a school of catfish, down into a basin of dirty stone. As you approach, you catch a flash of red around the edge of a lopsided stone fish.

“If I’m not very much mistaken, that’s our target right there,” Alena comments loudly enough that the Marguerite’s face pops out from behind the statue, wearing an expression of deep disappointment.

Add 5 minutes to your time and go to page 113.

40. SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

The busy street continues on for another five hundred feet before opening into a broad meeting place at the foot of the clocktower. You have to fight to make your way over there, and bump into several merchants and a carriage on your way.

“Watch it!” a well-dressed man snarls, knocking you out of his way as he charges down the street. An elderly woman seated at a park bench gives a soft “tut” of disapproval.

Alena turns to you. “I think we’ve gone in the wrong direction... no matter how nimble that girl is, she couldn’t have made it here in the time we spent counting.” She sighs. “Let’s try again, I suppose.”

Add 10 minutes to your time.

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the clocktower.

Left!	Right!
<i>Go to page 110.</i>	<i>Go to page 112.</i>

41. ALLEYWAYS

The main street veers off into a set of small alleyways and artisanal cafes. ‘Fresh, delicious, cheese!’ one sign reads. Sweet scents beckon the way to a florist where a half-elf with shining black hair that reaches nearly to the ground weaves rose garlands before an adoring audience.

Alena nudges you. “Hey! Focus! We’ve got a job to do!”

One by one, you comb through the narrow streets, dodging the many merchants who offer free samples – or occasionally obliging those you favor – before you arrive at the end of the final street, and the conclusion that you have been wasting your time.

“Let’s pick another direction,” Alena suggests. “I didn’t realize how big this place was!”

Add 20 minutes to your time.

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the market.

Straight ahead!	Right!
<i>Go to page 110.</i>	<i>Go to page 111.</i>

42. ROUND TWO

“You got me,” Marguerite concedes glumly. She rallies and continues: “But that was just the first round! You’ll see! Catch me two more times, and maybe then I’ll be a little impressed!”

“Only a little?” Alena asks. “Take this seriously, young miss, your all-you can eat dessert journey is on the line here!”

“I’m always serious when it comes to cake,” Marguerite informs her with great dignity.

“Then, you’d better think of a good hiding place, because round two starts now. “Ready? One... two... three...”

Marguerite gives a small squeak of protest and begins to flee.

Would you like to listen for Marguerite’s footsteps? If so, make a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Result of <12	Result of ≥12
“Four eggs? I said I needed six!” a grating, high-pitched voice declares loudly. You are not sure why the accuracy of the egg count is such cause for distress, but the sound of Marguerite’s footsteps is lost beneath the noise.	You listen closely and filter out the sound of the girl’s footsteps beneath a noisy argument nearby, and once again, Marguerite runs towards the left. You hear a shout of protest as she bumps into someone along the way.

“And one hundred,” Alena announces. “Well, I suppose we should get to searching...” She laughs suddenly. “Would it surprise you if I said I was having fun? Childish of me, I suppose, but I’ve always wanted kids of my own. Maybe someday we would get to play like this... hah, I wonder what you’d think of me as a mother? I just can’t imagine it.

“Forgive me, I’m prattling on again, and right now, we’ve got a runaway to catch. I don’t understand all of this, but I suppose our job right now is to convince Marguerite to come back with us, one way or another.” She looks over to the great clocktower counting down the minutes. “Careful now – let’s not lose track of the time.”

Add 3 minutes to your time and continue. If your time reaches 3:00, go to page 131.

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the market.

Left!	Straight ahead!	Right!
<i>Go to page 115.</i>	<i>Go to page 116.</i>	<i>Go to page 117.</i>

43. HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Once more, you take a left turn, this time moving parallel to the main street. There is significantly less traffic here, and you are able to move at double speed. In no time at all, you arrive in the shadow of the clocktower.

“Huh. Now what is that young girl up to now?” Alena asks, pointing to the child sitting in plain view at a park bench in the shadow of the great clock. Marguerite’s eyes are closed, as though she is concentrating deeply.

“Well, shall we go and see what she’s plotting?” Alena suggests.

Add 2 minutes to your time and go to page 118.

44. CHEESE-FLAVORED SOAP

You hurry back to the hubbub of the marketplace. Somehow, the place seems even louder than before.

“You call this cheese?” an irate customer exclaims as you attempt to squeeze past. “I paid good money for a round of cheddar, and instead you wrap up this bar of soap and rotten milk and send me on my way. I want my coins back, and don’t you dare withhold a single copper!”

“Focus!” Alena reminds you. It is difficult indeed to accomplish such a task, yet in the twenty minutes that you spend searching, you find no nook or cranny capable of concealing a young girl with no wish to be trampled.

Add 20 minutes to your time.

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the clock tower.

Straight ahead!	Backwards!
<i>Go to page 115.</i>	<i>Go to page 117.</i>

45. SOMEONE ELSE'S GAME

The shops soon give way to the beginnings of the town's residential area. You walk the quiet streets with Alena at your side.

Children run and play. You can see games very like your own game of hide and seek.

"Why play with strangers, when you can play with kids your age?" Alena wonders aloud.

There is a burst of laughter and complaining as the 'seeker' discovers a hiding place where two girls huddle.

"I don't think we'll find her here," Alena comments. "Let's try somewhere else."

Add 10 minutes to your time

Choose a direction. You are facing towards the clocktower.

Straight ahead!	Right!
<i>Go to page 115.</i>	<i>Go to page 116.</i>

46. THE INVISIBLE GIRL

You approach the girl seated at the bench with her eyes closed in concentration. Alena asks curiously, “Is this what they call hiding in plain sight?”

Marguerite’s eyes blink open. She seems stunned to see you gazing down at her. “What – you can see me?!”

“Weren’t we supposed to?” a skeptical Alena asks.

“I’m supposed to be invisible,” Marguerite informs her.

Alena frowns. “You shouldn’t be learning that sort of magic yet. Wait another ten years before you start meddling with spell-books.”

“I didn’t learn it in a spellbook,” Marguerite retorts. “It’s a special trick I learned. It’s easy: if you get really angry, or really sad, you just focus on that emotion, and people stop being able to see you.” She seems somewhat upset that you’ve seen through her magic trick. Alena looks over to you uncertainly.

What do you say?

You’re too old for that trick to work.	Alena and I have magical sight.	Those people were only pretending not to see you.
Marguerite nods glumly. “I suppose so. It doesn’t seem to have been working as well lately as it usually does. People seem to notice way more these days – really, they notice a little too much. It’d be nice to be able to just slip away like that at times, but I think I’m losing my touch.”	Marguerite snorts. “Don’t take me for a fool. I may look small, but I’m nearly eight years old. Well, I suppose your answer tells me what I need to know, in any case: the whole invisibility thing must have been a lie from the beginning.”	Marguerite shrugs. “I suppose they might have been. I’ve started to suspect that myself. I guess it might have seemed like a funny game to play with a kid. But what do I know, right? Adults are weird. I wonder if I’ll someday get to the age of wanting to mess with kid’s heads.”

Marguerite sighs. “Well, I suppose it doesn’t matter. You’ve won this round at least. And with only one left. I suppose you think you’ve got this in the bag, then.

“Say, before we get going again, I have something to tell you. Have a look over there – see where we are now?”

You follow Marguerite’s gaze upwards. “Look at the clock-tower,” she tells you, “and then, look over there, towards the markets. Do you notice it?”

“Whoever made the clock did something funny. When the sun is rising, the shadow of the tower goes right over there in the direction of the hills. When it’s setting, the shadow goes the other way. In the afternoon and in the early evening, the shadow darkens the whole trading area – the core of the marketplace! So even in the summer, when the days are long and the sun takes forever to set, that’s how you know its time to go home. The shadow tells you!

“It’s dark, the shadow says – run home, where it’s safe. But I’d rather stay out a little longer. I think there are spooky things everywhere; maybe the shadow thinks it’s being clever, sending you from one scary place to another!

“Say, if the tower wasn’t there, what do you think? Would we gain a few more hours back in the day? Wouldn’t that be interesting?”

“Isn’t it strange how Mr. Clock gets to rule lives like that? Tick, tock, he says, then it’s time to go! Time to sleep, time to wake, time to study, time to play. How come Mr. Clock gets to decide?”

“Is this some sort of riddle?” Alena asks.

“It can be, if you want. Sure, why not? If you give a good answer, then I’ll give you a bonus: you get 10 minutes back! Hah! Aren’t I generous? Mr. Clock never does that!”

“You’re stalling for time, aren’t you?” Alena comments.

Marguerite pokes her tongue out. “It worked, didn’t it?” she points out. “Well, start counting, then!”

Would you like to listen for Marguerite's footsteps? If so, make a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Result of <14	Result of ≥14
In the shadow of the clocktower, the noise of the market has faded away to near nothingness. You ought to be at least able to hear the sound of Marguerite's footsteps, even if you cannot make out their direction, yet this time, you hear nothing at all.	You listen closely, but for a long moment, you hear nothing at all. As Alena continues to count beside you, you wonder if you have somehow missed Marguerite's escape. Then, as the count hits twenty, you hear the girl shuffling away, this time at a slower pace than before. The footsteps fade away as they travel to the right.

Alena finishes counting, and the two of you scan your surroundings. The clocktower is to your back. The market lies before you. To either side of the plaza you can see cafes, shops, and further up on the hills what look to be residential areas.

Add 5 minutes to your time and continue. If your time reaches 3:00, go to page 131.

"I didn't hear her run off this time," Alena comments. "Failed invisibility spells aside, did that girl learn some stealth magic? More likely, maybe she's hidden somewhere nearby? Ah, but then again, this is the final round of her challenge after all. Surely she wouldn't make it that easy.

"What do you think? Should we search nearby, or venture out a little?"

Which do you want to try?

Search nearby.	Search further out.
<p>“Makes sense,” Alena agrees. “We can always venture out later if we can’t find her. Well then, let’s do a sweep of the area.”</p> <p>You make your way around the plaza, peering behind benches and statues – which earns you a few odd looks from the locals.</p> <p>“I don’t think she’s anywhere nearby,” Alena concludes at last. “It was worth checking at least, but we’d best move on for now.”</p>	<p>“I suppose she wouldn’t make it that easy,” Alena agrees. “This is the final round after all – if we lose, she gets all the cake she wants. Which I suspect from experience is a lot. Let’s get moving then.”</p>
	Continue below.
Add 5 minutes to your time and continue.	

“Say, since this is the final round after all, what say you we give it our all?” Alena suggests. “I was nervous at first, but this town seems safe. Let’s split up to search. How about if I search that way –” she points to the left “– and you search that way?” she points to the right. She quickly adds, “Mind you, don’t go too far, and yell out *immediately* if you run into trouble.”

What Alena is suggesting makes sense, and could save you a lot of time, yet it is a far cry from her previous advice. Is it wise to split up in this strange place?

Do you split up to search?

<p>Yes. Time is running out.</p>	<p>No way. Alena is being reckless.</p>
<p>“Alright then, how about we meet back here in ten minutes?” Alena suggests. “If you find Marguerite, bring her with you. Let’s hurry now!”</p> <p><i>Go to page 123.</i></p>	<p>Alena notes your firm disapproval, and her enthusiasm dissipates. “Oh. Of course. No, you’re exactly right,” she says. “I suppose I let my excitement get the better of me. Silly, isn’t it? It’s only a children’s game after all, and it’s not as though we really <i>need</i> to win or anything.</p> <p>“Alright, let’s get a move on. Together.”</p> <p><i>You are facing back towards the clocktower. To head left, go to page 127. To head right, go to page 128.</i></p>

47. THE WORKSHOPS

You part ways with Alena and make your way towards the cafes that rim the plaza. From the clothing of its patrons and the fine architecture, you gauge that this area is perhaps a little more upmarket, yet the conversation you hear is by no means stiff and formal: the warm chatter is frequently broken by bursts of laughter.

Little marzipan cakes spin slowly on discs of air in the windows of a patisserie that you pass. You glance through the windows on a whim to make sure that Marguerite has not taken refuge inside. She hasn't, as far as you can tell. You suppose that would be cheating.

Beyond the cafes are a set of workshops, many of which are open for public viewing. You walk past enormous looms clicking at an outrageous speed. The weaver's hands are little more than a blur as he tosses threads and pulls at a set of levers and bars. A tour group of excited gnomes listen to a tiefling in a bright orange gown prattle on about "warp threads" and "shuttle races". You catch little of the explanation, but the audience appears to be enjoying it. Only a few stops along, a smithy has drawn a similar audience – making, of all things, a set of ladles. As you hurry along, peering into each shop for signs of a young redhaired girl, you pass a dizzying array of crafts ranging from glassblowing to pottery to lacework and quilting.

The shadow of the clocktower has begun to slowly dip across the marketplace, but the area you walk is still bright with sunlight. You walk past workshop after workshop, until you glance back towards the clocktower and notice that your ten minutes are beginning to run out. Quickly, you retreat.

Alena is late in returning. You wait a few minutes before you spot her jogging back to meet with you.

"Phew. Sorry about that," she tells you, pausing briefly to catch her breath. "So, you didn't have any luck either? I searched all along the northern side, but I couldn't find her. Where could she have gone, then?"

Add 12 minutes to your time and continue. If your time reaches 3:00, go to page 131.

“We’ve already searched in the north and the south. I suppose next steps would be the market and behind the clocktower. How about if I try the former and you try the latter? Shall we meet back here in another ten minutes?”

Do you have at least ten minutes left?

Yes	No
<p>“Alright, then let’s get to it. Time’s wasting!” Alena trots off towards the market, leaving you to head in the other direction.</p> <p><i>Go to page 125.</i></p>	<p>Alena follows your gaze up the clocktower and exclaims, “How did the time pass so quickly?!” Damn it all. Well, let’s spend the last few minutes searching, just in case, but we may have to concede defeat this time.”</p> <p><i>Go to page 131.</i></p>

48. THE HOUSE ON THE WESTERN HILL

It is pleasantly cool in the shadow of the clocktower. You walk past all sorts of people chattering and enjoying street food in the meeting area. A small stall makes a roaring trade selling roasted chestnuts and almonds at the base of the tower. The nearby teashop, only slightly larger and with an unnecessary canvas to block out the sun, is crammed with patrons. Most of the space is empty of trade, instead playing host to lollygagging tourists and tradesfolk.

The temperature changes noticeably as you step out from the shadow and into the afternoon sun. The plaza continues around the rim of the clocktower. You search for signs of Marguerite, but although there are ample spaces for a young girl to hide, you catch no sight of her.

You make it around the other side of the clocktower, where something stops you in your path and draws your gaze to the west.

This side of the plaza is slightly raised. You can see residences stretching out in all directions, but further away, you spot something else: atop a hill to the outskirts of the town is a larger dwelling of clean white walls and a black tiled roof.

Logically, you know that the house is much further away than Marguerite could possibly have walked during the time you spent counting, yet something about it holds your eye. Glancing up at the clock, you note it is only a few minutes before you are to meet back with Alena. You complete your duty, searching back around the other side of the clocktower (to no avail), and jog back to meet with your friend.

Alena is already waiting when you return. "Nothing," she tells you glumly, but then spots your expression. "Hmm, did you find a clue?"

Quickly, you explain your discovery. Alena listens with interest, and comments, "If your instinct is pulling you in that direction, then I say we trust it. Mind you, from what I'm hearing, it sounds like Marguerite may have skipped out on our game... once we get out of this mess, she's going to be the one buying me cake, mark my words.

“Well, what are we waiting for, then? Lead the way.”

You turn away from the market and retrace your steps to the other side of the clocktower. That same strange pull calls to you, and you and Alena make your way west, following the long street that points the way up the hill to where the house crouches like a predator readying itself to strike.

As you walk, the clock calls out behind you three times: your time is up, and Marguerite is nowhere to be seen.

“What is that girl thinking?” Alena mutters mutinously. “I’ll have some words for her, once all this is over. I don’t care if you’re seven years old or seventy, no one ditches a friend and gets away with it.”

Go to page 137.

49. THE SCENIC ROUTE

The two of you make your way towards the cafes that rim the plaza. From the clothing of its patrons and the fine architecture, you gauge that this area is perhaps a little more upmarket, yet the conversation you hear is by no means stiff and formal: the warm chatter is frequently broken by bursts of laughter.

Little marzipan cakes spin slowly on discs of air in the windows of a patisserie that you pass. You glance through the windows on a whim to make sure that Marguerite has not taken refuge inside. She hasn't, as far as you can tell. You suppose that would be cheating.

Beyond the cafes are a set of workshops, many of which are open for public viewing. You walk past enormous looms clicking at an outrageous speed. The weaver's hands are little more than a blur as he tosses threads and pulls at a set of levers and bars. A tour group of excited gnomes listen to a tiefling in a bright orange gown prattle on about "warp threads" and "shuttle races". You catch little of the explanation, but the audience appears to be enjoying it. Only a few stops along, a smithy has drawn a similar audience – making, of all things, a set of ladles. As you hurry along, peering into each shop for signs of a young redhaired girl, you pass a dizzying array of crafts ranging from glassblowing to pottery to lacework and quilting.

"No luck," Alena announces at last. "Let's try searching somewhere else. Where haven't we looked yet?"

Add 10 minutes to your time. To search the opposite side of the plaza, go to page 128. To search the market, go to page 129. To search behind the clocktower, go to page 130. If your time has run out, go to page 131.

50. DEADLINES AND DISASTERS

To the northern side of the plaza you find a set of tall buildings bustling with activity. Closer inspection reveals signage of each guild house. Through the windows and open doorways, you see scribes and apprentices darting back and forth with stacks of paperwork, while guild officials alternate between barking orders and singing sycophantic praises of those higher up in the chain of command.

“I doubt they’d let a little kid cause trouble in there,” Alena suggests. “Let’s keep walking.”

Yet even as you keep walking, you find no sign of Marguerite. Beyond the guild houses are a set of artist studios. The only excitement you receive is the sudden burst of noise as a half-orc woman thrusts the shutters open on the second floor and yells at the top of her lungs, “I HATE DEADLINES, AND I HATE WHOEVER INVENTED THEM!”

Calmly, the woman closes the shutters, after a brief apology to the stunned folk standing below.

“This is an odd town,” Alena comments. “Let’s keep moving.”

You search and search, with no further luck. At last, Alena announces, “This is pointless. We’re going to have to try somewhere else.”

Add 10 minutes to your time. To search the opposite side of the plaza, go to page 127. To search the market, go to page 129. To search behind the clocktower, go to page 130. If your time has run out, go to page 131.

51. THE PRICE OF FRESH GUANO

You dive back into the hubbub of the market. The trade has intensified even further as the shadow of the clocktower continues its slow march towards the stalls. As you wait for an oversized wagon to shift from your path, you overhear a sly whisper: “That merchant probably thinks he struck an amazing deal with me. He’ll faint once he learns the true retail value of fresh guano among wizards. I’m going to make a killing back at the guild!”

“Shh!” the stranger’s friend cautions, glancing in your direction.

“Are you getting distracted again?” Alena accuses. “Come on, we’ve got a job to do!” She tugs you firmly away from the trader’s foul-smelling wares.

Time passes as you search, yet you are given nothing to show for your efforts. “Damn it, where is that girl hiding?” Alena demands.

Add 15 minutes to your time. You are facing towards the clocktower. To search the left, go to page 127. To search towards the right, go to page 128. To search behind the clocktower, go to page 130. If your time has run out, go to page 131.

52. THE CLOCKTOWER

The clocktower remains clearly visible throughout most of the town; you can easily navigate your way back. Ignoring the area to the front of the clocktower, where tourists and locals alike mingle over street food and conversation, you continue around the side, following steps and ledges bearing plinths of all sorts of statues, some humanoid and some strange and out of place creatures. Another group of children have started a game of hide and seek in the area, but Marguerite herself is nowhere to be found. You make it around the other side of the clocktower, where something stops you in your path.

This side of the plaza is slightly raised. You can see residences stretching out in all directions, but further away, you spot something else: atop a hill to the outskirts of the town is a larger dwelling of clean white walls and a black tiled roof.

Logically, you know that the house is much further away than Marguerite could possibly have walked during the time you spent counting, yet something about it holds your eye. It is difficult for you to explain, even to yourself, but you know that this place is important.

Alena listens as you tell her of your suspicions. “If your instinct is pulling you in that direction, then I say we trust it,” she replies. “Mind you, from what I’m hearing, it sounds like Marguerite may have skipped out on our game... once we get out of this mess, she’s going to be the one buying me cake, mark my words. Well, what are we waiting for, then? Lead the way.”

You and Alena make your way west, following the long street that points the way up the hill to where the house crouches like a predator readying itself to strike.

As you walk, the clock calls out behind you three times: your time is up, and Marguerite is nowhere to be seen.

“What is that girl thinking?” Alena mutters mutinously. “I’ll have some words for her, once all this is over. I don’t care if you’re seven or seventy, no one ditches a friend and gets away with it.”

Go to page 137.

53. THE CLOCK STRIKES THREE

You hear a deep, rich tone calling out across the town: three chimes, then silence.

“Time’s up then, I suppose,” a crestfallen Alena comments. “Ah well, it’s only a kid’s game. Nothing wrong with letting her win, every now and then.

“She did say to meet at the clocktower, didn’t she? I seem to recall there was some sort of animal sculpture. A dog, maybe? Ah, no, that’s right: she said to meet near the cat. Well, let’s go and find her.”

* * *

You find the statue Marguerite mentioned easily enough: the brass cat is a gaudy, cartoonish creature with a nasty sneer, and seems to be a common meeting place. You sit nearby and wait for the young girl to show herself.

A scuffle soon picks up beside you. “No, dear, we need to wait for mummy to come back!” a high elf chides his son, who complains loudly about the side trip he wishes to make to the leatherworkers. The young boy’s whining grows more and more emphatic, and you and Alena are forced to dodge caramelized almonds that fly through the air. The haggard elf apologizes profusely and offers you a clean handkerchief as a nut strikes your forehead squarely.

“That girl can’t be too far away, right?” Alena mutters to you, yet time passes, the nut-throwing boy is appeased, and still Marguerite does not appear.

“Something’s wrong,” Alena says suddenly. “She wouldn’t just give up on the game like this, surely. Ah, we shouldn’t have let her leave our sight. I forgot: she’s just a kid after all! Why is she running around unsupervised at such a young age? Isn’t anyone else worried about her? Come on. We have to find her. Let’s try asking around.”

Together you glance across the plaza. The patronage has changed over time and the faces are unfamiliar; it is a struggle to recall which folk were there the last time Marguerite left to seek a new hiding place.

Make an Intelligence check with advantage.

Result of <15	Result of ≥15
<p>You gesture doubtfully towards a group of halflings enjoying a picnic in the shade. They may have been there earlier; they may not have.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Go to page 133.</i></p>	<p>You spot a promising cluster of dwarves. They seem quite settled in their place, with no intention of moving. Each is dressed in a leather smock, suggesting they are on break from work. Every now and then you catch a flash of brown paper as a bottle is passed around.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Go to page 135.</i></p>

54. AN INEPT INVESTIGATION

“Say, you wouldn’t have seen a young human girl with red hair around here? About this tall?” Alena asks, indicating Marguerite’s height.

The halflings look to each other with bemusement. “Can’t say I have,” one of them offers. “Good luck. You could ask over at the food stalls; they’ve been here all day.”

“Thank you,” Alena replies distractedly. The halflings return to their picnic as you move away.

The vendor is mildly annoyed at the interruption to his business, but points you to a group of children playing games to the side of the clocktower.

“You’re it!” a tiefling girl with bright pink hair screeches. The victim of her touch attack flees in swift denial, smacks straight into Alena, falls over, and begins to cry.

“Ew! Adults!” the tiefling yelps.

“Hold it!” Alena calls back, doing her best to appear unthreatening. She stoops down slightly so that the two can see eye to eye. “My name is Alena. I am looking for someone named Marguerite. Do you know where I can find her?”

“We don’t play with ghosts,” the girl says scornfully.

“Ghosts? She’s no ghost. She’s about this tall, with red hair, and –”

“I know who you mean,” the girl interrupts. “It haunts that house on top of the western hill. I can show you. Follow me!”

The girl scampers off towards the west. The felled boy scrambles to his feet and throws Alena a dirty look before chasing after his friend.

The western side of the plaza holds a slightly raised section, where steps lead down towards a quiet residential area. From your vantage point, you spot the house the dwarves mentioned: a large dwelling of clean white walls and a black tiled roof. It is far off in the distance; clearly much further than Marguerite could have reached during the time you spent counting.

“The ghost went home,” the tiefling girl tells you. “That house is haunted! If you go there at night, you can hear all sorts of

weird sounds. If you want to go play with ghosts, go for it, but don't blame me when you get gobbled up. Hee hee!"

The two children scamper away, back to their waiting friends. Alena comments, "You know, I've wanted kids for a while now, but I'm not so sure anymore. Are they all this bratty?"

"Speaking of which, it sounds like I was a fool to be worried... that girl abandoned our game! I'll have some words for her once all this is over. I don't care if you're seven years old or seventy, no one ditches a friend and gets away with it. But for now, let's track her down."

You set off on your way, following the long street west to where the house crouches like a predator readying itself to strike.

Go to page 137.

55. GAME ABANDONED

“Greetings, and well met,” Alena calls out as you approach the group. Various eyes turn towards the two of you, and light up.

The shortest and fattest dwarf calls out a greeting: “Hey! Fancy seeing another dwarf in these parts!” “Are you from Silvercliff?”

“Khulgarshold,” Alena replies automatically. “Now, unfortunately I can’t stay to chat –”

“I have a cousin up in Khulgarshold,” the dwarf interrupts brightly. “Do you know Singram?”

“He’s your cousin?” a startled Alena asks. “That’s right, he said he had some relatives out west! Fancy that!”

Singram’s cousin beams. “Well, a friend of my cousin is a friend of mine! I’m Anthel. Why don’t you join us and we can share news?”

You see Alena waver for a moment, but she firms her resolve. “We’re actually looking for someone right now,” she says reluctantly. “You wouldn’t happen to have seen a young human girl with red hair, about this tall?” She indicates with her hands.

“Hmm... I may have... hey everyone,” Anthel addresses his friends, “listen up, was there a human girl around there before?” A chorus of voices reply. “Hold up, one at a time.”

“You must mean Marguerite,” a woman with a tattooed face says. “She lives to the west, up in the hills. I see her around the town often; I bring cookies to work sometimes, in case she drops by. I saw her before, and I think she was headed home.”

“Heading home? She was supposed to meet us back here!” Alena exclaims.

The tattooed dwarf shrugs. “That girl’s an odd one. Very independent of course. But odd. She might have forgotten about that promise. Be kind to her – she’s only a child. Still, if you want to find her, you can see her house from behind the clocktower. It’s the big black and white one on the hill.”

Mutiny simmers in Alena’s eyes, but she thanks the dwarves and steers you away from the gathering. Several of the group call out invitations for a later rendezvous, and Alena gives a half-hearted assent.

“So, she ran out on our game,” Alena says to you as soon as you’re out of hearing range. “That little minx... I’ll have some words for her once all this is over. I don’t care if you’re seven years old or seventy, no one ditches a friend and gets away with it. But for now, let’s track her down.”

* * *

The western side of the plaza holds a slightly raised section, where steps lead down towards a quiet residential area. From your vantage point, you spot the house the dwarves mentioned: a large dwelling of clean white walls and a black tiled roof. It is far off in the distance; clearly much further than Marguerite could have reached during the time you spent counting, yet something draws you towards it. There is no doubt in your mind that this is the right way to go.

“Shall we, then?” Alena suggests. You set off on your way, following the long street west to where the house crouches like a predator readying itself to strike.

Go to page 137.

56. THE ELENSBROOK RESIDENCE

The street slopes gently upwards, and as it does, the residences transition from working class dwellings into larger manors that seem out of place in the context of a town. Rather than the residences of nobility, perhaps they are the homes of wealthy merchants.

It is a long walk, but eventually you make it to the foot of the larger home. Up close, the dwelling is not as clean as it had appeared from the clocktower. Weeds have begun to creep up on the lawn, and the windows are dusty. A sign above the gate bears the name "Elensbrook" and the number "78" in smooth, bold letters choked with fungus. The gate itself is unguarded and unlocked, and creaks softly beneath Alena's hand. As though that small sound has woken her from a stupor, Alena turns to you with worry in her eyes.

"Do you think it's ok if we're caught here?" she asks. "Do you know anything about Marguerite's family?"

You tell her what you know, which isn't much. Marguerite said little about her childhood. You know that she was an only child, and that "Elensbrook" was her original surname, changed during the course of your travels. Marguerite mentioned her parents a few times, but hesitated to say much. You never thought it right to push her on the matter.

"It could be that she won't want us to see whatever's inside," Alena murmurs. "But what else can we do?" You follow her through the gateway.

The air is cool. You realize that the house has a similar design to the clocktower: during the morning, the shadow must point far over the hills to the west, but now, as the afternoon creeps towards evening, the shadow changes direction and stretches towards the market, calling the tradesfolk to their homes. The tiled roof overhangs a little too far over the porch, accentuating the effect where you stand. It could well be evening already if you keep your eyes fixed ahead, away from the sunlight that glimmers off houses to the left and right.

Alena knocks on the door three times. On the third knock, her hand is slightly too firm, and the unlocked door creaks ajar.

After a brief glance in your direction, Alena opens the door and steps inside. “Marguerite? Are you in there?” she calls.

Beneath your feet are tessellating tiles of russet and grey. The windows are dusty, but the floor less so. The place has surely been cleaned sometime recently, though with little effort or skill.

It is even cooler, and even darker inside. You and Alena continue to call for Marguerite as you walk further into the manor. Your voices echo hollowly off high arched ceilings.

The entrance hall breaks off into various lounge rooms, offices, and areas that you cannot guess the purpose of. You see all the trappings of a residence, in furniture, books and even paintings on the walls, yet they do not help to assuage that strange sense that you walk a ghost house.

Methodically, you check each room in turn, pausing only to cautiously peer into one room where a blue light flickers: within the fireplace, the flames of *elshe harth* burn. Cursing, Alena dashes forward, and before you can interject, she turns the ashes to douse the small flame. The pale light disappears, and but for the faint glow peering in through the window, you are thrust into darkness.

“Marguerite!” Alena calls out again, with a tinge of desperation.

This time, there is a response: “Over here.” The familiar voice calls from a closed door ahead and to the right. A string of letters across the door spell out ‘MARGUE-ITE’ – the ‘r’ is shattered into a remnant that clings determinedly to the twine. With only a brief moment’s hesitation, Alena turns the handle and opens the way.

Do you have Darkvision or a source of light?

Yes	No
<p>The room is smaller than any other you have seen in this house, and is completely windowless. It is all but bare of decorations, or even other possessions. Children's clothing is laid out neatly on what looks to be a repurposed bookshelf.</p> <p>A small form is seated on the bed, covers thrown back, as if she has only just awoken. "Why are you here?" Marguerite asks bluntly.</p> <p>"Why weren't you at the clocktower?" Alena counters. "We had a deal, remember? Weren't you going to stuff yourself silly with cakes?"</p> <p>Marguerite raises an eyebrow, her expression unfriendly. She slides out of bed and stands before you. A blue flame appears within her outstretched hand, illuminating her face.</p>	<p>The way ahead disappears into the darkness. You see a vague shape shift ahead, as a voice calls out: "Why are you here?"</p> <p>"Why weren't you at the clocktower?" Alena counters. "We had a deal, remember? Weren't you going to stuff yourself silly with cakes?"</p> <p>There is a momentary pause and a soft sigh from the darkness, and then light blooms within the room. Marguerite stands before you, barefoot and clad in a nightgown, clutching a flickering blue flame. The light illuminates a room that is bare to the extreme: the only furnishings are a simple bed with the covers thrown back, next to a set of shelves where the girl's scant belongings are laid out neatly on full display, as though ready for military inspection.</p>

"You weren't coming, and so I left," Marguerite informs you in a chill tone.

Alena takes in her appearance with a cautious gaze. "Who said we weren't coming?"

"No one said it. I just knew. That was the impression I had: that you definitely wouldn't come."

“We searched for you,” Alena informs her. “We searched for you until time ran out, and then came here to continue searching for you.”

“Lies,” Marguerite hisses. “What do you want? Why are you here now?”

“Where did that flame come from?” Alena asks steadily.

Marguerite looks unconcernedly at the blue light emanating from her palm. “Who knows? I don’t remember. I hear there’s a light they leave on at the theatre to keep the ghosts happy; maybe someone left a ghost light out for me. It’s working. I feel appeased already. Say, what do you think: don’t I look peaceful?”

You look miserable.	You look monstrous.
<p>“Hmm... it mustn’t be working so well after all,” the girl comments. She looks over to her hand, and the flame within grows larger and brighter.</p> <p>“Stop that,” Alena says sharply.</p> <p>“Why?” the girl asks. “I can do what I want, for now at least. There should still be a few hours left before sunset. The house is still mine until then. Hey, if I wanted, I could set the whole place ablaze. Wouldn’t that be fun? Just ‘kapow’ and all your problems go away! Simple, right?”</p> <p>“Ah, maybe it wouldn’t be all that fun. I’m tired after all. How about you just leave, so that I can go back to sleep?”</p>	<p>Marguerite’s grin only widens. “Fitting then, isn’t it? Now that’s how a ghost light should behave!”</p> <p>The fire in her hand grows, and creeps up her arm, spreading until her whole body is alight. Her hair and her nightgown billow around her, unharmed by the flames.</p> <p>“There should still be a few hours left before sunset. Until then, the house is mine: I can be as monstrous as I want, and no one needs to know. See? There isn’t even a mirror in this room. It was taken away long ago. I used to flinch at the sight. I’d think: who is that? Is that me? I don’t recognize her at all.</p> <p>“You’re in luck. I’m tired. How about you just leave, so that I can go back to sleep?”</p>

“We’re not leaving without you,” Alena says firmly. “Without *you*, Marguerite. That is you, isn’t it? Why not face us as your true self?”

There is a brief pause, as the young girl sneers at you, and then begins to grow. She stretches upwards and outwards until she stands before you as the Marguerite you know and recognize. Yet her eyes are bright with blue fire and her smile is purely malevolent. As she speaks, the voice that comes out is not quite right: it is surely Marguerite’s voice, but the sound is twisted and strange. “As you wish,” she says. “Did you know that if you call someone a monster enough times, those words become true? And so, here I stand: the monster at the end of your quest. And what will you do about it?”

“We’ll take you back home.”	“You’re not a monster.”
“To where?” Marguerite gestures around her. “I <i>am</i> home. <i>You’re</i> the ones who don’t belong.	“Come now, I was only joking before,” Marguerite tells you scornfully. “Words aren’t quite that powerful. If someone’s a monster, you can’t change them with just words.”

“You’re starting to annoy me,” Marguerite growls, and the blue flame in her eyes brightens. “Leave now, before someone gets hurt.”

“Forget it!” Alena snaps. “You don’t get to run out on a promise, and you don’t get to run out on me!”

“Then *die where you stand*,” Marguerite hisses and the flames in her eyes burn bright as she lunges to attack.

“Fine!” Alena yells. “If you want a fight, then I’ll give you one!”

MARGUERITE'S RAGE

Sometimes even best friends fight.

Running the encounter:

- Alena deals non-lethal damage each round, and expects you to do the same. If you attack in earnest, Alena stops you in whatever way necessary.
- If you called Marguerite 'monstrous' before, she has advantage on her attacks. If you told her she was not a monster, she has disadvantage.
- Marguerite attacks wildly. You and Alena can draw her attacks with taunts.
- If you defeat Marguerite, go to page 144.

MARGUERITE ELENSBROOK

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities fire

Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic

Saving Throws Cha +5, Dex +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Performance +7, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Blessing of the Living Flame. Marguerite's flame attacks ignore resistances to fire damage and deal half damage to any creatures with fire immunity other than herself.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Marguerite makes two slam attacks.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 1d6 fire damage.

REACTIONS

Fiery Rebuke. When a creature within 60 ft. of her that Marguerite can see attacks her and deals damage, Marguerite can use her reaction to cause the target to make a DC13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d10 fire damage on a failed save.

57. AN HONEST REQUEST

“And stay down!” Alena yells, proving her words true by swiftly sitting on top of Marguerite’s collapsed form. Enough time passes with no reaction that Alena nervously checks for a pulse. You have a better view of the problem: as Marguerite lies on the floor, tears seep from her eyes. The blue light is gone, as though it was never there at all. Alena allows Marguerite to wriggle an arm free in order to wipe the tears from her eyes. She lets her hand rest there for a moment, shielding her face from your gaze. After a long pause, she speaks, “Say, remember the prize I promised you? If you won the game?”

Do you remember?

I do.	I don't.
<p>“You said you’d let us kidnap you,” you reply.</p> <p>Marguerite lets out a soft, slightly choked laugh. “That’s the one. I mean, I cheated at the game and all, so I guess I lost by default. Umm.. do you... do you still want your prize?”</p> <p>“No more word games, young missy,” Alena tells her. “Just say what you want. Spit it out.”</p>	<p>“Oh, come on, it didn’t leave any impression?” Marguerite lets out a soft, slightly choked laugh. “I said I’d let you kidnap me.”</p> <p>“You were a real brat as a kid,” Alena informs her. “But at least you were a little more honest than you are now. Come on, how about telling us what you really want? Spit it out.”</p>

“You’re a tyrant,” Marguerite complains. “And you’re heavy. Get off me.”

Alena shakes her head with a grin. “You lost our game – not only *lost* but cheated in it. Only the victors get to set terms. And you still haven’t answered me.”

“Fine,” Marguerite expels. “Take me home. Please?” Her voice quavers. “I don’t want to be in this room anymore.”

“That’s more like it,” Alena says gently. As though that were a signal, the room begins to shift and distort once more. As your surroundings become insubstantial, you just barely manage to catch the small voice of your friend.

“Thank you,” Marguerite says. “Thank you both.”

Go to page 146.

58. NOTHING LEFT TO FEAR

Khulgar's obsidian key is still clutched in your hand when you return to your physical forms, but there is something different in the room. You look over to the center of the room to find that the roaring flame of *elshe harth* has receded nearly down to ground level.

Khulgar's voice calls into your ear, as loudly as though he were standing next to you: "*The living flame has been weakened greatly,*" he tells you. "*The strength it had begun to gather is departing, and all so soon after its long confinement at my hands. There will be no greater opportunity than now.*"

All of a sudden, energy surges into you. The aches in your bones ease and your exhaustion fades, as though you have only just woken up.

The three of you gain the benefits of a long rest.
--

With some reluctance, you pass on Khulgar's message.

"Seriously?" Alena complains. "It couldn't wait until after dinner?"

"I've obviously missed a thing or two," Marguerite comments. "Mind you, I'm not above shooting spells into a bonfire if it's standing between me and dessert. Give me a quick rundown, and let's get going."

Your friends seem oddly cheerful, given the current circumstances, and the feeling is infectious. Alena gives you a reckless grin which you cannot help returning.

"Still got that key then?" Marguerite asks. "Then how about the three of us go and ruin this living flame's day?"

"Are you sure?" Alena teases. "We're following the words of a ghost to go and fight a spirit, after all. It's not too spooky, is it?"

"My friends are with me. There is nothing left to fear," Marguerite says simply, then has to add, "plus your chef said that they're making raspberry and pistachio pie for dessert tonight, and I'm not dying before I taste *that*."

"That's fair," Alena agrees, "Salen does make a damn good pie. Let's get this over and done with."

Together, you approach the stone fountain that contains the living flame. You hold out the key and focus hard on that other sense that you are only just beginning to grasp. The key pulses in your hand, and draws you in.

* * *

As the chamber coalesces before you, you are confused for a brief moment. The place looks just like the one you left, yet with one key difference: in the place where the blue flames of *elshe harth* burned in the other cavern crouches a glowing figure.

Elshe harth slowly rises to her feet. She is perhaps fifteen feet tall, with a skeletal frame, limbs disproportionately long for her body. Her head is crowned with spiraling horns and her fingers end in long claws. She leers down at you and speaks in a voice that crackles through your very bones.

“I gave you peace, foolish creatures. I have collected many souls over the years, and all of them were the same. All of them longed for the peace that I can bring. Why do you fight?”

“No point trying to play the good guy now,” Marguerite tells her. “You tried to kill me!”

“I was not speaking to you, foolish girl,” elshe harth hisses. *“I want to hear from that one: the one the spirits cling to.”* The eyes of the living flame are firmly fixed on yours.

What is your answer?

I want to protect my friends.	I want us to live.
<p><i>“Friends will fade. Family will fade. Even spirits fade in time. You cannot protect your friends. You cannot even protect yourself.”</i></p> <p>“Then we’ll protect one another,” Alena retorts, and hefts her axe high. “Come on, let’s show this creep who’s boss!”</p>	<p><i>“The life you wish to protect is as feeble as a candle’s flame,” elshe harth</i> hisses. <i>“I could snuff it out with one breath.”</i></p> <p>“Is that so? Why don’t you try it, then?” Marguerite dares. Arcane light glimmers around her fingertips as she readies a spell.</p>

“Then there is nothing left to say,” the living flame spits at you. “Perish, foolish creatures, while clinging to your foolish ideals.”

The giantess rears back, and in her hand a cloud of darkness gathers into the shape of a spear.

Marguerite grins. “You heard the big bad. It’s go time!”

THE LIVING FLAME FLICKERS

Defeat elshe harth!

Running the encounter:

- Each turn, on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Khulgar aids you by casting your choice of the following spells, requiring only verbal components. His spellcasting modifier is +5.

At will: guidance, spare the dying

3/day each: cure wounds, heroism, haste

2/day each: lesser restoration, revivify

1/day each: mass cure wounds

- On her first turn, and each time the ability recharges, Elshe Harth uses Breath of Oblivion. On other turns, she uses her Multiattack on whichever foe is either closest or poses the greatest threat. If any character falls, she uses Consume Life.
- If you defeat *elshe harth*, go to page 150.

ELSHE HARTH

Huge undead

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d12 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Consume Life. As a bonus action, elshe harth can target one creature she can see within 5 feet of her that has 0 hit points and is still alive. The target must succeed on a DC14 Constitution saving throw against this magic or die. If the target dies, elshe harth regains 10 (3d6) hit points.

Illumination. Elshe harth sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.

Turn Immunity. Elshe harth is immune to any effect that turn undead.

Magic Resistance. Elshe harth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Elshe harth's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Elshe harth makes two spear attacks.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 20 ft. or range 60/180 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) necrotic damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 1d6 fire damage.

Breath of Oblivion (Recharge 5-6). Each creature within 60 feet of elshe harth must make a DC16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is paralyzed and takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

59. RASPBERRY PIE AND SHORT-TERM GOODBYES

With one last, powerful blow, *elshe harth* is struck down. “*This is ridiculous! Impossible!*” she continues to sputter as she crumbles away.

“What a sore loser,” Marguerite comments, and kicks at the ashes.

Khulgar’s voice is faint in your ear as the last of his power ebbs away. “*You have done well, child. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. May the light of hope forever bless your path.*”

And with those last words, you can no longer hear Khulgar’s voice. You blink, and find yourself standing with obsidian key in hand, before the fountain that once held the living flame. Inside is only a crumbled pile of ashes and bone.

“Is that going to be a problem?” Marguerite asks worriedly. “The Thrashhammer clan were reliant on *elshe harth* after all.”

“We did what we had to,” Alena replies. “Whatever comes next can wait. I say it’s time for dinner.”

“And pie?” Marguerite asks excitedly.

“*After* dinner. Not instead of. Eat your damn broccoli, young miss.”

The banter continues as you turn from the remnants of *elshe harth* and begin to make your way towards the stairs. There you pause.

Did anyone else join you downstairs?

Zylverdyn should be here.	Danylla should be here.	We came alone.
The red dragon waits to one side of the chamber, watching you contentedly. Marguerite's light spell glimmers off his bright scales. As you look in his direction, he gives a deep bow to the three of you, and begins to trot up the stairs ahead of you. By the time you reach the end of the mines, he is already out of sight.	The captain of the royal guard greets you at the stairs. Her eyes are creased with concern as she glances between the ashes of the living flame and to the three of you, weary yet triumphant. "Let's be on our way, princess," she says, and leaves it at that.	"This was a pretty crazy day," Marguerite comments. "To think all I really wanted to do was come and fight a dragon." "That's all, huh?" Alena jibes. "I suppose if you set your expectations low enough, you'll always be pleasantly surprised."

You climb the stairs slowly and leisurely and make your way back to Alena's chambers. She calls for dinner while each of you take baths to wash away the grime of the day. Soon, dressed in fluffy pink pajamas, you have a chance to gossip over raspberry and pistachio pie.

"Give Jerys a kick in the butt from me, next time you see him," a scowling Alena instructs. "What an asshole."

"Is he, though?" Marguerite wonders. "Isn't that just an allo thing?"

"Hell no. I don't care how amazing this girlfriend he just met is, it's no excuse for ditching a longtime friend." To punctuate her statement, Alena takes a vicious stab at the pastry with her fork.

"Well, if you're going to pull a 'not all allos' on me, you'll have to be ready to back it up," Marguerite says around a mouthful of pie.

"Oh? Can I swear it verbally or do you need a written contract?" Alena asks.

Marguerite shudders. “Oh gods, imagine the creeper who makes you sign a contract to commit to a relationship. Yikes. Oh wait – that’s marriage.”

Alena snorts. “You’re cheeky today, aren’t you?”

“I’m trusting today. There’s a difference.”

“True enough. How about this then: the two of you are my good friends. I solemnly vow that even if I get married, I won’t turn into a shithead like Jerys.”

Marguerite sighs. “He’s not a shithead... he just...” she shrugs helplessly. “I don’t know. Maybe he’ll come around.”

You can see that Alena wants to argue, but she reins herself in. Instead, she asks, “So, what are your plans from here?”

“I’ve still got my job back in the city,” Marguerite admits reluctantly. She hesitates, then adds, “But I’m thinking of quitting.”

“Hmm? And then what?”

“I’m an adventurer at heart,” she replies. “I’m not happy unless I’m on the road. The city isn’t good for me.”

Alena nods. “I thought so. I thought it was odd, seeing you settled for so long.”

Marguerite shrugs. “Being an adventurer is fun. You get to live out all the dreams you had a child that people try to stamp out of you as an adult.”

Alena throws a skeptical look her way. “You dreamed of fighting dragons when you were a kid?”

“Sometimes,” Marguerite replies. “More often, I’d just dream of having fun with my friends forever, without anything getting in the way.”

Alena laughs. “Maybe you need bigger dreams.”

“Maybe you need smaller ones,” Marguerite retorts. But you can see from both of their faces that an understanding has passed between them.

“Things around here are going to be busy for a while, I expect,” Alena remarks. “I’d love to join you, but there’s my clan to think of too. Write me a letter or two, won’t you?”

“Of course,” Marguerite replies with a grin. “Mind you, I might just have to drop by again sometime soon, if only for the pie.”

“And the truth comes out!” Alena grumbles, and passes her another slice.

* * *

It is night, and you lie in bed staring at the ceiling. Your pulse still thrums with energy from whatever strange magic Khulgar cast on you earlier, or perhaps in response to the awakening of your own strange magic. A whisper calls out to you in the darkness: “Are you awake?”

Marguerite stands at the entrance of your guestroom, peering in with a dim witch light glowing in her hand.

What is your answer?

Yes	No
Marguerite enters the room, allowing the light in her hand to brighten.	“Hmm... yes I suppose that was a trick question, wasn't it?” Marguerite acknowledges, and enters the room.

She takes a seat at the small desk near your bed. “I don't know about you, but I'm finding it hard to sleep,” she confesses. “What Khulgar did probably didn't help – my veins are still fizzling! But there are a few other things I'd been mulling over too.

“Say, do you think it's ok if I don't go to Jerys's wedding?” she asks.

What is your answer?

Of course!	I don't know...
“It is, right?” Marguerite exclaims. “See, it was exactly that easy. What was I so worried about?”	“Ah well. To be honest, I've made my decision anyway,” Marguerite confesses. “You know, I think sometimes it's ok to put myself first.”

She continues, “I mean, he's the one who told me to stop visiting after all. If that's what it takes for him to be happy, great,

but I'm going to be very unhappy if I have to accept it as normal for an old friend to value me less than someone he just met.

"Well that was easy enough. Ok, then: here's the other thing I've been mulling over: do you want to come on another adventure with me?"

"You don't need to decide just yet," she adds quickly. "I know we kind of ended up settling down in the city, and if you wanted to stay there, that's not a problem, but – ah, I'm rambling again. I guess what I want to say is: if you're willing to join me, I'd really like us to go together. Promise you'll at least think about it?"

What is your answer?

I promise I'll think about it.	Of course I'll join you!
Marguerite grins. "That's all I'm asking."	"Really?" Marguerite asks excitedly. "Oh, this'll be amazing! I can't wait!"

"Well that's all I wanted to say – goodnight!" She backs out of the room and closes the door.

You lower your head to your pillow once more, and the buzzing in your veins slowly calms. You rest easy, knowing that new adventures await in the dawn.

-THE END-

APPENDIX 1: PARTY MEMBER STATS

ALENA THRASHHAMMER

Medium humanoid (dwarf)

Armor Class 14 (half plate)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +5, Dex +4

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +3, Medicine +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Danger Sense. Alena has advantage on Dexterity saving throws against effects that she can see, such as traps and spells. To gain this benefit, she can't be blinded, deafened or incapacitated.

Rage (3/Day). Alena can use a bonus action on her turn to enter a rage. While raging, she gains the following benefits: advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, a +2 bonus to the damage roll for any Strength-based melee weapon attack and resistance to all damage except psychic damage.

Reckless. At the start of her turn, Alena can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against her have advantage until the start of her next turn.

ACTIONS

Mastercraft Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

MARGUERITE HALEFIRE

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 31 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5, Dex +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Performance +7, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Bardic Inspiration (3/Day). Marguerite can use a bonus action on her turn to choose one creature other than herself within 60 ft. who can hear her. Once within the next 10 minutes, the creature can roll 1d6 and add the result to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw that it makes. The creature can wait until after it rolls the d20 before deciding to use the Bardic Inspiration die.

Spellcasting. Marguerite is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mending, vicious mockery*

1st Level (4 slots): *dissonant whispers, healing word, faerie fire, thunderwave*

2nd Level (3 slots): *knock, lesser restoration, shatter*

Song of Rest. Marguerite can perform a song while taking a short rest. Any ally who hears the song regains an extra 1d6 hit points if it spends any Hit Dice to regain points at the end of that rest. She can confer this benefit to herself as well.

ACTIONS

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Cutting Words. When a creature within 60 ft. of her that she can see makes an attack roll, ability check or damage roll, Marguerite can expend one use of her Bardic Inspiration to subtract 1d6 from the result. The creature is immune if it can't hear her or if it is immune to being charmed.

ZYLVERDYN CRIMSONCLAW

Medium dragon

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft, fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive

Perception 14

Languages Draconic

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

DANYLLA/CASILI (GUARD CAPTAIN)

Medium humanoid (dwarf)

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Orcish

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Teelor has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pack Tactics. Teelor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of his allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Mastercraft Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the captain can utter a special command or warning whenever a non-hostile creature that they can see within 30 feet of them makes an attack roll or saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the captain. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the captain is incapacitated.

TEELOR TINKLER

Small humanoid (kobold)

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 5 (2d6 - 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Teelor has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pack Tactics. Teelor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of his allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Sling. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. **Hit:** 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

PALACE GUARD

Medium humanoid (dwarf)

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Dwarvish

ACTIONS

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. **Hit:** 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

PALACE GUARD UNIT

Huge unit of Medium humanoids (dwarves)

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Unit. The unit can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the unit can move through any opening large enough for a Medium humanoid.

Strength in Numbers. The unit has advantage on all saving throws.

ACTIONS

Longswords. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 39 (6d8 + 12) slashing damage, or 19 (3d8 + 6) slashing damage if the unit has half its hit points or fewer.

Light Crossbows. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (6d8 + 6) piercing damage, or 19 (3d8 + 3) piercing damage if the unit has half its hit points or fewer.

APPENDIX 2: OPEN GAME LICENSE (OGL)

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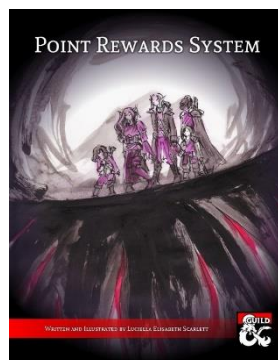
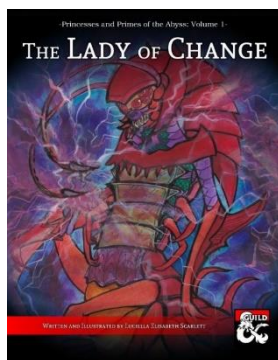
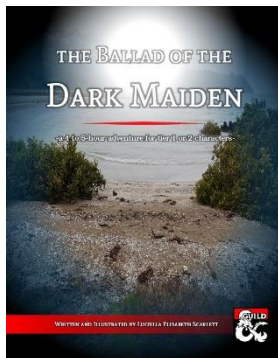
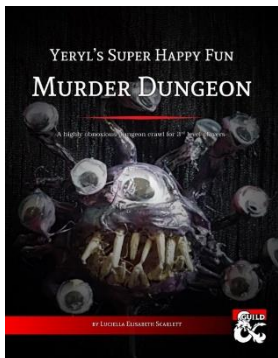
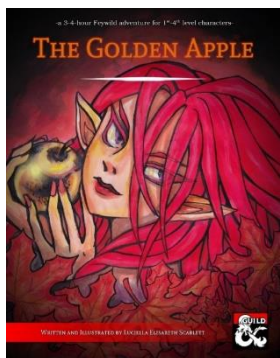
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