

Blackengorge - The Forest Ruins - The Antechamber - Chapter #06, Scene #10

...continues from [Chapter #06, Scene #09](#)

Synopsis

The 20th Day of Ches in the Year of the Sudden Journey
Descending into the gloom of a long forgotten ruin in the northern forest the party have found what appears to be more than a goblin lair. They have despatched many goblins, including a chieftain, Balgron the Fat and his pet torturer. An incarcerated goblin gives them some clues and the party have moved on to locate the chieftain's treasure. Heading into some caves they encountered vermin and strange cave fishers, and even more bizarre creatures, such as kruthik and slimes. Now they have entered some foul smelling chambers and encountered dwarven zombies and the remnants of a skeletal legion.

- [Khâlin Grundokri](#) - 4th Level Male Dwarven Marshal (Warlord)
- [Kireth Majere](#) - 4th Level Male Half-Elven Arcanist (Wizard)
- [Tradden Aversward](#) - 4th Level Male Human Weaponmaster (Fighter)
- [Zero Uhlit](#) - 4th Level Male Human Scoundrel (Rogue)

Scene Length

This scene starts on Wednesday 21 September 2011 and is expected to be completed by the end of Wednesday 5 October 2011. Players are expected to be able to post at least once a day.

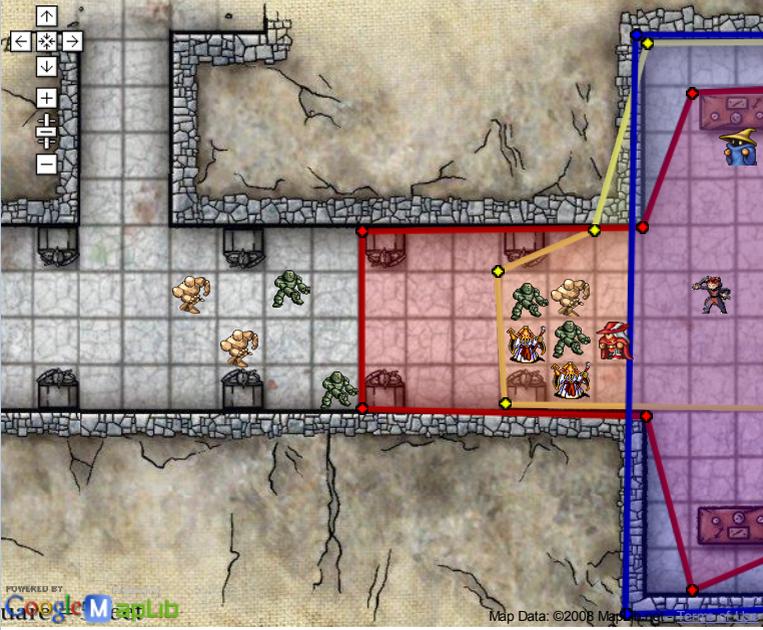
INITIATIVE BLOCK

Round #01 Combat Encounter Completed

- 01) [26] Tradden - **1d20+5+2: 26** - HP 41/45
- 03) [22] Decrepit Skeletons - **1d20+5: 22**
Decrepit Skeleton #01
Decrepit Skeleton #02—Dmg: 15=15
Decrepit Skeleton #03
Decrepit Skeleton #04
- 04) [14] Khalin - **1d20+3+2: 14** - HP 35/41
- 05) [12] Zero - **1d20+5+2: 12** - HP 40/40
- 06) [12] Decaying Skeletons - **1d20+8: 12**
Decaying Skeleton #01
Decaying Skeleton #02
Decaying Skeleton #03
Decaying Skeleton #04
- 07) [09] Boneshard Skeletons - **1d20+5: 9**
Boneshard Skeleton #01
Boneshard Skeleton #02
- Sp) [24] Kireth - **1d20+8+2: 24** - HP 36/36

Removed from Play:

BATTLE MAP



Illumination: Darkness.
Doors: These are made of wood with banded bronze and are closed (unless otherwise stated).
Walls: The walls are smooth stone, and the floors consist of flagstones with mortar between them (unless otherwise stated).

Yellow Polygon: denotes the area of effect of Kireth's Light spell.

Red Polygon: denotes the area of effect of Khalin's torch.

Blue Polygon: denotes the area of dim light from the dome.

 Matt and me: **Tradden Aversward**

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"HmMMM." said Tradden, whilst carefully stepping backwards [Move Action]. As he passed the similarly concerned Warlord and Rogue he made a suggestion.

"Back - back into the main light. Let them come to us and we can take them here."

With that, he readied himself for the rush of undead [Total Defence], knowing that Khalin would come and stand by his side and that Zero would probably try and find what shadow he could.

That only left Kireth - unpredictable at the best of times. He snapped his head towards the mage, foregoing his usual niceties given the current distractedness of the magic user. "Seriously, if you are going to do something, do it now, otherwise you may want to get behind myself and Khalin."

 Neil and me: **Kireth Majere**

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Kireth opened his eyes and looked down to his left. He could just about make out the Dwarven Skeletons in the dim light, beginning to move slowly but purposefully towards the group. He nodded, it all fit and confirmed his suspicions.

"They're not evil you know" he offered "Followers of Bahamut unless I am very much mistaken". The skeleton's raised their weapons, as if in response "Probably still stab you though" he added.

The half-elf's eyes turned upwards to the Dragon above "Ok. You and I may not see eye to eye but I trust you understand our intentions".

Moving with grace he knelt before the altar.

[Delay]

 Matt: Tradden's jaw dropped.

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"Ohhh kyy. Right, Kireth has officially lost it. Khalin, when they come, you take the ones to our left, I will take the ones on the right."

 Me and Random: **Decrepit Skeletons**

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The skeletons moved forwards, heedless of **Tradden** and **Kireth's** actions, their bones glaring white and orange in the glare of the torchlight. The one with the handaxe, just within the torchlight was the first forward, closing the gap to **Khalin** with surprising pace.

More came out of the gloom into the flickering glare, and battle was joined.

[Decrepit Skeleton #01 Handaxe: **1d20+6: 19** vs Khalin's AC(21)] - misses!

[Decrepit Skeleton #02 Handaxe: **1d20+6: 17** vs Khalin's AC(21)] - misses!

The dwarf was ready for them though, and caught both swipes of the axes with his shield.

 Mark, me and Random: **Khalin Grundokri**

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Khalin's shoulders sagged, and he stole another quick glance at the ceiling. "Forgive me, Bahamut," he offered, before readying his hammer to swing at the first of his late kinsmen...

[Warhammer vs Decrepit Skeleton #02: **1d20+7: 24**] - hits!

[Damage: **1d10+5: 15**]

With an almighty heave the warlord shattered the skeleton into a number of parts, bones skittering away down the chamber.

[Decrepit Skeleton #02 Destroyed]

 Nick, me and Random: **Zero Uhlit**

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Zero took great pleasure in slipping away from the oncoming undead monsters and slipped into the shadows on the other side of the chamber.

[Stealth Check to Hide: **1d20+13: 17**] - success!

Even in the dim light of the antechamber, Zero somehow managed to slip away from sight.

 Me and Random: **Decaying Skeletons**

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Out of the gloom of the sarcophagi-lined chamber more skeletons appeared, more dwarven soldiers carrying shields and warhammers. They marched on in a straight line, towards the group, the closest managing to reach Khalin in mere moments.

[Decaying Skeleton #01 Warhammer: **1d20+10: 22** vs Khalin's AC(21)] - hits!

[Damage: **6**]

The hammer blow took Khalin a little by surprise - the skill and style of the skeleton similar to his own.

 Me and Random: **Boneshard Skeletons**

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The two skeletons that had recombined out of the remnants of the scattered pieces lurched forwards ungainly. From somewhere, perhaps hidden under the hobgoblins or near the sarcophagi they had picked up battleaxes, and the lead skeleton took a swing at the outnumbered dwarf.

[Boneshard Skeleton #01: **1d20+9: 20** vs Khalin's AC(21)] - misses!

Khalin managed to raise his shield just in time to avoid the swift blow.

"A little help, here!" he growled.

 Me and Neil: **Kireth Majere** (Delayed Turn)

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Knelling before the altar, Kireth had taken this time to compose himself. It could not be said too often but at this moment the mage was at peace. His head was bowed low, his breathing was controlled and the noise from battle was dulled to his ears. With great respect he finally spoke.

"Mighty Platinum Dragon, you see my heart as clear as any and must know that Kireth Majere is not devoted as your honoured guardians are. Out of respect, this I do not hide. Your wisdom is great and I have trust that you know our intentions. Your Guardians must act as you see fitting and this we shall respect. I offer you my praise."

He spoke no more and waited, head still bowed.

 Me: On **Kireth's** last word the atmosphere in the antechamber changed. The soft glow from the dome grew in intensity until it bathed the entire area in a silvery-blue light, a welcome reprieve from flickering torchlight and the stark glare of the wizard's magical light.

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The skeletons stopped too, almost catapulting **Khalin** over as he stopped a swing in mid-air. Slowly, but surely they started to make their way back to their own sarcophagus, and, as the startled adventurers looked on, began to climb inside, the lids scraping slowly shut above them.

Kireth stood, looking rather pleased with himself.

The doors in the eastern end of the antechamber slowly began to open, almost crushing **Zero**, who leapt to the side just in time.

 Me: [...Combat Encounter Completed...]

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 Me: **Short Rest**

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Healing Surges

Healing surges are applied.

Khalin spends 1 healing surges (5 left) to get to 41/41 hp.

Kireth spends 0 healing surges (6 left) to get to 36/36 hp.

Tradden spends 0 healing surges (7 left) to get to 41/45 hp.

Zero spends 0 healing surges (7 left) to get to 40/40 hp.

Encounter Powers

All encounter powers are recharged.

Milestones

Milestone reached (2 combat encounters); 1 Action Point Received

Levelling

Khalin moves to Level 5

Tradden moves to Level 5

 Matt: Tradden, stood on his own in the middle of the room, let his swords fall down limply by his side.

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"Ah." he said. "Hmmm. Good job. I think," He looked at the retreating corpses. It was hard to argue.

A sudden thought struck him - doors which opened of their own accord were never a good sign.

Once again raising his blades, Tradden strode quickly to Zero's side, ready to tackle any new danger coming from that direction.

 Neil, me and Random: Kireth smirked to himself as the young fighter sprang to readiness, blades drawn. He supposed it never hurt to prepare but doubted very much that the Platinum Dragon would open any door that may draw ill intent into its sanctuary.

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He turned his attention to the altars. He was no thief and had no intention of stealing "pennies from the collection tin", so to speak, but both the one in front of him and the one behind did deserve attention. You never know.

[Perception Check North Altar: **1d20+2: 12**]

[Perception Check South Altar: **1d20+2: 15**]

The altars were stone in origin - granite - buffed and polished to a high sheen and not showing any signs of wear, tear, or age. They were simple affairs, perhaps eight or so feet wide, about three or four deep, and coming up to just below **Kireth's** waist.

There was nothing remarkable about the northern altar, but a small compartment at the bottom of the southern one sprang open easily when **Kireth** poked and prodded around it. Within appeared to be five small dragon figurines, sparkling in the light that reached them, about the size of a fist.

 Matt, me and Random: Meanwhile, Tradden was peering through the doors, craning his neck out to the threshold as far as he dared...

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After a second, he grew a second head as Zero's bearded face appeared over the young fighter's shoulder, the rogue having to stand on tip toes to see.

The chamber beyond seemed small and sparse in comparison to the antechamber, lit by the glow of the roof-bound dragon. It appeared to be about forty feet across, and the same wide, with a raised dias at the far eastern side. **Tradden** judged the room to be some sort of crypt - a single stone coffin sat on the dias itself.

 Neil and Matt: Kireth looked down on the dragon figurines sat in the compartment. Should they be taken? He considered all that had occurred in the last few moments. "I would argue that nothing happens in this room without your consent" he offered to the unseen force "and therefore, if I were allowed to find them..."

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He scooped them up and examined a couple in the newly brightened light. "Fascinating". He came down from the altars and pressed one figurine into each of his colleagues palms, keeping the remaining two for himself. "Don't break it" he suggested to Tradden.

The young fighter looked hurt as he looked down at the statue now resting in one gloved palm. "I don't know what you mean, Im sure.." he sniffed. "Anyway, why would I? It will look good on my mum's * mantelpiece.", he finished sarcastically, slipping it into his backpack nonetheless.

* - None of the party bar Tradden would have known this, but would have been interested to know that when pressed, Tradden's mother had been known to dual wield two rolling pins to devastating effect. The Spring Festival night where she had waded in to knock some sense into the drunk and scrapping Uncle Radius and Jack next door had been a memorable one.

 Nick and me: Zero ambled over to Kireth, putting away his crossbow.

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"Not sure what you said there, my friend," he said, "but nice work."

He patted the wizard on the back, but hardly received a friendly smile in return.

He removed his hand swiftly.

"So, what's all this dragony stuff?" he inquired, checking out the altar.

The compartment in the southern altar didn't look particularly well hidden to **Zero** - it was a simple affair recessed into the stone of the base.

"A gift from Bahamut, perhaps?" responded **Kireth**, almost warmly to the rogue.

 Mark: With the immediate threat over, Khalin nodded gratefully to Kireth, clearly impressed at the half-elf's knowledge and graciousness towards Bahamut. The warlord then took a moment to lower himself onto one knee before the nearest altar and quietly muttered his own thanks to the dragon god. Though he was a follower of Clangeddin and Moradin, the dwarf knew better than to fail to respect the rest of the pantheon.

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With the brief moment of acknowledgement over and the dead once more at peace, Khalin gazed around the chamber. He'd been searching for signs of the old dwarven kingdoms, and here was the first.

"Respect, lads, respect. My brethren lie here. We should tread lightly," he offered.

 Matt, me and Random: A hand slapped down onto Zero's shoulder, causing him to jump, just a little, at the suddenness of it.

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"See Z - probably no traps or monsters or anything." said Tradden whilst nodding at the tomb and its environs. "Stiiiiiii - best be sure eh?" He continued, nodding in the direction he wanted the Rogue to go.

Not to worry - I will be right behind you!" he finished, drawing his longsword.

Zero looked like he was going to say something, his brow furrowing and his mouth starting to open. Then he shrugged.

The two humans, Tradden tagging along behind his friend, then wove a methodical pattern, or at least methodical to Zero, around the room, checking every flagstone and wall section to the Rogue's contentment before finishing with the tomb itself.

[Zero Perception Check: **1d20+10: 25**] - success!

Zero's path to the coffin was slow, yet methodical, and executed with the skill and satisfaction of a professional. When the wave of his hand indicated for the group to enter, they were all confident that there was nothing unexpected - at least mechanically - about to happen.

As the group entered they could see Zero stroking his chin and looking at the coffin up on the dias, looking reluctant to get much closer.

"This might be one for you, Khalin," was all **Zero** would say when they joined him.

The coffin was fairly simple, carved out of the same stone as the floor, but polished and buffed to a sheen like the altars. Carved on the lid of the coffin was a dwarven warrior in plate armour with a curious hammer laid across his chest, the head towards his feet.

 Matt: Everyone was quiet. Tombs got to you like that.

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Khalin was particularly silent though, thought Tradden - it was the kind of quiet that you can feel radiating out of a person. It made the air slightly... thicker, perhaps. You could cut it with a knife. Maybe a fork. Certainly one of those posh forks with a knife edge that he had once been served with in Thalasso's, one of the social elite's restaurants of choice in Deepingwald.

Deciding that this was not the time to speak such things aloud, Tradden went to stand slightly behind, and to the left, of his Dwarven friend, as if to try and reassure him. Tradden knew that one of Khalin's main reasons for coming to the mainland was to find out whether Dwarves still existed in this bizarre land. They had already found stark evidence of dwarves actually still being here - mostly dead, but one only just so. This was something different though. This was a dwarf, a follower of Bahamut no less, who had seemingly deserved what would once have been a fine tomb. That meant something, although Tradden, not unaccustomed to the ways of the Dwarves himself, couldn't quite place. Maybe Khalin would...

 Mark, me and Random: Khalin walked slowly up to the side of the coffin. To the others he looked like he was trying to be cautious, yet also trying to show the proper respect to what appeared to be a formerly quite well-to-do kinsman, resulting in a slight awkwardness to his gait. Still, he was a soldier not a priest. Nevertheless, there was a barely concealed frisson of excitement in the dwarf's mien, which, juxtaposed with his respectful silence had the group a little unsure what he might do next.

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As it was he lowered his head respectfully to the hilt of his hammer, then examined the tomb before him...

[Dungeoneering check: **1d20+4: 21**] - success!

The carving on the coffin was good workmanship, although not exceptional and depicted what Khalin surmised was a dwarven lord of some kind laid at rest. There were no inscriptions or otherwise to indicate a name or a date, or even any other clue.

Khalin began to trace some of the lines of the relief, thinking of anything else he could gather from the sculpture. Suddenly, there was a crack, and the warlord's hand darted backwards and he took an involuntary step back towards the others, down the dias.

There was another crack - this time visible as well as audible - and it appeared that many such cracks were starting to form over the coffin lid.

Then, the heavy coffin lid exploded in a flurry of dust! Another dwarven skeleton girdled in plate mail armour rose from the cloud. Its breastplate shone in the light of the room, emblazoned with a stylised dragon's head. The skeleton held aloft a craghammer.

"The rift must never be re-opened," it croaked in Dwarven.

Then, looking around the room and focussing on the group, it barked out an order in Dwarven with a booming, commanding voice.

"State your intentions, or prepare to die!"

 Matt: Tradden, still stood behind Khalin, bent down slightly to whisper in his ear.

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"What rift? What's he talking about?"

He immediately regretted it - the skeleton shifted ever so slightly to face the tall human, its hollow eyes still managing to somehow bore right through the young fighter.

 Mark: (Former) kin or no kin, this doesn't look good, thought Khalin silently. There were two ways this encounter could go. Wondering if he was being naive, Khalin opted for the peaceful approach. "We are no enemy!" the marshal started quickly, trying to defuse matters, lest Tradden's sword strike before the chance to parley was gone. "We pay respect to the mighty Dragon Lord. But we are searching for a comrade. We fear he has been captured by accursed goblins."

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Khalin was chomping at the bit to ask about how a dwarf lord had ended up being buried here, and what might be left of the former kingdom - the notion of a civilised chat with a skeleton somehow seeming no less ridiculous than so much else the group had seen since arriving at Blackengorge. But that would no doubt have to wait.

 Me: *The skeleton appeared to study Khalin for a moment, judging the warlord's words, it's bone-white skull boring into him for moments on end.*

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"I am sworn to defend this keep against interlopers. Why should I not include you in this category?" the skeleton raged, its eye sockets firmly directed at **Khalin**.

 Mark, me and Random: Khalin puffed his chest out proudly. "Because I speak for the great dwarf stronghold of Kel-Moradin!" he declared proudly. "Last home of the dwarven lines of old. Our word is our honour, and we would help you rid your noble keep of the green scourge lest they defile your proud home further. We are at a common purpose, my liege."

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The warlord spoke with as much due deference as he could muster. He sorely hoped his first encounter with remnants of his dwarven past would not be at the hilt of crossed weapons.

[Diplomacy check: **1d20+5: 15**] - success!

The skeleton pondered for a moment, but appeared to be satisfied with Khalin's answer.

"A fitting answer, for one so young," the skeleton continued. *It's gaze stayed on Khalin for a moment before the skull snapped up and its eye sockets fell on Tradden.*

 Me: "You!" it boomed, its bony fingers released from its grasp on the craghammer and pointing towards the young fighter. "You wear a fearsome demeanour, with weapon drawn."

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Tradden looked down to notice he still had his longsword drawn from when he had first entered the chamber.

"Are you really as formidable as you look?" it queried, with the barest hint of sarcasm in its hollow voice.

 Matt, me and Random: The question took Tradden by surprise, although he fought back the compulsion to take a step back.

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"I'm sorry?" he asked, quietly, in Common. Then, realising that he Dwarf had been addressed in Dwarven, the young fighter replied more fully, this time responding as best he could in his second language.

"Formidable? The four that stand here before you are the same four that first entered this place. In our time here we have battled foes aggressive and wicked. I cannot declare I am a follower of The All Father, The Father of Battle or The Platinum Dragon BUT I lay claim to knowing of duty and honour. It is both my duty and my honour to stand at the front line of any battle, often side by side with a Dwarf I consider a kinsman!"

Now noticeably growing in confidence, he stepped forward, drawing his shortsword as he did so, and adopted what he hoped was a heroic pose which struck the right balance between being impressive and slightly intimidating. Ultimately, he was not actually scared of the Dwarf, and he hoped that this was evident.

"My swords and my life stand between the forces of evil. If your sight extends beyond the walls of this tomb you will see a trail of corpses recently belonging to skeletons, zombies, orcs, wolves, goblins, evil mages and many more leading right back to the town of Blackengorge, whence we came."

More of an actor than an out-and-out intimidator, the youth tried to play on this by leaving a pregnant pause before continuing.

"The path I describe has been difficult, and I have been tested mentally and physically to the extremes. And yet, here I stand, still walking the road. I tell you this - our aim is true - we seek the whereabouts, and probable rescue of an innocent. If you have had any part in his disappearance then as much as it would pain me to take up arms against a Dwarf, then the path I describe will soon be home to another corpse..."

He whirled his swords impressively, as if to make the point. It wasn't something a Dwarf, ever pragmatic, would do, but then again he wasn't a dwarf.

"Does that answer your question?" he finished, meeting the Dwarf's hollow gaze full-on.

[Intimidate: **1d20+1: 6**] - failure!

Tradden's act drew an impulsive scoff from the half-elf behind the fighter which was quickly quieted in the silence from the skeleton that followed.

"Duty and honour, you say?" bellowed the skeleton after a few moments.

It raised its voice, the sound seeming to fill all of the chamber, almost too loud for Tradden to bear.

"What know you yet of duty and honour, young whelp? To be respected by allies and foes alike, and to bear the grim countenance of fear when it is required takes more than a pair of swords and exuberance on the battlefield. There is a lot still that you must learn, child. You should do well to remember that honour, not a trail of corpses from your swords, may yet be your greatest armour."

The young fighter seemed about to retort, before he thought better of it at this juncture, and looked away as the skeleton passed its gaze around to Kireth.

 **Me:** "You," the skeleton started at **Kireth**, with a sharp, rasping voice. "You have the air of aloofness, misplaced confidence in one's self, and the trappings of arcane power. Do you fear what you seek in these halls? Unnatural forces abound in this place - are you equipped to overcome them?" Sep 28 ▼

  **Neil, me and Random:** A fraction of a second passed as the numerous possibilities and options blazed across Kireth's mind. To act with respect and humbleness? No, this was a dwarven warrior - bold, fierce and forthright. He was testing us and he expected the same. He would get it. Sep 30 ▼

"I do not fear that which dwells in these halls" boomed the mage as he threw back his hood to meet the stare of the undead dwarf full on. He strode forward, with each step he took the room grew a little darker as the light from Khalin's torch seemingly diminished, covering back from the half-elf [Prestidigitation]. *"I meet each test head on and am yet to be beaten back. If your undeath grants you foresight, then perhaps you know how my power grows"* as the mage spoke in the dimming light, it seemed to the others that the room shrank slightly as Kireth's shadow grew larger, taller, towering over them [Prestidigitation]. *"There are indeed unnatural forces abound in this place"* there was a slight pause as Kireth's eyes moved up and down the skeleton, pointing out its own unnatural position in undeath *"and, trust me, I am equipped to overcome them"* again his eyes fixed, unflinching on the dwarven warrior. A sharp gust blew through the chamber putting out the final flicker of Khalin's torch as Kireth replaced his hood [Prestidigitation].

[Arcane Check: **1d20+11: 26**] - success!

The skeleton neither flinched nor exclaimed any surprise, although there was a small shudder from the rogue at the rear of the group.

"You have a hand of shadow about you, mage," the skeletal voice cascaded through the chamber. "Be wary that it does not envelop you too readily."

The dwarf's gaze slowly rose to the rear of the party and fixed itself upon Zero, who had been doing his best to remain silent and hidden.

 **Me:** The skeleton's voice changed a little, becoming softer, and spoke Common at **Zero**, albeit with an archaic accent. Sep 28 ▼

"You are a man of reluctance, one on the fringe, who needs but step forward and shine. Why do you hide yourself so in the presence of spirits? Fearful of the gods, perhaps?"

It's tone changed, and the skeleton's voice became more commanding - a question that could be ignored, one that took Zero somewhat by surprise.

"What god do you serve? Can I trust that you are true to that service?"

  **Nick, me and Random:** "God? Oo, well, er, it's been a long time since I've been to church!" Zero stammered. Sep 29 ▼

He chuckled amiably.

The skeleton, unsurprisingly, did not.

"I'm not really very religious," Zero stated honestly. "Got nothing against those who are though. Y'know...each to his own and...erm, whatnot."

He smiled; a very 'I'm no threat so please don't kill me' smile.

[Religion Check: **1d20+4: 11**] - success!

The skeleton paused for a few moments, regarding Zero with a mixture of suspicion and incredulity.

"An honest answer, at least, for a godless one," the skeleton boomed.

 **Me:** The dwarf skeleton appeared to regard each one of the party in turn for a few moments in silence, before resounding out another proclamation. Sep 29 ▼

"You have earned my favour, heroes! You may have much to learn, and much to fear, but I believe you are true to your words."

The skeleton took up a less formal posture on the dias, lowering the head of its hammer to the floor and leant on the shaft.

"I am Harbek Garrack, I was commander here in Caulkin Keep. It was my charge to keep the rift sealed, lest its unholy powers once again seep into the world. But, I failed in my responsibility. I allowed the influence of the shadow rift and my knowledge of the crumbling empire to distract me from my sworn oath. The corruption that lies on the other side of the rift touched me and triggered disaster."

The group looked at one another with confused faces, but the skeleton continued regardless, its voice rising to a crescendo as it poured out its tale.

"A vile taint soaked through the rift and into my dreams. A madness overcame me. I was possessed! In a rage, I drew my hammer and slew my wife and child, From that bloody deed I moved outward, attacking my captains, one by one, killing them even as they stared in shock. I had become a murderous fiend!"

The skeleton's voice now grew small and quiet and as the skeleton spoke it softly shook its bowed head.

"Finally, the alarm went up, and what remained of the battalion banded together against me. Even in my rage, I knew I could not best them all, so I fled into the crypts to hide from vengeance. Only then did the madness lift. I realised what I had done and despaired. I had killed my love and broken my oath. More than that, I had done so with my hammer, Aecris, an implement given to me by King Elidyr when I was knighted."

It was silent for a moment, before continuing.

"The remnants of my legion sealed the passage and trapped me here. I selected this as a fitting place to spend eternity."

The skeleton now looked up and judged those before it, as it had judged itself for centuries.

"I feel the rift opening once more, and its power and corruption spilling out even as we speak. The rift must be sealed once more, and those seeking to open it be destroyed. I am past redemption, but perhaps I can grant you aid. I cannot leave this crypt, but Aecris can." The skeleton began to turn the craghammer round in its bony hands. "Perhaps this elegant weapon, unlike me, can be redeemed. I give it to you that you might purge Caulkin Keep of those who work to open the rift. I see you have already managed to seek Bahamut's boon at the altars outside, they too may grant you aid."

Give it to you that you might purge Cawkain's curse or those who work to open the rift. I see you have already managed to seek Bahamut's boon at the altar outside, they too may grant you aid.

The skeleton let go of the craghammer, and it rolled end over end down the dias steps to land squarely at **Khalin's** feet.

"You do not have long. I sense vile magics below, and if there is a friend you seek, then I believe they are in mortal peril."

 **Me:** **Khalin** looked down at the hammer in front of him with reverence and awe. It truly seemed a magnificent weapon, with three large diamonds set into the flat of the head, and a pommel carved to resemble the head of a noble dragon. Even without touching it, he could sense its power. Sep 29 ▼

 **Neil:** Kireth was first to respond. His query was direct and quite clear "Tell me more of this 'Shadow Rift'" Sep 29 ▼

 **Me:** The skeleton's head swung round to regard **Kireth** before it's voice croaked out once more. Sep 29 ▼

"There is a natural rift between worlds below us, one that I was sworn to keep sealed lest its foul powers once more seep into this world. Within it lies only death - it must be kept sealed."

 **Neil:** "I see" said the mage as his eyes wandered slightly up and left, looking at nothing in particular. He seemed to be putting something together in his head. "We will surely look into this for you" Sep 29 ▼

 **Matt and me:** Tradden was strangely silent - perhaps a byproduct of the rebuke he had received minutes earlier. He had put away his swords by now, and had shuffled towards the doorway, as if eager to leave. He looked somewhat forlorn, and kicked at an imaginary rock, or speck of dust. Sep 29 ▼

He mumbled, under his breath. The others could hardly even hear him. "Thought it was Feywilds that were important, not rifts. Don't see what this has to do with anything..."

 **Mark:** Khalin reached down slowly to heft the hammer before him. As a warrior he regarded its power, as an artisan he marvelled at its craftsmanship. "We will deal with this rift, and those who would use it for ill," he declared with conviction, following Kireth's lead, as his fingers wrapped round it's proud hilt. Truth be told the dwarf thought his friend Tradden's soliloquy hadn't been half bad, but the youth of today were easily offended. Sep 29 ▼

"If I might ask a question before we proceed," he added, mindful of their mission and Tradden's reminder. "We also seek an elf tracker, a man of noble spirit yet. We fear he has been captured and is yet to be found somewhere in this keep. Do you know anything of his fate, or where he may yet lie? Could his disappearance be tied to those who would misuse the rift?"

 **Me and Neil:** The skeleton paused, as if thinking, before replying to **Khalin's** query. Sep 30 ▼

"My senses are tied to this chamber and Bahamut's crypt just beyond. I can feel the evil of the rift beginning to call, its tendrils seeping into the flagstones around us, but I can see no further. You are the first to enter this chamber in an eternity for me, yet perhaps I would not have the strength to seek your aid had the rift not been tampered with. It is most fortuitous that such a group of noble hearts should appear at such a time - perhaps that same fortune may shine down on you to seek your friend.

To open the rift is no insignificant challenge, and those that seek to do so will need to perform rituals of such vile compulsion that it shakes me to my core. If your friend is captured by these people, then his fate will be dire, and there is no time to lose!"

Following these words was an extended period of silence as none spoke or even moved. Perhaps some of the party were considering the plight of the elf they had been sent to seek, others just eager to leave the room.

Something stirred within Kireth and he approached the skeleton.

Harbek Garrack's eyeless gaze fell upon him. Looking back, into the deep, dark, soulless sockets, the half-elf possibly understood his plight more than any. He understood what it was to be consumed, to be driven by unseen forces, to spiral towards damnation. Kireth held out his hand and uncurled his fingers, within it lay one of the small figurines from the altar.

The skeleton's head looked down at the figure and then back at Kireth.

"I am beyond Bahamut's light," was its emotionless reply.

With an equal lack of emotion Kireth slipped the figure back within his robes and walked away. There was at least one difference between them, Harbek Garrack regretted his path... Kireth was embracing his.

 **Matt and me:** Led by Khalin, whose smile shone even brighter than the hammer he now brandished proudly as he strode forth, the party filed out of the chamber. Sep 30 ▼

As they left, the cold, dark sockets of the dwarf followed their progress. As they passed through the antechamber the star-like lights from above slowly faded. Zero noticed first, then the others, but no-one said a word. By the time they reached the far side, and were passing between the tombs the luminescence had faded almost completely.

At that point there was a loud "clang" as the doors to the dwarfs tomb swung shut behind them with a certain degree of finality. Whether Bahamut would ever allow Garrack redemption, or whether he would spend eternity in penance would never be known to the party.

Khalin stopped to turn and look at the door for a final time. As he did so, there was a whisper from Kireth in his ear.

"Your torch. Do you still have it?"

It was in fact still held in his shield bearing hand, although he had completely forgotten about it.

"Aye," was the equally whispered response as he held it up.

In the semi-dark there was a flash as the mage snapped his fingers and flames once more sprang forth from the oil soaked wood. Half-elven teeth gleamed in what appeared to be a smile, but only for the briefest of seconds.

"No charge!"

Once again guided by both magical and natural light the party retraced their steps, eschewing the westerly passage in favour of the path they had foregone earlier, Khalin this time displaying a methodical approach.

"Let's keep to an orderly exploration - its easier to remember this way. An old dwarven miner's trick!" he winked.

 **Me, Neil and Random:** The crypt's passageways wound around the area, but at least were wide enough to keep together as a group - **Khalin** and **Zero** to the fore, and **Tradden** and **Kireth** to the rear as usual. As they moved slowly north they noticed the holes cut away into the walls to act as burial chambers - most of them empty, perhaps their original charges now destroyed by the light of **Kireth's** staff and their spirits at rest. Sep 30 ▼

Whatever magics had animated them had no further corpses to gather, at least that was of some comfort to the group.

Thirty feet or so north a corridor led off to the west, possibly to join up with wherever the other had led, and not too far away the northern corridor ended and turned to the left. However, it wasn't too far further north along the corridor, just beyond the western corridor, where **Zero's** sharp eyes spotted something unusual, and he requested the party to stop and investigate.

"What is it?" enquired **Tradden**, drawing his sword in readiness.

"I'm not sure," replied **Zero**. "What do you make of it Kireth?"

The rogue pointed to an inscription on the floor at his feet, about ten feet by ten feet, carved and stained into the stone floor. It was difficult to make out - the stone had been stained black or deep red, and a pictogram etched out in silver in the middle - a three-pointed star, with a hand, crossed arrows, and a circle with horns in the gaps between the points.

Kireth knelt down beside the picture to examine it more carefully.

[Kireth Arcana Check: **1d20+11: 14**]

Thinking back to the recent texts he had come across, Kireth did not recall ever seeing this. "I do not know this but I can give you my best thoughts" he offered. "It is more than just a picture, it is a rune which, more often than not only displays a message but also has an effect". Without actually touching it he pointed out the small symbols "The hand could be a warning to stop or it could signify that the runes effects are activated when touched. The arrows are most likely the effect but that could be anything, only those able to decipher this properly could tell you precisely. This.." he said pointing at the final symbol "looks to me to be the symbol for infinity. In all likelihood meaning that this rune will last until it is triggered i.e. there is no time limit" he stood up "I would suggest we avoid touching them"

 Matt and me: "Alright then." piped-up Tradden, from the back. "Easy, we avoid touching them. Let's move on." Sep 30 ▼

The youth's patience had clearly crumbled, and his testiness was apparent in the tone of his voice.

He looked down at the darkened area, or stain, of the rune stretching from wall to wall.

"Although if we do avoid it and continue onwards here, we're going to have to go over," he added, glumly.

"Lets try this way and see if there is anything down here..." he said, starting off down the nearest westerly passageway.

 Me, Matt and Random: *The corridor west led away thirty feet or so before there was an opening to the south, a short connecting passageway that presumably led to the other western corridor.* Sep 30 ▼

"This place is a maze," sighed **Zero**, his nerves starting to play up again.

At the wall to the south, where the corridor ran east-west was another of the runes, stretching across the junction.

"Let's keep going west," said **Tradden**, pushing the group onwards.

However, it was only a few feet further on that the corridor branched off to the north, with another of the runes just further up the northern corridor. The corridor they were on then turned south, and around on itself. It was all getting rather confusing, cold, and glum.

"I don't think there's anything else we can do but try to cross one of these things," said **Tradden**, not altogether unhappy about the prospect.

The young fighter rubbed his hands together. "Right - me first I think!" He adopted a serious look on his face - everyone could see right through it mind. "We should make sure it is safe on the other side..." he nodded sagely. Kireth snorted.

With that, Tradden jogged a few steps back so that his back was against the wall directly behind them. The others wisely parted as he then ran and leapt over the rune currently in front of the party.

[Tradden Athletics Check: **1d20+10: 25**] - success!

His long legs clearing it with arrogant ease, he still had enough room to stop just short of the wall on the other side before sauntering back to the edge of the rune. He stood with his hands on his hips, beaming.

"So - who's next?"

 Me and Random: *It seemed as though **Khalin** and **Kireth** synchronised their steps backwards, and **Zero** was left standing on his own before the rune.* Sep 30 ▼

"Right, me, I guess," he sighed, and took a few steps back before sprinting quickly and leaping into the air.

[Zero Athletics Check: **1d20+3: 14**] - success!

The rogue managed to leap to the far side with a few inches to spare. He turned round with a grin.

"See, nothing to it," he exclaimed, brushing himself down. "Told you so," he added.

 Me and Random: **Khalin** and **Kireth** looked at each other for a moment, judging who would be next. Sep 30 ▼

"After you," offered the dwarf graciously. "We need someone on this side just in case any zombies come back."

Kireth scowled a little, but prepared himself for the leap.

"After all," the dwarf continued with a whisper. "It wouldn't be a fair fight if it were just you and them, now, would it."

The mage ran and jumped for it.

[Kireth Athletics Check: **1d20+2: 7**] - failure!

Tradden could see almost immediately the mage wasn't going to make it. Between his staff and the long robes it was a disaster waiting to happen. With a stumbled landing **Kireth** came to a stop on the northernmost edge of the rune.

For a second nothing happened, then an ear-splitting shriek rang out along the corridor.

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 15** vs Kireth's Will(15)] - hits!

[Staff of Defense: Will becomes 17] - misses!

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 24** vs Khalin's Will(16)] - hits!

[Damage: **1d4+1: 5** necrotic damage]

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 26** vs Tradden's Will(15)] - hits!

[Damage: **1d4+1: 5** necrotic damage]

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 17** vs Zero's Will(16)] - hits!

[Damage: **1d4+1: 4** necrotic damage]

Kireth managed to keep stationary - his grasp of the situation and will emboldened by his lit staff. The noise was piercing, but he knew it for what it was, an illusion only to those nearest the rune.

The others, though, were overwhelmed. The noise dulled their senses, filling their world with fear and they began to run in whatever direction they could, fleeing for their lives from some invisible terror.

Tradden and **Zero** fled east along the corridor, into the darkness, and tripped another rune. **Khalin** fled away to the south and east, cowering in a corner.

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 11** vs Tradden's Will(15)] - misses!

[Terror Rune: **1d20+7: 16** vs Zero's Will(16)] - hits!

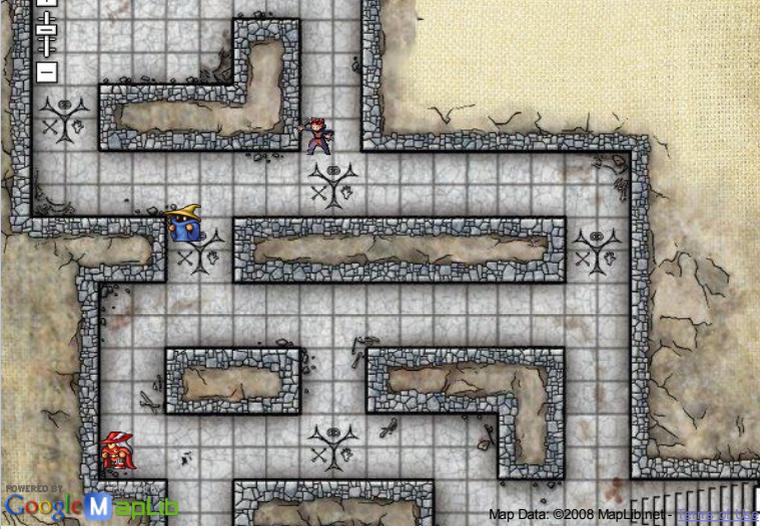
[Damage: **1d4+1: 2** necrotic damage]

Tradden managed to compose himself just to the north of the rune, but **Zero** fled further into the darkness to the north, and flung himself to the floor, shivering.

 Me and Matt: Oct 1 ▼

AREA MAP (after triggered rune)





 Me: "Hmm, intriguing," muttered **Kireth** more to himself than anyone else. Sep 30 ▼

"An effective trap, or would be if there were still zombies around. Running into their arms in the darkness. Quite elegant.

"Come on, Khalin, this is no time for quivering. Pull yourself together - there is much work to be done."

*The half-elf strode onwards to find **Tradden** and **Zero**, wondering whether there were indeed any zombies remaining in the crypt.*

 Me and Random: **Khalin** steeled himself against his fear, more by the chiding from **Kireth** than any other factor, and hoisted himself to his feet. He quickly rounded the corner and leapt the rune with a long stride. Sep 30 ▼

[Khalin Athletics Check: **1d20+10: 29**] - success!

He then joined **Kireth** at the edge of the second rune, with **Tradden** sat at the far side in shock.

"Gather yourself, m'lad," **Khalin** offered, trying to sound calm. "Where's Zero?"

"Erm, I dunno..." was all the young fighter could offer in his state.

"Well, let's get over this one, Kireth, and find our way to our friend."

Khalin took a few strides back and made another leap.

[Khalin Athletics Check: **1d20+10: 27**] - success!

He then turned to **Kireth** and urged the half-elf on.

[Kireth Athletics Check: **1d20+2: 6**] - success!

The mage cut it fine once more, but the rune did not fire.

 Me: **Khalin** hoisted his torch up high, and spotted **Zero** at the end of corridor, his cloak cast over the top of him and shivering beneath. Sep 30 ▼

As the group made their way forwards they could see the corridor led out eastwards into a larger chamber, and a wide staircase led down into darkness.

 Matt: Tradden went over to his friend and crouched down beside him with a freindly smile. "Magic runes. Nasty stuff. Lost who and where I was then." He shuddered. "Come on." He held his hand out to help the rogue up. Sep 30 ▼

Nick: "Just..just..just a second," stammered the bulky cloak. Sep 30 ▼

A hand emerged from it, tortoise like, and pointed, shakily, at the wall.

"There's a...secret door thing...there," Zero informed.

 Me: When the shaky hand pointed towards the eastern wall it all seemed fairly obvious, and **Tradden** wasn't sure how he hadn't seen it himself. Oct 1 ▼

It was indeed a doorway, built carefully into the stonework as to avoid any notice, right next to **Zero**. It appeared simple to open - just a push would do - its concealment relying on being hidden, rather than gated and locked.

"I think... I think it's been opened, uhm, recently," came the muffled voice from within the folds of the cloak.

 Matt: Still being a little tense from before, Tradden decided that he had had enough of sneaking and checking for one day. Oct 1 ▼

Standing back up he drew his shortsword and planted the sole of a large leather boot on the hidden door, kicking it open.

 Me: The door opened easily and crashed against an interior wall with a bang. It revealed a small, bare room, barely big enough to hold the party, about fifteen feet long, away from the hidden door, and about ten feet wide. Oct 1 ▼

If this hidden room once held treasure, someone has apparently emptied the place of valuables.

The only remaining feature was a bloodstain on the flagstones, towards the middle of the northern wall. It glistened in the torchlight.

 Matt, me and Random: Tradden stood for a second. It was hard to see as he blocked most of the light coming from behind him. Oct 1 ▼

"May I?" he asked of Khalin. "Ta." he followed up as the Dwarf passed him his torch.

Sword in one hand, torch in the other, the young fighter knelt down to have a look at the bloodstain.

[Perception Check if needed: **1d20+4: 10**]

The blood was red, which was some sort of relief, and seemed to imply someone, or something, had been sat against the wall with an injury. The mere fact that some of it was still wet indicated that it had been left fairly recently.

  Matt and me: "Hmmm." said Tradden. "You had best all come and have a look at this." He pressed to the far wall, stood beside the blood and held the torch aloft so that each of his companions could squeeze in and have a look, or perhaps file in one at a time. Oct 3 ▼

"Could this be ... Elf blood?" he finished, suddenly fearing the worst about the errant Gilmoril.

The group entered the room to take a look, standing where they could in the cramped space.

  Neil, me and Random: Not one for pretending to care, Kireth left the 'blood examination' to those that did. He had something else on his mind right now. Oct 3 ▼

As soon as he had entered the room he had felt it. The hairs on his neck raising ever so slightly, it meant only one thing.

[Kireth Arcana check: **1d20+11: 28**] - success!

Just as Kireth completed his arcane mutterings an arm suddenly appeared from within the wall and wrapped itself around Tradden's head, the palm of the hand covering his eyes. Another arm from the wall appeared on the other side of the young fighter, grabbing him tightly, the hand holding a small blade.

For a moment time seemed to stand still - Tradden unable to move [Surprised] and the others staring blankly with shock.

[Unknown Attack: **1d20+3+2: 18** vs Tradden's Reflex(16)] - hits!

[Grabbed] and [Pull 1]

Before anyone could react, the young fighter just seemed to disappear, literally pulled into the wall and out of view.

 Me: Tradden couldn't see what was happening and had a terrible sense of vertigo as he was pulled backwards where a solid wall should have been. His head swam as a rough voice, somewhere near his shoulder, whispered to him. Oct 3 ▼

"Drop the sword, longshanks, I've a knife in your ribs!"

The young fighter could indeed feel a sharp instrument poking into his side, just under his ribs.

In the small room, Khalin and Zero looked on agape as their friend disappeared into the stone wall.

Kireth, on the other hand, appeared quite calm.

"As I was about to say," offered the mage. "The walls in here are illusory. Beyond them, I suspect, is a larger chamber."

The half-elf seemed more concerned and pleased with his abilities to spot and identify the magic involved, than the fate of his companion.

Then a rough voice, deep like a male, hoarse and croaking, shouted out from beyond the wall in Common. "Shut yer traps! I have your friend - no stupid moves, or he gets it. State the password, or he dies first, and my men here will finish you off!"

 Nick: Zero leaned in Khalin's direction. Oct 3 ▼

"Do we know the password?" he murmured, trying not to move his lips.

 Neil: Password? He couldn't remember hearing of a password but there was.... The mage hurriedly searched his pouches and produced an ink stained parchment he had picked up way back at the Deepingwald Mansion House. Oct 4 ▼

Silently he passed it to Zero with an "worth a try?" shrug. "If not" he whispered "blag it".

At the foot of the parchment it read "Light must be snuffed, perfection decayed, order dissolved, and minds fragmented"

  Nick, me and Random: Zero cleared his throat and took a bold step forward. Recalling the two years of drama lessons at school, he spoke with absolute conviction and raised his fist for added effect. Oct 4 ▼

"Light must be snuffed, perfection decayed, order dissolved and minds fragmented," he projected.

"If you believe, they'll believe," he repeated inside his head.

[Zero Bluff Check (assuming it's wrong!): **1d20+9: 26**]

There was silence for a moment, and then the arms on Tradden relaxed, the knife point moving away from his ribs, and the hand slipping from his eyes.

"Light must be what?" inquired the voice. "By the Nentir Falls that's the worst attempt at a bloody password I've ever heard."

Tradden could now see the rest of the group in front of him - not quite looking directly at him, but in his general direction as though they couldn't see him. Zero was holding a parchment and looking quite confused.

"Most people don't write passwords down, either," continued the voice with a hint of sarcasm. "Step through the wall - it's just an illusion, there's more room this side. I'm no enemy."

Tradden dared a quick look behind him and saw he was in a slightly larger room than the illusory storeroom, about twenty feet by twenty, in what appeared to be an old armoury. There were two weapon racks, on the north and south walls, and a stand against the east wall with a ragged suit of armour mounted on it. Behind him, moving very slowly away, with arms slightly raised offering peace, was a scruffy-looking dwarf - a living one, rather than undead this time - unclothed apart from rags of leather britches, makeshift bandages, and covered in blood.

"Take it easy, longshanks," the dwarf coughed, "I just had to see if you were with them - asking for a password seemed to be a way to gauge if you were hostile or not."

 Matt: Tradden gave the dwarf a look like daggers and pulled at the slight indentation on his shirt where the blade had poked through his armour. Oct 4 ▼

"I think..." said the young fighter as the rest of the party tentatively stepped through the wall (Kireth like it was an everyday occurrence, Zero as if it were an affront to doors and locks everyway and Khalin with a cheery little comment about this stonework definitely not being Dwarven), "... I think that from what I have seen in the rest of this place the fact that we are neither goblins, zombies or big spindly creatures with long tongues, thatn this would have been fairly obvious and that you could have asked the nice way..."

Stuffing Khalin's torch into a nearby bracket, Tradden smiled and held out his hand. "Anyway, now that I am no longer your hostage I feel I should introduce us all - I am Tradden of Deepingwald as is yon bearded fellow Zero, your fellow Dwarf is Khalin of Kel-Morndin and Kireth is where in the gods are you actually from Kireth?"

 Me: The dwarf sighed, and sat down against the northern wall with a wince, clutching his side as he did so. Oct 4 ▼

"After what I've been through. I didn't really fancy taking second chances."

After what I've been through, I didn't really fancy taking second chances.

There were signs of blood slowly seeping through the dwarf's fingers.

"Well, I've no idea where Deepinwold is, nor your Steel Peak, but I'm sure glad to see you. Is any one of you a healer?"

 Matt: "No one here is an out and out healer, although I have some first aid skills. Whilst I check my pack for my kit, why not tell us who you are and how you come to be alone, underground, in a well guarded complex of goblins and zombies?" answered Tradden, unslinging his pack as he did so. The slightly unusual tone of his voice indicated - "No Answers, No Bandages". Oct 4 ▾

 Me: [...continued in [Chapter #06, Scene #11](#)...] Oct 4 ▾

Tags:  Next w ave ➡