



BEGINNINGS

Your breath comes in quick gasps as you climb the last few feet to the summit of Kyndalyn's Watch. The cool spring air quickly dries the sweat soaking your tunic, causing you to shiver ever so slightly. Your feet come to rest atop the stacked stone cairn; nearly three spear throws long, a spear throw in width and another in height. Below you, in their granite tomb, lay the moldering remains of Kyndalyn the Fair, his brother Farinmail and their 20-odd staghounds. Here, 20 winters ago, the brothers and their faithful hounds fell protecting Glynden from a fierce raiding party of the Averni.

Your grasp the imaginary sword at your side and swing it over your head! You shout a battle cry as you strike again and again, felling an Averni with every deadly blow, just as Kyndalyn did all those years ago. You have heard the story many times, told late at night in the council hall, as the embers from the banked fire grew dim. Heard the tale of the ranger Kyndalyn, the sorcerer Farinmail and their pack of magnificent hounds; four score and twelve Averni crossed the Thunder River and not one returned home!

You look north and east and see the object of their defense two long bowshots or more distant. The village of Glynden lies between two rocky spurs at the southern end of the Dragon's Tail Range. The wood smoke from the evening cooking fires curls lazily

skyward above the stout stone and timber homes with slate roofs. You can make out the bell tower of the Church of Light, where Father Thomas must be preparing for evening vespers. Two ox-carts are straining to make it up the switchback path, under the every-vigilant eyes of the watch at the town gate.

You marvel at the crumbling, but still stout, walls and towers left behind when the 4th Cohort of the Rustica Auxilia departed for distant Emor, a decade before you were born. Here and there the walls were patched with timbers and lime cement – but they have withstood 30 winters of harsh weather and even harsher neighbors. Without those walls, Glynden would have shared the same fate as many of the other settlements of the Lost Northern Provinces, or so the elders always say.

Aquae Sulis, Ironoak, Greenspire and Bremerton have all been lost to marauding barbarians, fiendish Felevar or other evils in the last five winters alone. Since the legions withdrew, even the imperial provincial capitals of Lords and Roses had fallen, cast down into dust and memory. Now, fewer than a score of holds remained throughout all of the Lost Northern Provinces, according the last halfling merchant caravan to make the long and arduous journey to Glynden.

Evening is rapidly approaching, as is usual in the early spring of the North. You should be getting back, before they close the gates for the night – but you linger for a few more moments, surveying the land around your home. To the west, just under the fading sun, lay the Western Wilds; rough, densely wooded hills that are home to fierce barbarian tribes that Imperial Emor could not tame, even at the height of her power. Those tribes; the Averni, the Nervii, the Brigantes and a score of others now raid across the Thunder River in increasing numbers, seeking to pick the bones of the Lost Northern Provinces clean. The river is at least ten days of hard walking distant and

those that have made the trip swear that unfriendly eyes watch them every step.

You turn to the south and spot several distant smoke plumes. There are still several fortified villas that survive, due to their proximity to Glynden. They raise foodstuffs and breed hardy ponies, which find a ready market in the town. Beyond the villas, three weeks or more on foot, is the port of Oar and beyond that, the Crescent Sea. Some of the halfling trading caravans that visit Glynden two or three times a year travel by sea to Oar from the Eastenmarch, the Jewel Cities or even Imperial Emor herself. Most, however, prefer the longer (but safer) overland route – or so you have been told. The Corsairs of the Crescent Sea are rumored to be quite fierce and without mercy. Somewhere to the south, beyond the villas, beyond Oar and the Corsairs and the Crescent Sea is the shining city of Emor, Queen of the entire world!

You cast your eyes to the east and can faintly make out the huge bulk of Dragonspire Mountain in the fading light. The peak is lost in the misty clouds that always adorn it like a crown, even on the clearest of days. Everyone knows that a great and fearsome wyrm lives on the mountain. Several of the more permanent fixtures at Nan's Tavern whisper of seeing the beast winging through the night sky when Seluna is smiling brightly, but only when they are deep in their cups. Rumors hold that the dragon considers the entire North to be its domain and it has destroyed no fewer than a dozen barbarian and Felevar armies! From time to time, foolish adventurers set out to find the wyrm and steal its treasures, but no is known to have reached the peak and survived to tell the tale. The beast does not seem to take an interest in Glynden and the town returns the favor! Beyond Dragonspire Mountain, two weeks or more distant, are the Monrovia Highlands where the ferocious highland clans raise their cattle, drink their mead and bash each other's heads. Travelers say that the clansmen are suspicious of outsiders, but

make sturdy friends, or terrible enemies.

Finally your gaze turns north and you shiver again as the evening breeze picks up. To the north lies the Great Northern Forest, also known as the Darkwood. Beyond that, lost in the gathering gloom, but still visible on a clear day, lay the majestic Pillars of Heaven – mountains of immense height. Even further to the north, beyond those mighty mountains according to tales whispered in hushed tones, lays the hidden Isle of the Dark Druids – the terrors that cast down the Imperial City of Roses in but a single night. The Darkwood is the domain of the fey and magical Felevar, fierce creatures known for their deadly archery and even deadlier sorcery. It is said that they eat the flesh of their victims and hate all of the free folk with a burning and twisted hatred. Somewhere near the heart of the Darkwood is the lost city of Chrysilium, once home to the princes and princesses of the Seelie Court, or so old Sentenius claims. Of course, he is drunk half the time and asleep the other half, so who knows if he is telling the truth!

The half-smile that is playing across your face disappears as the gate horn sounds. You only have ten turns of the minute glass before the gate is closed and barred for the night. You leap down the cairn, leaving Kyndalyn and Farinmail and their hounds to their eternal watch, only to pause and look westward once more. There, far in the distance, framed by the burning eye of Osirian are the low hills of the Western Wilds. One day soon, you tell yourself, the sword at your side will not be imaginary and the barbarians' best mind their heads! Perhaps you will brave the ruins of Lords or rid the Darkwood of the evil Felevar. Maybe you will travel to the Jewel Cities or the Eastenmarch or even to Emor herself. Perhaps the bards' will sing tales of your bravery in the tavern halls one day or, you think as you glance one last time at the cairn, maybe a monument such as this will stand for you 30 winters hence.

Suppressing a shudder at that last thought, you race down the slope for home – where a steaming bowl of mutton stew and a soft, down-feather tick await you. As you disappear into the darkness, a pale, translucent shape rises from the top of the cairn and watches you go. As if reading your mind, a brief smile touches the lips of Kyndalyn's shade. With an inaudible sigh, the apparition then turns its sightless gaze westward, beginning its nightly vigil.

THE VILLAGE OF GLYNDEN

Location and History: Nestled betwixt two rocky ridges at the southern end of the Dragon's Tail range lies the mining and farming village of Glynden. It began as a collection of ragged tents around a single mine shaft over 250 winters ago. Once a part of the Imperial Theme of Lords, Glynden is one of the few holdings in the Lost Northern Provinces that has not been overrun by barbarians or the Felevar (Fels for short). Glynden was once the home of the 4th Cohort of the Rustica Auxilia and has significant (if crumbling) fortifications that have helped it survive. In addition, it is not adjacent to any of the major trade routes, so it attracts little attention.

Nevertheless, Glynden has survived half-a-dozen barbarian incursions since the legions withdrew 30 winters ago. Several times, the village has come close to disaster, but has recovered each time. Several neighboring hamlets have been destroyed in recent years and their survivors now call Glynden home (Aqua Sulis, Ironoak, Greenspire and Bremerton - all but Aqua Sulis within five days walk of Glynden). Perhaps 700 souls now reside in Glynden and they make their living primarily from mining the rich iron and tin deposits in the surrounding hills and through farming.

Glynden boasts a large militia (about 100 – 10 always on duty, 50 within 1 hour, 100 with 3 hours) and their constant watchfulness help keep danger at bay. Glynden is also the home of an ex-Emorian

battlemage, who was mustered out of the legions just before they withdrew – Claudius Sentenius. "Uncle Claudius", as the village children know him, is old and forgetful, but he can still call up some magical energy when the situation is desperate (he will also tutor aspiring wizards in simple spells, but the instruction process is long and arduous, as he often falls asleep during lessons or is too drunk to make much sense). The final reason for the village's survival is that it lies within the shadow of Dragonspire Mountain. The barbarians, Fels and Dark Druids all give Dragonspire Mountain a wide berth, for it has an evil reputation.

Both legends and eyewitnesses agree that Dragonspire Mountain is the home of a great and terrible elder wyrm who has resided on the mountain's peaks for over a century. The dragon does not bother Glynden or the other few surviving communities in the Lost Northern Provinces, but has been known to descend on large groups of armed men and utterly destroy them. Several barbarian hordes and Felevar armies are said to have perished under dragon fire and claw. Also, no one has ever successfully visited the dragon's lair (and lived to tell the tale). Those few that have ventured close to the summit and returned tell tales of being chased away by a band of fearsome rock trolls. The trails and paths that lead to the upper reaches of the mountain are strewn with the skeletal remains of those that have sought the wyrm's treasure and failed (each skeleton is laid out in a neat pile, skull on top, with their mundane gear stacked neatly beside it – no treasure or magical items are ever found among the remains). Some few report seeing a tall, slender tower rising into the mists on the highest peak of the mountain, but most reporting such a sight were found wandering aimlessly about the base, dazed and confused.

Curiously, the great wyrm has never bothered Glynden and most of the villagers seek to discourage would-be adventurers from stirring up trouble on the mountain.

Leadership: Glynden is ruled by a “Council of Elders”. They meet weekly in the Council Chamber located next to the market square to administer justice and discuss problems facing the village. The Council meetings are generally open to all and usually take place on the evening of Market Day. See Important Personages for those who sit on the Council.

Trade/Outside Relations: Traders come to Glynden two or three times a year, trading finished goods and luxury items for iron and tin ore, foodstuffs and the hardy mountain ponies bred at several of the surviving villas. Only large, well-armed caravans make the trip and they are normally controlled by one of the halfling trading families. Local craftsmen of note include a decent blacksmith, a good stonemason, an excellent leatherworker and a fair bowyer. All other finished goods must be imported (chief among these is metal armor – such as chain mail and the lorica segmentata). Horses, especially trained war mounts, are in very short supply (and very expensive), most families use mountain ponies, mules or ox-carts for transportation.

Other travelers are fairly rare, especially after the Suevi tribe sacked Bremerton 2 winters ago. Bremerton was the closest thing Glynden had for a trading partner, but the town, four days walk to the west and north, is now a deserted ruin. Those few that survived the attack now call Glynden home. Occasionally, a bard or tinker will stop in Glynden, bringing word from Oar or the Monrovia Highlands. Also, adventuring bands regularly use the village as a way stop in their forays into the North.

As often as not, the bright-eyed, eager youths that leave Glynden boasting of the deeds they will do return hard-eyed with terrible wounds and even worse tales – or fail to return at all. The jaded gamblers at Nan’s Tavern now lay wagers on who will or won’t return and those that bet against the adventurers win all too often. Perhaps two in three of the lads and lasses that pass through

Glynden as fortune seekers are never heard from again.

Important Personages: There are still several veins of iron and tin which are actively mined, with perhaps half a hundred miners working the lodes. All of the miners currently work for the Brathwaite Mining Company, run by “Boss” Bigglestrom Brathwaite, easily the richest (and most powerful) man in Glynden. Several smaller operations have closed in recent months due to cave-ins or monstrous attacks. Boss Brathwaite has hired the remaining workers from the shuttered operations and actually expanded his own. Some in Glynden grumble that the misfortunes at the other mining operations were no coincidence, but Brathwaite denies any wrongdoing. Boss Brathwaite sits on the Council of Elders.

Calian Cassuvius is probably the second most important citizen of Glynden, even though he doesn’t live in the village proper. He and his family live in Castellan Cassuvius a large, fortified villa an hour’s walk south of Glynden. He is a tall man of aristocratic bearing, although almost 70 winters have stooped his shoulders a bit. Local lore holds that the Cassuvius family has held the villa for over eight hundred years!

The family Cassuvius still affects the style of Imperial Emor, in speech, dress and attitude. It is said that a visit to their holding is like returning to the glory days of the Empire, 300 winters hence. They hold a lavish banquet once a year, inviting the notables of Glynden and the other local villas. Calian regularly bemoans the fact that most “necessary luxuries” are so difficult to come by these days and is known to pay well for interesting works of art. The three greatest treasures that reside in Castellan Cassuvius, however, are Calian’s three daughters – Ludmilla, Drusilla and Carmilla – all great beauties of marriable age.

The ponies bred by Calian and his charges are said to be the swiftest and sturdiest

within two weeks ride. Castellan Cassuvius also produces ample wheat and barley in its high-walled fields. Perhaps four score people call the Cassuvius compound home, and they are not counted among the inhabitants of the village. Calian Cassuvius sits on the Council of Elders. Three other fortified villas still exist, held by the Jucadius, Nacalius and Octorus families. Each of these families also holds a seat on the Council of Elders.

Young Father Thomas maintains the small abbey dedicated to the Church of Light. It is open to all who are “welcomed” into the Church. Father Thomas has ministered to the needs of the local parishioners since Father Holthyn disappeared while returning from one of the outlying villas five winters ago. Two Acolytes of the First Mystery and four Lay Brothers assist Father Thomas at the abbey. Father Thomas holds a seat on the Council of Elders.

Kyndalyn the Younger commands the village militia. His father, Kyndalyn the Fair, his uncle, Farinmail, and their pack of staghounds succeeded in defeating a large war-band from the Averni tribe on a tall hill just to the southwest of Glynden. The Averni, over 90 strong, came at the town in the dead of night, in a heavy snowfall, just after the Midwinter’s Eve celebration. Had it not been for the watchfulness of Kyndalyn and Farinmail, it is likely that the village would have suffered the same fate as many of the others throughout the North.

Some in the village reported hearing sounds of battle, but the swirling winds made it impossible to discern the direction. The following morning, the rising Eye of Osirian illuminated a terrible sight. Atop the rocky tor, not 700 paces from the village gate, stood Kyndalyn the Fair, dead and rimed in ice, twin blades still clutched in unfeeling hands, amidst a circle of fallen foes. Kyndalyn, Farinmail and their score of hounds had all traveled to the Deathsgate – but so had every single one of the Averni! The grieving villagers built a lofty cairn

over the brothers and their faithful hounds and to this day the hill is known as Kyndalyn’s Watch.

All of these events occurred 20 winters ago, when Kyndalyn the Younger was but a babe. Today he is a grim-faced young man of few words. He drills the militia hard, but is regarded as a fair leader. It is said that he rarely sleeps and spends much time patrolling the countryside around Glynden. His slightly pointed ears and straw-colored hair betray his elven heritage, for he is of the Caeldyn. Kyndalyn the Younger holds the title of Constable of Glynden and sits on the Council of Elders.



Threats/Opportunities: The greatest threats to Glyndon’s survival are the barbarian tribes of the Western Wilds. Raiding bands of numerous tribes have been seen in the area in the past several moons and the Council of Elder is concerned that one or more tribes may try to sack the village, destroying it as they did Bremerton. To make matters worse, one of the militia patrols clashed with several Fels recently, so those fey and evil creatures may be moving down from the Darkwood, looking for plunder and a “hot” meal.

The entire North, however, is dotted with lost ruins. Cities, abbeys, towns, towers, old dwarven holds and deserted legion forts are everywhere. Many have undoubtedly been picked clean by bold adventurers, but who knows what may still lie buried out there.

Chapter 1: Of Rats and Men...

A fine spring day in the Lost Northern Provinces...overcast and chilly, with the threat of rain to come later. A recurrence of Rosë's stomach ailment returned him to the Abbey of Osirian and the care of Father Thomas (Rosë's player - John - was unable to make the session due to car problems). Lew, Garrick and Marcus Tiro were taking their mid-day meal at Nan's Tavern (mutton stew, day-old pumpernickel bread and slightly overripe radishes) when a red-faced Rowan burst into the tavern. Kyndalyn the Younger and two militia men, Vittius and Sanio were close on his heels.

"Gnolls!" he blurted out breathlessly. "Over by King's Mountain (referencing a low, wooded hill about a league southwest of Glynden), the Old Man left me a warning totem, they are definitely heading this way and up to some kind of mischief!"

The others exchanged knowing glances. "Did the Old Man tell you this himself?" queried Garrick with a barely suppressed smirk.

"No", replied Rowan, face darkening slightly at the implication that his friends didn't really "believe" in the existence of the Old Man, "he left this." Rowan held up a bundle of bark with some symbols scratched into it and several feathers attached. "I know it doesn't look like much, but I swear its true!"

Kyndalyn stepped forward and in his usual gruff manner growled, "We don't have time for idle banter. Real or imagined, we must see if this rumor holds truth. Marcus Tiro, fetch your gear and come with Rowan,

Vittius, Sanio and myself. Would you two care to join us?" He nodded towards Lew and Garrick.

Lew sighed, "Let me fetch my stave and medical kit."

Garrick plucked at his sleeve, "Shouldn't we let the militia handles this? I've never seen a gnoll before, but they sound dangerous!"

Lew shot Garrick a withering look and the halfling ducked his head, embarrassed. "Let me gather a few things," he mumbled sheepishly.

Within 15 turns of the minute glass, the small group passed through the gates and started heading southwest. Kyndalyn instructed the gate guards to call up the reserve and double the wall guard...just in case. Kyndalyn and Rowan ranged ahead of the group by half a spear's throw, moving quickly and quietly through the light woods and tangled underbrush. Soon, the rocky promontory of King's Mountain appeared ahead and Kyndalyn guided the party to a hiding place on the Northeast side of the summit.

"Rowan, with me," he whispered, "the rest of you stay put and stay quiet." With that, Kyndalyn and Rowan crept to the top of the hillock and hunkered down, looking and listening. Before long, Kyndalyn's sharp ears picked up movement below and the pair could see several forms moving along a game path, about a bowshot distant.

Carefully backing off the hill, they returned to the rest of the party and Kyndalyn led them around to the Southeast and into some large rocks just above the game trail. "Prepare yourself," he whispered, "they should be here very soon. Do not attack until I loose."

He unslung his long bow and placed several arrows tip down in the ground within easy reach. Rowan did the same with his short bow, Garrick loaded his light crossbow with

trembling hands - mumbling something about the lunacy of leaving the comfort of Nan's Tavern, and the rest of the group readied their weapons and waited. Lew quietly called for the Blessing of *Osirian* on all present and each member of the party felt their spirits and sword arms strengthen.

Soon, they could hear low, guttural voices and the voices were followed by four gnolls. They were all dressed in ill-fitting leather armor, reinforced by small metal studs and plates. The lead gnoll had a large wooden shield slung over his back and rested a notched axe on his shoulder. The next two in line also carried axes, but also carried a large wicker cage, suspended from a long wooden pole, in which several large grey-furred creatures squirmed. The last gnoll had a long bow and quiver slung across its back and shouldered a long, heavy-headed spear-like weapon. The gnolls seemed unaware of the party's presence.

Just as Kyndalyn was drawing an arrow to his ear, a high-pitched buzzing sound filled the air and an arrow, coming from the other side of the trail, buried itself in a beech tree a pace or two away from the last gnoll in line. Stunned, for a moment, the last gnoll barked an order, stuck his spear-weapon in the ground point first and unslung his bow. The rest of the gnolls crouched low, gripping their weapons and looking about uncertainly. The gnolls attention was riveted to the right side of the trail and the party was positioned on the left.

"At them!" yelled Kyndalyn, loosing an arrow. Rowan and Garrick followed suit, but the first volley fell ineffectually among the gnolls. Rowan targeted the gnoll with the bow, but it twisted aside at the last minute, causing his arrow to glance off its armored chest. Marcus Tiro, Vittius and Sanio raised their shields and moved forward cautiously through the rocks.

The two gnolls with the wicker cage ducked behind a large tree for cover. The lead gnoll hefted his axe and shield and charged up the

hill, seeking an opponent and the gnoll with the bow returned fire at Rowan, striking him solidly. Rowan staggered and almost fell, but Lew stepped forward and called upon the power of *Osirian* to heal his friend. A nimbus of blue-white light surround the cleric's hands and Rowan felt a surge of power as his grievous wound closed!

A second volley of missiles by the party was as impotent as the first. Then the gnolls that had ducked behind the tree charged up the hill, led by three huge, slavering rats as big as Garrick! The battle soon degenerated into a confused melee, with gnolls, rats and militia men hacking, biting and slashing at each other.

Vittius charged down the hill to engage the bow-wielding gnoll, only to be shot through the lung from less than 5 paces away. Sanio stepped around a boulder and straight into the waiting axes of two gnolls. He fell quickly from several powerful axe blows. Marcus Tiro met the charge of a gnoll and two rats, holding the line and preventing the center of the party from being overrun. Kyndalyn fired one last shot from his bow, wounding a gnoll, and then discarded it in favor of two short swords. Garrick crouched behind a tree, taking pot shots at enemies as the opportunity presented itself. Finally, Rowan engaged in an arrow duel with the gnoll archer.

Marcus Tiro dealt several solid blows before his multiple opponents dropped him, bleeding severely from numerous grave wounds. Reaching deep within himself and overcoming his fear, Garrick felled the gnoll that had just smashed Marcus Tiro to the ground with a bolt right through its vile throat. Then he sprinted forward to try to staunch the blood flowing from Marcus Tiro's wounds. Kyndalyn quickly dispatched one gnoll and engaged another, although he took a wound to the thigh. Rowan hit the gnoll archer with a glancing shot, but was rewarded by an arrow in the chest and slumped to the ground. Again, Lew stepped forward and channeled the power of *Osirian*

into his friend, reviving him from his stupor.

Garrick slapped a makeshift bandage on the worst of Marcus Tiro's injuries, stemming the flow of red blood, but was immediately set upon by two of the huge rats. Unable to fend them off, he fell beneath their slaving bites. Meanwhile, Kyndalyn finished off the gnoll he was facing, side-stepped and skewered one of the rats atop Garrick. As Rowan pulled himself back up, another rat rounded a boulder and flung itself on him. Lew stepped forward and struck it with his stave, cracking its foreleg. Undaunted, the pain maddened rat continued to lunge at them. The gnoll archer, seeing an opportunity, shifted his fire from the armored Rowan to the unarmored Lew and put an arrow into his ribs, dropping him to the ground and leaving him on the verge of unconsciousness. Rowan ducked behind a boulder, drew his short sword and attempted to finish off the wounded rat, which managed to slip aside and dodge his blow.

Kyndalyn's sure blow felled the second of the three rats and, leaving the final rat to Rowan, the constable charged down the hill toward the gnoll archer. The gnoll shifted his aim to the charging Kyndalyn, but only grazed him. The remaining rat, preferring a defenseless target to an active one, lunged forward and sank its teeth into Lew's prone form, sending him into blackness. Again, Rowan, slashed at the rat and again the pesky rodent rolled under his blow.

The gnoll archer dropped his bow and lunged for his spear-weapon, but Kyndalyn got there first and eviscerated the dog-man with two well-placed thrusts. Back up the hill, the rat ducked under Rowan's guard and sank its teeth into his leg. Waves of pain rolled over Rowan and he came close to falling, but he focused his anger and finally pinned the rodent to the ground with his short sword, severing its spine.

Their enemies vanquished, Kyndalyn and Rowan quickly saw to their friends. Despite the bodies littering the ground, only Sanio

had traveled to Deathsgate. Only Marcus Tiro's youth and hardy constitution prevented him from following, for he was sorely wounded.

DM's Note: I use a house rule that "Death's Door" is -10 +/- CON modifier - Marcus Tiro got down to -11, one away from death!

Lew, Garrick and Vittius - although badly hurt - were not in danger of expiring immediately. Kyndalyn left Rowan to guard the fallen and ran back to Glynden for help.

Several times, Rowan thought he heard movement, but did not see any dangers approaching. After what seemed like eons to Rowan, but was, in reality only an hour and a quarter, Kyndalyn returned with an ox-cart and Lew's brother Marcus, from the Abbey of *Osirian*. Marcus invoked *Osirian's* power to return all but Vittius to wakefulness. They did a quick search of the area, stripped the gnolls of their weapons and armor, and discovered a small pouch of denarii and sestericii on the body of the archer along with a crude map of the area around Glynden. It was marked with several "Xs" and some writing that stated "Beware of K". They found no trace of the arrow that had warned the gnolls just before their ambush, although they searched for it extensively. Just 'Who' or 'What' had fired that arrow, they all pondered.

With nighttime approaching, they returned to Glynden. Lew and Marcus, brothers in blood and in the service of *Osirian*, said nary a word to each other on the return trip. The entire party, along with Vittius, where housed in the Abbey infirmary that evening so Father Thomas could look after their wounds. That precaution turned out to be warranted, as both Marcus Tiro and Rowan took a serious fever from their rat bites before the next morning. Garrick and Lew followed close on their heels. Even with the assistance of Father Thomas and the miracles of *Osirian*, it was several days

before all of them returned to full health.

During that time, Lew's brother Marcus departed Glynden in the company of Brother Patroclian, a visiting cleric of *Osirian* from the Jewel Cities, bound for the port city of Oar - three weeks journey to the South. He left without any reconciliation with Lew as the two stubbornly refused to talk to each other. As they recovered, they debated whether they wanted to follow-up on the map they had discovered or search for two children, Meikos and Wynda Usaris who had gone missing in the abandoned mine traces West of Glynden.

After consulting Kyndalyn, they opted to try to locate the kids first and set out for the abandoned Western Traces...

DM's Note: The first battle was almost the last for the group. I roll attack and damage rolls in the open and had some seriously "hot" dice, including two criticals - fortunately by rats - not gnolls. The party, on the other hand, couldn't hit the broadside of a barn with their missile fire - 0 hits in the first six shots and didn't do much better in melee. They also made a couple of minor tactical errors. Despite not having any ranks in Heal or a proper bandage, Garrick rolled a "20" to stabilize Marcus Tiro, who was one hit point away from traveling to Deathsgate. All-in-all, a VERY tough fight. It probably would have gone easier if Rosë had been there - maybe next time!

Chapter 2: Look out for the Miner 49er...

What little information they had on the kids was their ages (12 and 10), what they were wearing when last seen and the general vicinity they were last seen in. A significant storm rolled through the area the night they disappeared and there was conjecture that they might have taken refuge in one of the old mines.

The party (Lew, Garrick, Marcus Tiro and Rowan) set out on the morning of Marktday (Market Day), passing several carts of produce straining up the switchback trail to bring their goods - mainly spring wheat, turnips and "Cor-apples" (an apple-like plant that blooms in the spring). Garrick "liberated" a cor-apple from one of the carts and munched on the tangy fruit as they marched. The day was actually sunny and pleasant, with a slight breeze blowing out of the southwest.

The last of the Western Trace mines had been abandoned about three winters earlier, when the Kolthir Mining Company folded after losing a dozen miners in the space of several weeks to an unknown menace.

Garrick piped in that he had heard from Nan about a band of miners from Clan MacGlowan in the Monrovia Highlands who had passed through while they were laid up and indicated they planned to set-up operations in two of the abandoned western mining shafts.

About mid-day, Rowan located two sets of fairly fresh tracks along the 2nd trace and thought they lead into the mouth of the mine.

DM's Note: A mining trace is the detritus left over from the mining operation. It is usually a mixture of silt, stones and worthless "tracings" of whatever metal is being mined piled up outside of the mine entrance. They usually stretch for a bowshot or more away from the mine.

The intrepid band reached the yawning mouth of the mine, where the tracks disappeared into inky darkness. Everyone paused and they looked at each other expectantly. Marcus Tiro asked, "Alright...who brought the torches?"

It was quickly determined that no one had a ready light source, so a lunch break was called while Marcus Tiro rushed back to town and purchased some torches, flint and

steel! On the way back out, he told the gate guards where they think the children may be. After that brief interlude, the party descended into the mining tunnels. Every five paces or so, thick wooden support beams braced the walls and the ceiling.

They quickly came to a four-way intersection. Ahead, they saw what looked to be a rail system, while the tunnels on the right and left were boarded up about 5 paces in. There was a 2-pace by 2-pace hole knocked out of the boards covering the right hand tunnel and the dust on the other side looked to Rowan like it had been recently disturbed, so they decided to head off in that direction.

After some shuffling about..."You hold the torch, I must have my hands free for my sword and shield."..."No, I can't use my staff if I hold the torch and what if I have to call upon the miracles of *Osirian*?"...they finally proceeded down the tunnel, which turned to the left after 25 or so paces. Continuing forward, the tunnel opened up into a larger chamber, perhaps 20 paces in width and another 40 in length.

DM's Note: In my campaign, a "pace" is about 2 feet.

Around the perimeter of the chamber, the party saw the cracked remains of wooden bunk beds, mostly fallen in on each other. Rotted bedding was strewn about the room and piles of fist-sized stones lay in several places where part of the ceiling had fallen in. They moved cautiously into the chamber and start working their way down the left hand wall. As they passed the third bunk, they heard a low moan and a desiccated hand swiped at Rowan. Rising from the ruin of the bed was the rotted remains of a long-dead miner, pick-axe still clutched in its undead hands.

Lew stepped forward, raised the sunburst symbol of *Osirian* and called upon the righteous might of the One True God to send

the abomination to its final rest. Bluish-White light flared and the corpse cringed from the power of *Osirian* and fled away from Lew. Marcus Tiro and Rowan pursued it and quickly hacked it to pieces in the far corner of the chamber. They quickly noticed that there was a stout door near that corner and an exit passage close by.

While they were discussing what to do next, several more moans issued from the passage and three more undead miners shambling forth, fixing hateful gazes upon the party and raising rusty pick-axes. Again, Lew stepped forward and reached deep within himself - calling forth reservoirs of strength from *Osirian*. "Be gone from here," he shouted, "return to the dust!"

A blinding blue-white light sprang from Lew and engulfed the three unnatural foes, consuming them in holy flames! Three pick-axes clattered loudly to the floor, scattering the zombie dust. Garrick looked at Lew with awe and admiration, "Can you teach ME to do that!"

DM's Note: One of Lew's Domains is Sun and he rolled REALLY well on this "Greater Turning" check.

Garrick, Marcus Tiro and Rowan turned their attention to the door, while Lew kept watch down the passage, confident that *Osirian* would help him defeat any further incursion by the undead abominations. The door proved to be stoutly locked and wouldn't budge, despite the best efforts of Marcus Tiro and Rowan.

"Let me take a look at that," Garrick said.

The dexterous halfling quickly overcame the door's lock and Marcus Tiro shouldered the door open and peered inside. Numerous crates, barrels and boxes were stacked haphazardly about the 10-pace diameter chamber, which was also covered with cobwebs. Just as Marcus Tiro was about to turn and inform his companions, he felt a

"plop" on his back. Rowan and Gerick's eyes widened as an enormous black and orange banded spider dropped down a web filament onto their companion's back.

"Aaaagggghhhh!" screamed Marcus Tiro as the creature's mandibles, dripping with yellowish liquid, sank into his flesh. Dropping his torch, which sputtered but did not extinguish, he tried to flip over on his back and crush the monster underneath him. Unfortunately, his feet tangled and he fell into a heap. The spider nimbly raised itself on its web strand for a moment, then dropped on his chest, mandibles clashing. From the interior of the room, Rowan and Garrick could see two more of the monstrosities advancing toward the prone Marcus Tiro.

Garrick loaded his crossbow and tried to jump up on one of the bunks to get a shot into the room. The rotten wood crumbled under him and he sprawled on the floor, discharging his crossbow. Rowan drew his short sword and moved up to attack. Marcus Tiro attempted to squash one of the spiders with his bare hands and received another vicious bite for his trouble. This wound burned like the fires of hell itself and Marcus Tiro suddenly felt weaker.

The second spider dropped on him, but its mandibles failed to penetrate his armor. The third scuttled over to the fallen halfling and sank its mandibles into his prone form, drawing a scream of pain from Garrick as he felt a wave of weakness wash over him. Undaunted, however, Garrick rolled to his feet and pulled out a dagger.

Hearing the screams of agony, Lew rushed to aid his companions and in short order, the floor was covered with spider ichors as short sword, dagger, stave and bare hands did their work (although not before Marcus Tiro suffered another painful bite that weakened him even further). The party rested for a few moments, then determined that they would leave the storage room alone for the time being and continue to search for the missing

children.

Chapter 3: Four Rats and a Hole...

Marcus Tiro and Gerick's spider bites still burned, leaving them light-headed and weakened. Before pressing on, they decided to examine the contents of the storage chamber. Garrick and Marcus Tiro rummaged through the boxes, crates and barrels - discovering a variety of mining equipment including picks and shovels, lanterns and several casks of lamp oil.

They quickly replaced their sputtering torches with a lantern, prepared another as a reserve and rejoined Rowan and Lew in the subterranean bunk house.

Back in town, while the party was waltzing with zombies and doing the cha-cha with venomous arachnids, Rosë hauled himself out of his cot in the Abbey infirmary. "I can stay here no longer," he mumbled through gritted teeth, "the others are out matching blades with great dangers while I lay here mewling like a newborn kitten!"

DM's Note: Rosë was still suffering from his stomach ailment and at an effective -1 to both STR and CON.

He readied his gear, heedless of the cramps that continued to twist his innards and the sweat dampening his forehead and stumbled out into the sunlight for the first time in a week. The gate guards exchanged quizzical looks as the unkempt barbarian, slightly hunched and in obvious pain, demanded to know where his companions were. Rosë grunted his thanks, hefted his sword and departed to the Northwest, wincing in pain with every step.

The main party started down the passageway leading out of the chamber with the ruined bunks, with Rowan scouting slightly ahead. After 30 paces, the rough hewn corridor turned to the left. As they started to make

the turn, several of the party members thought they could here faint shouting echoing through the area. The group shuffled to a halt and everyone stood still for a moment, heads cocked, listening intently.

No additional sounds were heard. "Probably just air moving through the mine shafts," Lew speculated.

They hadn't gone 5 paces before they heard the noise again and several thought they actually heard their names being called. After a hasty conference, the party backtracked towards the mine entrance, where they found Rosë leaning on his sword and bellowing, "Lew, Garrick...Rowan, Marcus Tiro!" at the top of his lungs in heavily accented Tradespeak.

Eyeing the sweating barbarian, Rowan inquired with a raised eyebrow, "I thought you were sick."

His face reflecting continuing internal distress, Rosë replied through gritted teeth, "I got better!"

United again, the party decided to travel down the main tunnel, following the mine cart track. Within 60 paces, they reached a four-way juncture, with the mine cart tracks continuing forward into the darkness. In the center of the juncture, the floor had fallen out, leaving a gaping 4 to 5 pace hole. The floor around the hole was fractured in numerous places and the fault lines radiated outwards for a pace or more in some places and looked unstable. The mine cart track and crosspieces were intact and looked stable.

Quickly deciding on a course of action, Rowan deftly secured a length of rope to himself and tied the other end around Garrick. The nimble halfling balanced himself on one of the rails and crossed the chasm with no difficulty, securing the rope on the other side to one of the cross-ties.

In short order, Rosë and Lew crossed, using the rope secured to Rowan on one side and

the cart track on the other side to steady themselves. Marcus Tiro looked suspiciously at the arrangement for a moment, started to say something, then shrugged his broad shoulders and started across.

On the far side, Rosë and Garrick strained to see past the feeble light thrown off by the lantern on the ground at Rowan's feet. Garrick felt the hairs on the back of his neck begin to rise as his keen ears picked up some chattering sounds in the darkness. He readied his crossbow and nodded to Rosë, who hefted his sword. As four pairs of glowing yellow eyes appeared from the shadows, a loud scream from behind caused the pair to jump!

"Clumsy oaf," Marcus Tiro cursed under his breath as he slipped from the rail midway through the crossing.

He desperately grasped for the guide rope, but it eluded his outstretched hands. The cart rail proved equally difficult to obtain a purchase on. Arms wind milling in a doomed attempt to fly, Marcus Tiro disappeared into the pit - the sound of his own screaming filling his ears.

Rowan stared with disbelief as his friend disappeared into the yawning hole. He clearly heard the fighter crash heavily onto the floor below and detected a faint moan.

"We've got rats!" Garrick yelled on the far side.

After a moment's hesitation, Rowan maneuvered near the edge of the hole and used the rope still attached to his waist to rappel to the bottom. He had just enough length to make it.

Above, things were not going well for Lew, Rosë and Garrick. As the enormous rats bounded out of the tunnel, yellow eyes and yellow teeth shining, Gerick's first panicked shot missed by a large margin and the bolt shattered against the ceiling. The barbarian

stepped forward and prepared to meet the charging rats. Rosë swung his sword in a vicious arc when the first rat came within reach. The nimble rodent danced aside and Rosë's momentum carried his stroke into the wall with crushing force, badly bending the tip of his sword!

DM's Note: on his first attack, our barbarian friend rolled a crit fumble, seriously damaging his sword - that was the highlight of his combat!

Then the rats were upon them! Three of the rats swarmed onto Rosë and one slipped past to attack Garrick. The barbarian swung desperately at the one that scurried past him, but his sword cut naught but air. His attention diverted for a moment, all three rats he was facing squirmed past his guard and sank their teeth into the barbarian in several places - including a severe wound in one thigh. Rosë slumped against the cold stone wall, barely retaining consciousness.

Garrick flung down his crossbow and whipped out a dagger. He sidestepped the lunge of halfling-sized rodent and slashed at with his dagger. The rat jumped aside and Garrick connected with the floor, shattering the dagger into metallic slivers.

(DM's Note: Critical fumble number 2!)

Meanwhile, down in the pit, Rowan located the badly injured Marcus Tiro and tried to bandage him up the best he could in the feeble light filtering down from above. He uttered a quick prayer to *Osirian* and began climbing back up the rope to aid his companions.

Above, things had gone from bad to worse. Rosë, barely on his feet, made a feeble swipe at a rat, but his waning strength and damaged blade combined to rob the strike of any power and the dexterous rodent easily rolled away from the blow. Garrick desperately pulled another weapon and

struck out wildly, failing to connect. Lew stepped up and swung his staff at the rat attacking the halfling. He struck it with a glancing blow, leaving a small mark, but not slowing the slavering rodent appreciably.

The rats surged forward, chittering and biting with their yellowed teeth. Rosë crumbled before their assault and dropped, bleeding from several wounds. The rat facing Garrick easily evaded the halfling's waving dagger and leaped through the halfling's guard, tearing a huge hunk of flesh from his shoulder. Gerick's world darkened as the halfling fell heavily to the floor. "Boy those are big teeth," he thought to himself as he passed out from blood loss.

Lew, suddenly facing four vicious rodents with only a staff and a thin robe to keep them at bay, stepped back and sent a fervent prayer to *Osirian*, praying for the Lightbringer to grant him Sanctuary from his enemies until help arrived. Three of the rats lost interest in Lew, but the fourth shook its head after a momentary pause, sending saliva and foam flying, then narrowed its already beady eyes and continued forward, nipping the cleric on the leg.

Lew scrambled back across the pit, without the aid the guide rope (which is still attached to Rowan), just as Rowan heaved himself from the pit, pulled his trusty short sword and assumed a defensive stance. On the other side, Lew hefted several fist-sized rocks and prepared to hurl them at the rats.

Despite his significant defensive abilities, Rowan's contest with the rats was an unequal one. The wily rodents, working as a team, managed to get past the ranger's guard numerous times; opening small wounds on his calf, forearm and hand. Lew, separated by the pit from his friend, hurled stone after stone, to little effect. One emboldened rodent tried to flank Rowan and the ranger's short sword flashed down, cleaving it in twain!

Soon, however, the remaining rats left

Rowan staggering, so Lew attempted to re-cross the pit to aid the ranger. Halfway there, in a replay of Marcus Tiro's ill-fated crossing, Lew lost his balance and was swallowed by the pit. A moment later, a rat ducked under Rowan's blade and bit down hard on his shin. The weakened ranger, unable to fight off the waves of pain, slowly fell backward into the hole - disappearing into the murk.

Chapter 4: From Bad to Worse...

The mantle of *Osirian* himself must have been protecting Lew, for the cleric received fairly minor injuries from his swan dive into the pit - despite falling about 15 paces!

DM's Note: I rolled 3d6 for the falling damage and rolled 1, 1, and 2 - I believe Lew had 5 hit points left - bringing him to 1 HP!

Rowan, the rope still tied around his waist, had his fall partially arrested by the length of hemp, but still struck the stone floor with enough force to be knocked unconscious. Lew called upon his last major miracle of *Osirian* to aid Rowan and divine power surged through the ranger's body. Rowan sat up groggily and the two looked fearfully at each other through the dim light then looked upward, expecting to see the remaining rats coming down the rope after them.

After a few moments, no rats were forthcoming and the pair hurriedly discussed what to do next. Lew determined that Marcus Tiro was still living - if only just - and Rowan was determined to get help or die trying. After a few moments to catch his breath, Rowan carefully climbed the rope, taking care to make as little noise as possible. After what seemed to be an eternity, he eased himself over the edge of the pit and is greeted by a horrible sight.

The three remaining rats were busy worrying the body of Garrick, now clearly dead. They have devoured most of the skin

off his face and eyeless sockets stared unseeing towards the ceiling. Two were tearing into the soft abdomen, while one was burrowing through the neck. As Rowan stood, the bloody muzzle of the rodent at Gerick's neck rose and its beady gaze fell upon the ranger - their eyes locked for a moment - then Rowan dashed across the rails, pulling out his short bow and nocking an arrow as he ran.

The rat chittered angrily and started to follow, while the other two glanced up - cross at being disturbed from their feast and began to skitter towards Rowan as well. He fired a quick shot, grazing the lead rat, which quickly lunged forward and bit him, wounding him badly. Unfortunately, the rope was still secured to a cross-tie on the far side of the pit and tied securely around Rowan's midsection - preventing him from retreating any further. The remaining two rats began to scramble across the rail and the ranger's heart sank. Then, an amazing thing happened.

Perhaps it was the divine breath of *Osirian*, answering Rowan's earlier prayer or perhaps it was just plain dumb luck. Both of the trailing rats, like a synchronized acrobatic team, slipped from the twin rails at the same time and, claws scrabbling desperately, plummeted to the stone floor below with two sickening thuds. The falling rodents barely missed the unconscious Marcus Tiro and the almost unconscious Lew.

That left Rowan, exhausted and barely able to keep from passing out, and one barely injured rat. Screaming incoherently, Rowan charged forward, surprising the rodent and driving it over the lip of the hole. As he followed it over the edge, the blackness took him as he mentally shouted, "At least I took one with me!" while falling to the floor below!

DM's Note: the rats had almost an automatic success chance to cross the pit, given their Climb Skill bonuses. Not only did they both slip and fall, they both blew Reflex Saves with substantial bonuses and got splatted. Marcus Tiro's player -Steve - commented, "If I hadn't seen you roll those in the open - I never would have believed it!"...another reason to make those open combat rolls, IMO. Also, see Rowan's note below...he was at "0" HPs, had one partial action before he passed out and did the last thing anyone expected...he charged! His "Bull Rush" knocked that ol' rat right into the pit and even cushioned his fall.

Chapter 5: Death and Disaster!

Lew jumped out of his skin when yet another rat panned itself on the pit floor, followed immediately by Rowan. Again, the rope helped attenuate the ranger's descent, but he still landed with enough force to be knocked unconscious. Lew hurriedly checked Rowan over, getting him stabilized and comfortable then slumped to the floor, exhausted. After a few moments, the shallow breathing of Marcus Tiro and Rowan - accompanied by the soft snores of the spent priest - were the only sounds that could be heard.

Lew awoke with a start, finding himself in total darkness. "Must have fallen asleep," he mumbled.

He could hear Marcus Tiro and Rowan's breath, but had no idea what happened to Rosë and Garrick. He calmed himself and attempted to renew his spirit with the power of *Osirian*. The Lightbringer answered his call, filling him with holy might! Feeling around in the dark, he located what he thought to be Rowan's prone form and channeled the power into the ranger. He moved to Marcus Tiro and repeated. Soon, all three were up and about - but all were in

very fragile condition.

Lew called up a minor orison to create a temporary light on Rowan's dagger pommel. The area around them finally illuminated, they found themselves in a rubble-and dead rat-strewn four-way juncture, with rough hewn passages leading off into different directions. They quietly discussed their options and Rowan informed the two of Gerick's fate. Marcus Tiro ducked his head to hide the tears welling from his eyes - Garrick was his oldest and dearest friend. He savagely kicked one of the rat corpses, cursing under his breath.

Rowan then attempted to climb out of the pit using the rope. He made it to the top, but part of the fractured ledge gave way as he climbed out and he hurtled downward, knocking himself unconscious as he re-connected with the hard floor. Lew offered him some comfort, but had no more major miracles to call upon. Lew decided to climb out next; he slowly and painfully made his way to the top.

Once there, he saw Gerick's small form - bloodied, half-eaten and frozen in death. Just beyond the dead halfling, he saw Rosë. Somehow, the barbarian's incredible constitution allowed him to survive! He was barely breathing and terribly wounded, but Lew judged him to be in no immediate danger. He loosened the rope from the cross-ties, carefully crossed the cart rails and threw the other end down to Marcus Tiro so he could start up.

DM Note: Rosë stabilized at -9. He could have gone to -11, based on his effective CON - see earlier note for house rule, but it was a VERY close thing.

Marcus Tiro began to climb. Near the top, the fighter's strength failed and he started to fall. Lew tried desperately to keep his friend from falling, but hadn't taken the time to tie the rope off to an immobile object. The rope tore the skin from his palms as it slides

through his hands and Lew couldn't hold the heavier Marcus Tiro. Finally, the rope slipped from his grasp and Marcus Tiro plummeted to the bottom of the pit, striking at a terrible angle. Lew heard the dry snap of breaking bones and Marcus Tiro did not answer his frantic calls.

Lew stood, trembling, with tears streaming down his face. He looked at Garrick's pitiful form and Rosë's beyond that. His mind whirled and only one thought cut its way through his clouded brain, "Father Thomas...I must get Father Thomas!"

Lew turned and fled from the abandoned mine. He stumbled outside and found that it was dark and there was a soft rain falling. Frantic and badly injured, he raced the league back to Glynden as fast as his aching legs would carry him.

DM's Note: IMC a league is 3 miles/5 km.

Behind him, in the dank darkness of the pit, an ever-widening pool of blood spread from the fracture point on the left side of Marcus Tiro's head. Three turns of the minute glass after Lew exited the mine, Marcus Tiro found himself surrounded by mist. He saw a faint light at the end of the mist and moved towards it. In a nimbus of golden-white light, he found Garrick seated atop an enormous cask. The halfling, smiling beatifically, thrust a foaming flagon of ale towards the confused warrior, "Welcome home, my friend!"

(DM's Note: Yes, it is sad but true, Garrick and Marcus Tiro, childhood friends, met an ignominious end at the hand of four rats and a hole...)

The aftermath of the sordid affair was somber and sad. Lew was able to secure assistance and by mid-morning, in the midst of a desultory downpour, the living (Rowan and Rosë) and the dead (Marcus Tiro and

Garrick) had been recovered from the mine. The children still had not been found and to add insult to injury - by nightfall - all the survivors were shaking from the alternate fever and chills of the "Rat Fever".

Adding to the gloom was news that the *Swords of Glynden*, with half-a-dozen retainers, had met and defeated a large gnoll band - taking 10 heads. They returned to the town muddy and bloody, but triumphant. Soon they were at Nan's, buying drinks for everyone and boasting of their exploits - bloody gnoll heads lining the bar. Soon a raucous crowd was gathered and the loss of Marcus Tiro and Garrick was forgotten by all but a few.

Lew, Rowan and Rosë lay in their sick beds, trying desperately to block the noise of merriment floating in from the tavern. Father Thomas placed his quill on his writing desk, paused his work on the burial service eulogy and shook his head sadly. Two of the gate guards, pulling their cloaks tight against the wind and the rain, talked quietly about the strength and loyalty of Marcus Tiro. And over in the tavern, a human woman - large and dumpy - stood at the corner of her bar and wept silent tears for the diminutive halfling she had cared for over nine winters.

The funeral service the next day...ironically Fesday...was a quiet and joyless affair. Father Thomas' eulogy was simple, yet forceful, concentrating on duty and sacrifice. Several others stood afterward to praise the pair and while Lew was speaking, a well-dressed young man stood at the back of the sanctuary and intoned in a steady voice, "And what of my cousins? They are still lost out there in the mines. They are innocent and blameless. Will those that sought them before now assist my brother and I in finding them?"

Lew's words faltered and he sat down, flustered. Rowan cast an angry look towards the young man, known to him as a miner from "Boss" Brathwaite's operation, but

remained silent. Rosë regarded him skeptically. "Perhaps now is not the best time to speak of this," Father Thomas said gently, "let us wait until after the service."

"Very well," the young man replied impatiently, "but every moment we do nothing, their chances for survival grow slimmer...do you want these two to have died in vain?"

Father Thomas turned away, completed the *Rite of the Dead* and led a small procession of clergy and lay brothers out of the Abbey and into the burial catacombs. Rowan quickly left the Abbey, brushing past the young man who tried to speak with him.

Rosë grunted when approached, mumbling that he was off to the tavern to hoist an ale to his old friends. The exasperated youth waited until Father Thomas returned and entreated the cleric to order Lew to help him.

"That I cannot do, my son. I feel that your urgency is well-placed and that it has merit. Lew must make his own choice on this however. Place your trust in *Osirian* that all will happen as it is meant to."

Somewhat mollified, the young man departed the Abbey, seeking Rosë in the tavern. He found the barbarian quizzing miners about the best way to cross cave-ins, what kind of equipment is most useful in the mines and how best to avoid a repeat of the disaster that was visited upon the party. He strode up to Rosë and placed a bulging pouch on the table in front of him. Several denarii leaked out.

"My name is Quintus Scipio. There are over 700 denarii in this pouch - more than enough to purchase all of the equipment we will need. My brother and I tend to retrieve our cousins on the morrow. Your woodsman has run away and your priest is a coward, but I am told that the people of the tribes are without fear...will you at least help us?"

Rosë looked from Quintus to the money and back again, then nodded his head in agreement. "Very well, then, we will gather in front of the tavern at the seventh hour."

With that, Quintus turned away and marched purposefully from the tavern. Meanwhile, Rowan stumbled to his mother's cottage and collapsed on a stool near her hearth - his breath came in great, ragged gasps and shuddering sobs soon wracked his body. His grey-haired mother stepped close and embraced her grieving son, saying nothing. After nearly an hour, the sobs subsided. Rowan gathered a few things, hugged his mother, and disappeared into the night.

Lew, eyes puffy, heart and head aching, sought the counsel of Father Thomas. He spoke in hushed tones of the guilt he felt - saying he was not worthy of *Osirian's* gifts. Father Thomas let him speak on for some time, then put his hand on the younger priest's shoulder.

"Lew, my friend, the ways of the Lightbringer are not always clear, even for us. I cannot tell you why your friends have been taken," he said gently. "The young man who spoke out-of-turn today, Quintus, I believe his name is - has asked me to order you to assist him in finding the lost youngsters. Although it is within my power to order this, I will not do so. You must search your own heart and decide this on your own. I trust that you will make the right decision."

Lew nodded, quietly thanked Father Thomas and departed, walking towards his own sleeping chamber. In the corridor, he almost bumped into Rosë without noticing him. The hulking barbarian youth was leaning against the wall in the shadows.

"Friend Lightman," he said in heavily accented Tradespeak, "I go tomorrow to help the Quintus-man and his brother. I may need your light-power...will you come?"

Lew looked into the guileless eyes of the barbarian and nodded. "When and where?"

"The seventh hour," Rosë grunted. Before turning away, the barbarian laid a hand on Lew's arm. "It is good!"

With that, he strode away, and Lew couldn't find his bed soon enough!

The next morning, Quintus was surprised to see Lew arrive along with Rosë. After an awkward silence, Quintus said, "I must apologize for my hasty words yesterday and the tone in which I spoke them. It is just that I fear for my young cousins and you are the only ones that have any idea where they may be!"

Quintus then introduced him to his brother, Sextus, a small man with a booming voice, whose fingers played idly with a hand-harp.

Lew graciously accepted the apology and they set about the task at hand.

Unfortunately, it was Restday - and many merchants shops were not open (also, many merchants had spent the night drinking at Nan's tavern). Through Lew and Quintus' persuasiveness, Rosë's icy glare and Sextus' quips they soon had all of the equipment they needed, albeit at a stiff mark-up for the merchants' trouble.

They departed Glynden - laden with ropes, spikes, hammers, boards, poles and all manner of mining goods - making for the mine with all possible haste. As they neared it, they found a deep furrow in the ground that ran through the mine trace and into the mine. They suspiciously readied their weapons and cautiously entered the mine, lighting two lanterns as they did so. They found a muddy track, matching the outside furrow, which headed down the central mine shaft, along the cart track.

Advancing with trepidation, they soon came to the pit, which now had a large, muddy log place across it and lashed into place. The group looked around, puzzled, shrugged their shoulders and proceeded to take the next three-quarters of an hour to build a

sturdy bridge over the pit. Rowan appeared on the far side about five turns of the minute glass after they started pounding spikes into the wall. He shook his head, motioned them to follow him and disappeared into the gloom.

"Sturdy as the bridge of an Emorian legion!" Sextus boomed. The group shared a laugh and continued forward. After half-a-hundred paces, they found Rowan standing on the far side of a large chamber. They moved to join him and he greeted them silently, pointing to a leather doll, stuffed with cloth, lying on the floor. Quintus bent and retrieved the doll. "It is my cousin's," he said, "let us search the area!"

After half-an-hour of fruitless searching, Rowan discovered a small slot, angling upward under an overhanging stone. He inserted his dagger into, wiggled it about and was rewarded with an audible "click". Slowly, a section of the wall slid back on oiled runners, revealing a narrow, damp passage. He motioned the group to follow him, saying nary a word and moved quickly away.

The party moved through the twisting, turning passage for some time. It seemed to be older than the mine, to their untrained eyes. Water ran down the walls in places, leaving a slimy trail and puddle on the floor. Rowan found one clear footprint in the muck, a man-sized boot print - heading forward. They went down several sets of rough-hewn stairs, and then came to small chamber that was littered with rocks and rubble. They could see several fault lines in the ceiling and no exits from the room.

They carefully searched the walls of the chamber for close to an hour, but found nothing. Quintus, Sextus and Lew debated backtracking to see if they had missed something. Suddenly, Rowan dropped to one knee and began sweeping rocks aside on the floor. Quintus and Sextus looked at each other - then dropped to do the same. They soon discovered a patch of floor where the

rocks did not move!

On closer inspection, they found a slot similar to the other one and determined that there was some type of trap door in the floor. Rowan repeated his earlier dagger trick and a section of the floor slid away, revealing an iron rung ladder heading down. After a quick decent, the band found themselves standing in fairly well finished corridor - maybe not Khazardyn craftsmanship - but definitely not rough-hewn.

By their lantern-light, they saw what appeared to be the beginnings of a chamber about 10 paces away and a door beyond that. They started forward cautiously and Rowan peaked into the room. His keen ears caught it first, the creaking sound of dry sinew rubbing across even drier bone. From the four corners of the room, Rowan saw skeletal warriors, clad in rotted armor, swivel their red-eyed gaze in his direction, raising bows nocked with bone arrows.

Rowan frantically motioned to the rest of the party to get back into the hallway and flattened himself against the passage wall while drawing his short sword...death lay ahead!

