

Princes of the Apocalypse

As told by Groin, LLC.

episode 2: the tomb of moving stones



24 Mirtul, 1491 DR.

After regrouping at the sink hole, the adventurers decided to discuss what they had seen and heard at The Helm at Highsun, the town's less refined tavern. The group was seated on an overlooking balcony area, where two of the three tables were moved together to accommodate the size of the group.

Scrotus, the Goliath Berserker, confessed that since spending time with the Uthgardt Barbarians he had encountered in Triboar, he had been experiencing a feeling of longing. Perhaps it was their nomadic lifestyle, perhaps it was the way they shared in his lack of social graces, perhaps it was the way their huntress, Torunn, looked at him. The dark haired woman may have been exceptionally tall for a human, but she was still a head and a half shorter than the Goliath (her suggestive glances revealed that this fact was not lost on her). Scrotus managed to convince himself that it was because they had fallen on hard times. The weather was unreliable, the enemies were getting strange, and the monsters they encountered were getting stranger. He saw their need for a hero, and did not see one among them. The

Goliath bade his companion's farewell and set off to find the Elk Tribe, and as he left Kazzius pointed out the tribe's emblem freshly tattooed on his shoulder blade.



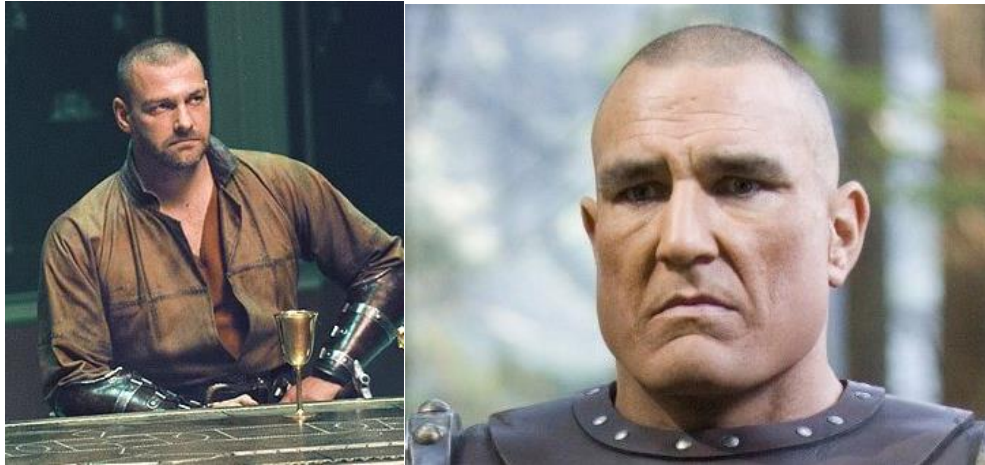
Kazzius also took his leave. His experience with Jonas, their prisoner from the first bandit attack, had shaken him and left him convinced that there were indeed strange and powerful entities at work. He wished to delve into his research so that he may find as much information as possible on who their foes may be, and why they angered his mysterious patron.

The remaining four adventurers dug in to their position at the tavern and set to planning their investigation of the tunnels under Red Larch. Diamachus noticed a trio of flutists playing in the taproom below, and left the table to strike up a conversation. They were a group known as the Wyndwyrds (a play on the fact that they all played wind instruments), who were passing through town on their way to Feathergale Spire, to play a private show for some "Aerial Mount Enthusiasts" at their headquarters in the Sember Hills. They told Diamachus that they had been hired by a man named Windharrow who had given them the job based on their name and instrumentation alone. He hadn't even heard them play yet, and the gig payed "quite well".

Justran, co-owner of the tavern working as both manager and host, came up to congratulate Ganon on his wonderful performance during the trial. "Way to call him out. That old skull-cracker has no idea what he's doing running a town *or* a trial!" He gave the guys a round of drinks on the house and hung around for some small-talk. Though he didn't have much helpful information regarding the tunnels or the town elders incriminated in the trial, he did manage to point Crotch in the direction of a Halfling who worked at Waelvern's Wagonworks. Crotch noted the name, and looked down on the taproom. He spotted the Halfling seated below at the bar, hunched quietly over a drink. Stannor Thistlehair had apparently been throwing wild accusations at his employer lately that surprisingly seemed validated by the recent events.

When two burly looking men were seated at the empty table next to the adventurers, the party became suspicious. Would the two men eavesdrop on their conversation? Diamachus and Crotch decided to test the waters by doing a little recon under the guise of a magic trick. "Would you two care to settle a bet?" Diamachus said, shuffling a deck of cards. He proceeded to attempt a simple card-guessing trick, but the two men were unimpressed when he failed to guess the correct card. They took the two drinks offered to them and when Crotch tried to keep the conversation going one of them cut in with a low slurred monotone "Dat wuz a vewry wunduhful madic twrick, and we apwreciate the wound of dwinks,

now if you don't mind we would pweefur to enjoy dem in peace." When prodded, they admitted that they were quarry workers who were "vewry tired and just want to be left alone."



Crotch went down to the main taproom and tried to strike up a conversation with Stannor. The Halfling's current state made this nearly impossible until Crotch offered the little man a drink, which seemed to earn him a new best friend. Crotch invited Stannor up to the balcony for a drink. After Crotch gave the Halfling a piggy back ride up the stairs, the group began to ask him about what he had seen at his place of work. It was not easy to get any useful information out of the obviously drunk Halfling. He mostly wanted to complain about his low wages and poor working conditions, but as time went on he began to talk of the town's troubles. Apparently Stannor had witnessed his employer, Ilmeth Waelvur (who had been incriminated in the trial) using a secret door in his wagon yard. He also told of another figure he had seen, a man in a brown robe with a mask that was made of gold rather than stone. "I bet *he* was that Larrakh character. You know how those religious types are, the important ones always get the fancier hat." As Stannor realized he had an audience, his story got louder and more animated. Shouting about how the quarry workers were using the town's paranoia to get out of working night shifts, his drunken ramblings began to include various references to "Men in Stone Masks" creeping around. Perry, who had been watching the two men at the nearby table for any type of reaction to the Halfling's tale, noticed that they abruptly got up to leave. His suspicion piqued, he grabbed Diamachus and headed after them.

Ganon wrapped up his conversation with Stannor, and he and Crotch headed out to find Grund, the town's Half-Orc meat-on-a-stick vendor who had been involved in the tunnels but cleared of any wrongdoing by virtue of his stupidity. Crotch was hoping he could provide a more elaborate description of the tunnels, or even serve as a guide. On their way out of the tavern, Justran caught them for a quick word. He wanted to know if the guys had thought about where they were going to stay. He recommended the Swinging Sword for luxury, or Mother Yalantha's boarding house for larger rooms and more extended stays. As Ganon thanked him for the advice, he noted that there was something about Justran that made him the slightest bit uneasy. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, and as

Justran asked Crotch about their next move, Ganon cut him off with a curt “we really must be going now.”



Perry and Diamachus were creeping along the shadows following the two “quarry workers”. The two men made a quick stop at Mother Yalantha’s, (one ran inside for less than a minute while the other waited outside), entered an alleyway behind Waelvur’s Wagonworks, and disappeared from view. The two Halflings split up and circled the block to make sure their targets didn’t just make their way straight through the alley, and as Perry was creeping along the front of the Wagonworks’ office he heard noises coming from the wagon yard. A failed attempt to climb the fence resulted in a little too much noise, but Perry finally managed to peek over the top. He saw a yard with half a dozen wagons in various states of disrepair, loose wheels and broken axels lying around heaps of lumber. The moon was just over half-full, but the cloudless night meant the grounds were bathed in Selûne’s glow. He saw no movement, heard no noises, and after meeting back up with Diamachus they were unable to observe anything further, the place had gone silent.

At this point, they could see Ganon and Crotch approaching from the direction of the sinkhole so the band regrouped. “What did you guys find?” asked Ganon. Perry cast a glance towards the fence he had just peeked over. “Let’s not talk about it here.”

They went on to the market looking for Grund to find that guards had been stationed at the entrance. Ganon, with the full bearing of a Paladin, managed to smooth them over and the group was given access to the market. They searched Grund’s smoke shack but found it unoccupied. Meat was in the smoker, which was burning low, and there was no sign of Grund, or anything out of the ordinary. His food preparation area was in remarkably tidy shape, he had very few belongings, and the only thing that stuck out was the bag of gold under his mattress. It seemed like either his meat-on-a-stick was the best-selling food item west of the heartlands, or Grund had another source of income. Diamachus took a piece of meat out of the smoker, and left a gold piece on the table. After searching around the market for any other unusual signs, they decided to stop at Mother Yalantha’s and secure their lodgings for the night, as it was starting to get late.

They arrived at Mother Yalantha's to find an ancient looking Gnomish woman hunched over the front desk. "You must be Mother Yalantha's *daughter*, I should think!" Diamachus jested. "Of course, would you like me to fetch her?" The woman replied, with a smile. Without betraying a hint of hesitation, Diamachus agreed; "Absolutely, but not before you book us a room!"



The group booked a room, indefinitely with two weeks up front, and Diamachus steered the conversation towards the two men they had followed there earlier. He managed to charm their room number out of the younger "baby" Yalantha before she went to fetch her mother. Perry slipped away to investigate the Quarrymen's room while Crotch, Diamachus, and Ganon stayed to distract the old Gnomes. "Mother" Yalantha proved truly ancient but was jovial, spry, and brought delicious soup. As she happened to mention that there were *six* quarry-men staying in that room, Diamachus asked for directions to the privy.

Perry found an empty room with six bunks and little else save a fresh coating of dirt on the floor and a few gold pieces under a mattress. It was as if the room was either being rented by six men who had absolutely no personal possessions among them, or had been recently cleared out. He had just pocketed some of the dirt for later inspection as Diamachus ran up, relieved to see that Perry was the only one in the room.

The hour was getting late, but before the group ventured into the tunnels under town, there was one place they wanted to check out first. They suspected that there may be an entrance to the tunnels at Waelvur's Wagonworks that they could use to avoid the spectacle of dropping into the sinkhole right in the middle of a street in between two taverns, both of which were currently open.

They made their way to the Wagon yard, following the alleyway taken by the two men they had tailed earlier, and found that a section of the fence was broken, allowing easy access. Using a description of the entrance's location provided by a drunken Stannor proved fruitful, for they quickly found a door hidden under a propped-up wagon. Crotch, the only member of the party whose race was gifted with dark-vision, took the lead. Ganon followed with a lit torch and two Halflings close behind. At the bottom of rough-cut stairs, there was a tunnel leading north. At the bottom of the stairs a pile of wet sand with burnt torches thrust into it sat next to a pile of fresh torches and a stack of flimsy brown cloaks. A

roughly hewn tunnel led to a chamber that lay directly under the sink hole, which let in a pillar of moonlight. Tree roots and veins of rock marked the walls of the chamber. As they made their way in, their torchlight brought about a “Who’s down there!” from above. Apparently, there was a guard stationed near the edge of the hole to prevent anyone from messing around in the tunnels. The group identified themselves to the guard, and bade him to keep quiet. They didn’t need him advertising their presence any further.

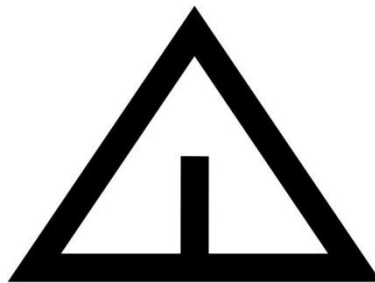


Finding the only door out of the room unlocked, they cautiously opened it and crept into the downward sloping tunnel beyond. The tunnel continued west for about 35ft before leveling off at a point where there were two stone slabs on either side wall, carved to show the relief of two Dwarven warriors facing each other across the hall. After a quick examination, they were found to be doors that were neither trapped, nor locked. Crotch noted that they did not appear to be historical figures; rather, they were the same generic images of warriors one might find on any adornment. The hall continued onward, but the ceiling looked a little different. Whereas the other tunnels had rough unfinished ceilings, this ceiling was made up of 10x10ft stone panels.



The group decided to see what lay beyond the two doors before walking under the strange ceiling. The door to the north led to a pit covered by a stone bench with a hole in it (a privy that hadn't been used in decades). The door to the south led to another passage. They stepped through the doorway and closed it behind them, the stone slab finding its home with a satisfying "thunk". The passage went on south for about 45 feet, then west and eventually to a small chamber that was filled with the stench of death, and the scuttling of vermin. Two giant rats rooted among a pile of dead bodies, ripping off chunks of rotting flesh and generally ignoring the intruders.

In the interest of preserving evidence, Diamachus decided it would be prudent to exterminate the rats, so he raised a sword and hacked the head off the nearest one. As the Rat's head, now free from its body, rolled along the floor the scuttling noises gave way to shrieks as three more rats jumped out of crevasses in the walls, one of them digging its teeth into Perry's shoulder. The room erupted into flailing weapons and gnashing teeth, with blood and bits of fur raining down. When the last rat was killed, only Crotch had suffered another minor bite and the heroes examined the pile of bodies that had been feeding their foes. The bodies appeared to be those of commoners, all of them bearing the same deeply carved symbol on their foreheads. The symbol was new to the group, none of them recalled ever coming across it's like in their collective experiences with history or lore, and there did not seem to be any magical energy, whether arcane or divine, present in the bodies.



The tunnel continued into another chamber roughly the same size, with an exit tunnel leading north. As the heroes proceeded into the room, they were met with the sight of a black rock, about a foot across, hovering in the center of the room about three feet off the floor. As crotch leaned in for a closer look, recognizing some basic Dwarven principles of levitation, Diamachus heard a familiar "thunk" echoing up from the way they had come. "We're being followed" he hissed, and as his three companions placed their hands on their weapons the black stone in the center of the room exploded with a force Crotch recognized as a "Shatter" spell, one he had in his very arsenal.



The caster had to be nearby, he realized as he landed in a heap against the wall. As the group picked themselves up they heard heavy footsteps coming from both hallways. "Shit, they've got us surrounded" spat Ganon, preparing himself for melee. To Ganon's surprise, Perry darted down the northern tunnel to meet their attackers head on. The Monk could see the back of the fleeing spellcaster as the robed man darted between two approaching stone-armored men, shrieking "PUNISH THEM!!!"

Perry rushed into the two approaching soldiers, landing a punch and manipulating his bodyweight to throw his opponent off his feet. This was a move Perry had practiced time and time again, and he could feel the perfection in his execution. Its failure to put the man on his back was indeed curious, but the man's Stone Morningstar, and that of his partner, swung wild passing far above Perry's head. Crotch backed in to a corner right next to the door they had entered through, and prepared to strike whoever came through the doorway first. He did not wait long, for two stone armored men quickly entered the room. One of them stopped and, in a low slurred monotone, said "We are da Bwinguz Of Woe. Pweepair to be punished for your cuwey-oss-uh-tea."



“Yea, we know these guys” Diamachus said to himself as he thrust his sword into the man’s back. He jumped back in time to avoid what he knew would be Crotch’s next move. The man in stone armor slowly turned to face Diamachus and raised his Stone Morningstar to strike but before he could bring it down in a skull crushing blow, Crotch’s shatter spell blasted the room with another shower of gravel and dust.

As Ganon made to follow Perry, he saw his friend put a tiny Halfling fist right through the stone armor of an enemy’s breastplate, just as easily as when the little Monk broke stone blocks while training. He followed with a killing strike, and the dead man’s stone armor crumbled to dirt. The pace of his charge became furious, however, when the armored man’s partner took two quick swings at the Halfling, one which sent him bouncing off the stone wall of the tunnel, the second catching him in midair and putting him straight down on the ground, out cold at the man’s feet. Ganon crashed into the man at full speed, leading with his shield and driving into the man with a force that could have leveled a building. Uncannily, the man did not yield an inch. They exchanged blows before the Paladin finally dispatched his opponent, who’s armor likewise deteriorated instantly.

As the cloud of dust settled in the chamber, Crotch and Diamachus were both startled to see that the two enemies were standing in exactly the same position as before his spell had erupted. He had centered the blast in the hall just behind them, focusing all of the concussive energy straight at them. By all means, they should have been blown clear across the room! Instead, they were virtually unfazed, each immediately dealing a sickening blow to their respective opponents. As Diamachus returned in kind, slaying his foe with two quick cuts, Crotch stepped back waving his hands in front of his face and blurting out the words which would cause his pursuing attacker to stop, and then drop his weapon as he doubled over in a fit of deep yet childish laughter interrupted only by the briefest of threats between breaths. Knowing this man would be useless as a prisoner, they quickly finished him off, observing the crumbling armor for themselves.

Ganon knelt beside Perry and placed his hand on his companion’s chest, imploring his deity to mend the broken Halfling. Perry came to with a gasp. Wide eyed, he took one deep breath and immediately scrambled after the wizard he had seen fleeing. “It’s Larrakh! It *has* to be! We have to *catch* him!”

From where they were, at the doorway of a room they had yet to explore, they could see two doors leading out of the room (one of which was wide open) and a statue in the center. Without pausing to take in his surroundings, Perry ran straight through the open door into a great room full of large stone monoliths, lighted by an open hooded lantern on the floor at the room’s center.



Scanning the room, he could see, from the ceiling, a large square of brown fabric hanging from something just behind a stalactite. It was the robe of the spellcaster. He was standing, suspended on the ceiling, trying to hide behind the conical stone pillar, his golden mask with the face of a gargoyle peeking out from behind the rock. He was apparently unaware that his cloak had remained unaffected by the spell and was hanging like a pennant. When he realized he had been spotted, he released a bubble of acid in the Monk's direction. Perry vaulted over the green liquid spread-eagle and, in mid split, threw a spear that bit into the man's side. The spear clattered to the floor, and at that very moment, all of the stone monoliths rose up a quarter inch off the floor and levitated. Larrakh fell next, the pain of his wound breaking the concentration necessary to maintain his spider-climb spell. He landed on one of the Monoliths, causing it to glide towards the north wall. As his companions rushed in to Perry's aid, they noted that the floor had begun to shake. Perry drew upon his Ki and focused, moving his feet into a specific stance. "Step of the wind" he whispered, and he could feel his body lighten. As if borne upon the wind itself, he jumped unnaturally high and landed on the stone monolith beside Larrakh, who had just recovered from his fall. Perry began to attack the man, but his strikes were compromised by the tremor that had begun to grow into a violent quake. Larrakh managed to stay clear of Perry's lightning quick strikes and jumped off the monolith, landing in the northwest corner of the room, well away from any of his attackers. The room continued to shake, rising in intensity and causing the ceiling to begin to break apart. Larrakh pointed to the Halfling monk still atop the monolith and screeched above the cacophony "the town of Red Larch be dammed, YOU will pay for this interference!" With the quake reaching a climax, the ground all around Larrakh became a violent tumble of moving rock and giant jagged teeth as a Bulette, the great fearsome land-shark, came crashing through the wall and floor. With one bite, the evil priest disappeared in the the monster's gaping maw. The creature turned and burrowed away with amazing speed into a tunnel that collapsed behind it.



As the creature retreated, they could feel the quake it had caused dying down. Stalactites and pieces of the ceiling continued to rain down, each one causing the monoliths to drop heavily onto the ground or lift back off, in turn. As crotch recalled seeing such a thing in the loading zone of an old Dwarven mine, Diamachus looked at what remained of the tunnel the creature had made. "It... it just ate him, and left?"

Gannon rubbed his head. "Was it just me, or did that thing have a... a *guy* on its back?"



Perry pulled the bloody and ragged cloth strips from around his fists. He unceremoniously let them fall to the floor. "There was *definitely* a guy on its back, and it didn't eat Larrakh, it *took* him. He escaped."

The tomb was silent. They searched the room they were in, finding six bodies, ancient, laid on slabs around the perimeter of the room. "These must be the 'Delvers'" Gannon said, resting a hand on a now inert stone archway. "What made the stones move like that?"

Crotch stomped his foot, and the stones immediately rose off the floor to hover, weightless.

"Its old mining magic, a utility used to move loads around. We could use something like this in Phandelver, right by the rail carts." Crotch said, stamping his foot to return them to the ground.

They tended their wounds and, finding no other way out, explored the room they had run through, a long minute ago. The statue they had passed was a petrified dwarf with a pile of coins, jewelry, and other tributes beneath it. There were signs of ritual and ceremony, but no real magical power seemed to be present, save one dagger, dried blood still coating the blade. The dagger was decorated with star motifs, and the name "Reszur" was graven on the pommel. Upon reading the name aloud, Diamachus noted that the dagger began to give off a faint, cold glow. When he tested the blade for sharpness and balance, he realized that the dagger made absolutely no noise as it came into contact with other objects, even when he tapped it against the stone wall. "Well isn't *this* a sneaky little tool..." He said, slipping it into his belt.

To the east a door led to a small chamber where Grund sat on a stool, next to a steel door's eye-slit. Behind him, a row of levers lined the wall, each attached to a chain which disappeared into the ceiling. He turned, obviously startled and scrambling for his weapon until he noticed Perry in his cloak. "Sir! I dinna know you were a Believer!" He smiled only for a second, "but Harburk says the believers were the bad guys... should you be here?"

"Its fine, we're working for Harburk. He wanted us to find out what's really down here." Diamachus said, with a smile and a handshake. "My good man, what's really down here?"

Grund smiled back, "well tonight that gold mask guy is really down here."

“Not anymore, but we *will* find him and he *will* die by my hand!”

All conversation stopped and every head turned to the Halfling monk standing in the doorway.

“This, I swear!”

