

Dramatis Personae:

Mo - Goliath Bard (College of Lore)

Orryk - Forest Gnome Monk (Way of the Four Elements, variant)

Fiona - Half-Elf Wizard (Evoker)

Taman - Human (variant) Rogue (Inquisitive)

Joybell - Forest Gnome Paladin (Oath of the Ancients)

Imaktis - Turtle Cleric (Nature)/Shadow Sorcerer

GM: - Everyone Else

19 Sunnin 748 (Campaign day 20) (immediately after the previous)

Everyone reassembled on the street outside the back entrance to Black Irnod's -- with the Orcphans now safe with us.

As we walked back to the Flaming Quill, Joybell talked to the child, Turlk, who could speak common about the situation they were now in. She was trying to convey to them that they were safe with us -- though starting that off with "Bad things were about to happen to you" may not have been the best conversational gambit.

Turlk told us that they were from a tribe called the Jagged Swords. The Masks came and grabbed the children. Turlk remembered seeing them torching the village as they were being carried away. They traveled for a week or so from the village then they met up with a weird looking person who made a teleportation circle and they appeared in the House of Masks in Pelsoreen. (That is not how Turlk described it.)

Which means we can't glean from that where they're from.

Imaktis asked how Turlk learned to speak common. He said that some members of the tribe had parents or grandparents who were half-orcs and they were traders with the surrounding villages and spoke common.

Orryk pulled out a map and asked Turlk if he knew where on the continent his village was, but it was apparent the kid had never seen a map before and/or didn't know the geography of the continent. He was able to tell us that there were mountains and they could see snow-caps on the mountains. And when they arrived in the teleportation circle in Pelsoreen their ears popped.

Unfortunately, there are a number of mountain ranges on the continent where they could be from and since a teleportation circle was involved in getting them to Pelsoreen, we have no way of knowing where their village was.

Mo asked Turlk if they'd like to go back to their village or if they'd like to go to another orc village or what. Turlk and the other children were just...overwhelmed by the whole situation and unable to give a solid answer to that.

When we got to the Flaming Quill, we arranged for a second room across the hall from our room (because six adults, six children, and a large wolf in one room seemed like it would be a tight fit). We also arranged for food for the children.

Imaktis suggested seeing if Jorly would raise the kids in exchange for them working at the inn, but the rest of us were not fans of that idea. Joybell wanted the children with orcs, so they'd be raised in their proper culture. Mo wanted them out of Pelsoreen, because it's awful.

We asked Jorly if he knew of anyone who could help us and he told us about a tribe of orcs and half-orcs in Pelsoreen at the base of Bloom Cliffs near Ovverway. They're called the Cracked Shield tribe. The tribe mostly makes a living by working as mercenaries. Jorly had done business with them and found them to be good to work with.

Imaktis expressed some concern at taking them to become part of a tribe of mercenaries.

Mo: I'm not sure what the difference is between us and mercenaries.

Orryk: Mercenaries get paid up front.

Mo then called for a party caucus regarding what our moral line was.

Mo: Are we okay with children being slaughtered.

Joybell: NO!

Orryk: I'm not okay with taking on a continent-wide guild of assassins unprepared.

20 Sunnin 748 (Campaign day 21)

The next morning we had breakfast then took the children to a temple of The Joyful (an order focused on the Life, Luck, and Nature domains) to see if they could watch the kids for a few hours while we went to check out the Cracked Shield Orcs to see if they'd be able to care for them and if we were comfortable giving the children to them.

The cleric in the temple spoke to the children in Orcish and they lit up at hearing their own language.

We spoke to the cleric a bit about orcs in general, about the Jagged Sword Orcs the children were taken from, and the Cracked Shield Orcs in Pelsoreen. He told us that orcish culture was

devastated by the Severance, because they were so connected to their gods. Historically they had been driven by their gods to violence and sort of continual war against the other races. Since the Severance they've been in more of a struggle to survive and remain orcs without that. He said that they fit in well here in Pelsoreen, for what that's worth. Mo asked if they own slaves and we were told that they don't make enough money to buy them (other than occasionally buying an orc and manumitting them or otherwise arranging their freedom) and they don't appear to take debt slaves -- if someone shorts them in a deal, they just kill them.

We headed off to the Cracked Shields -- into a neighborhood where the houses were more spread out. We found a compound with several houses inside one large solid-wood fence. From what we could see over the fence, the houses looked about the same as the others in the area architecturally. On the outside of the fence, we noted copper plaques for all five Corporations.

The fence had an actual door in it, so Joybell knocked on the door. A half-orc answered almost immediately. We told him that we'd rescued six orc children from the House of Masks. He growled in response.

We asked to speak to a tribal leader or council perhaps, because we want to make sure the children will be well cared for and we needed help with that.

He told us to wait then went inside, leaving the door open. Inside the door was a room built into the fence that was somewhere between a reception room and a guard room. It appeared that they generally have someone on duty at the door.

He came back about five minutes later with an elderly orc who introduced himself as Rask, as he stepped out onto the street and closed the door behind him.

Joybell: Do you know anything about the Masks?

Rask: [ground-rattling growl]

Joybell: I'm right there with you! Exactly!

Joybell told Rask that we had rescued these children from the Masks. We made it clear that we wanted the children to go to a very good home where they'd be cared for and learn how to be orcs.

Joybell: They say they're from the Jagged Swords. Do you know where they're from?

Rask: They've come a long way.

We told him that we believed that the village was destroyed. Or perhaps that it was there available to be moved into if the tribe wanted to leave Pelsoreen. Rask didn't seem to be overly interested in that, though he said they'd consider it.

Mo: Is the tribe strong and healthy?

Rask: Mostly. We are mostly a tribe of people brought here against our will. We are former slaves who have bought ourselves free. We are cracked in various ways, but we have not been broken.

Mo: Are you accepting new members?

Rask: We are always accepting new members.

We asked a bit about how they live in the city and Rask said that they have learned to fit in but that they also do what they can to remain orcs.

We had a really good feeling about Rask and the Cracked Shields as a new home for the children, so we asked if perhaps some people could come with us to meet the kids -- perhaps an older child so they'd feel comfortable and safe. We were afraid of walking with them through the city and being attacked and having to defend them.

Rask went away for a bit, then returned with a younger orc woman and a couple of children, about the same age as the Orcphans. He said there were some warriors getting ready to come with us and they were preparing a cart.

While we were waiting for them, we talked with Rask about the House of Masks. He began growling again and was obviously Angry With Rage. He said that many members of the Cracked Shield had had occasion to tangle with the Masks, but they had never done so in Pelsoreen.

Some members of the tribe doing mercenary work outside of Pelsoreen had encountered them. He said that they are monstrous -- they heal like trolls, but fire and acid have no effect on them. Taman mentioned that they appear to think with one mind. Rask agreed with that and said that they work as one -- if many of them gang up on one target then it goes badly.

When Rask encountered them, there were spellcasters who slowed down the Masks, which are Goliath sized, holding them off and allowing the rest of the group to escape. They were braver, he said, than he thought spellcasters could be. There was an elf woman who cussed more than he thought possible and he heard the ringing of many many bells.

(We recognized those as Vicious Mockery and Toll the Dead -- which means psychic and necrotic damage. That confirms what Barnett told us about necrotic damage being good against them.)

Orryk: Because you fought them in one place, do the ones here seem to recognize you as a threat?

Rask: They don't seem to.

That's good news.

The escort then arrived -- 8 orcs and half-orcs in splint and chain armor with weapons out. Rask, the woman (to whom we were not introduced) and the kids rode in the cart and we all walked together to The Joyful Temple. Taman and Orryk kept watch around us for any problems.

At the temple, we asked Turlk and the other children to come outside. The greeting with the Cracked Shield Orcs was full of joy and warmth. It was a happy moment and Joybell cried with joy and relief for the children.

Mo: If you need us you can reach us via Administrator Alighieri in Embernook.

Joybell: Please send us a message from time to time letting us know how they're doing.

Rask agreed to keep in touch.

After the orcs and Orphans left, we walked down the street that the House of Masks was on -- simple pedestrians walking -- to see what was on the the street around them. Across the street from the House of Masks were a haberdashery/millinery store, a pantry/dry goods store, and a leather worker. None of which was at all helpful for Fiona and Orryk hanging out for a couple of hours and observing the place. Dang it.

It was early afternoon, so we went to Thani-Breel, the library with the collection focused on magical theory and the planes. We knew that there was a test of knowledge to get in, which was five essay questions on aspects of magic -- magical theory, magic in history, magic's interaction with religion and how magic and nature affect one another. Mo, Imaktis, Fiona and Orryk sat for the test, while Taman and Joybell went to talk to Black Irnod about the Masks, since he seemed to know something about them.

Before Joybell and Taman left Thani-Breel, Mo gave Joybell some questions he wanted her to ask Black Irnod. What did Tarly (Irnod's apprentice) want with them? How much did he pay? And who else buys children? Joybell committed those to memory.

The testing took most of the afternoon. Orryk, Imaktis, and Fiona passed and got library cards that would allow them to return whenever they wanted to. Mo alas did not.

Meanwhile, at Black Irnod's, Joybell went to the reception desk inside the front door and rang the bell. When Black Irnod came out, she pulled out the jar of Gribbly Monster Bits she'd collected at Harl's house in Kalmarn before the monster's remains disappeared into a mist.

Joybell: Hi. We met last night -- you gave me the orc children that the Masks brought to your assistant, Tarly. I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about them. I don't have a corpse, but I have these pieces of a monster that had tentacles and a nasty beak. It was with some cultists who worship (or something) the Hunger Between Worlds.

Black Irnod told her that he'd heard of the monster and that it's called a Starspawn Mangler. Which is probably a better name than Gribbly Monster. He said he'd never gotten a chance to look at one.

Once he accepted her payment, Joybell asked him questions about the House of Masks and how they operate. As we had gotten from the drunk in the bar the day before -- hiring them is just a matter of going to their "storefront" and placing an order. They usually get paid some money up front and more when the job is finished. Tarly, the assistant who ordered the Orcphans, had clearly paid before any of the children were taken into the building, because the Masks left without requiring any further payment.

When asked why Tarly wanted them, Irnod said that he assumed Tarly thought he would learn something by vivisecting them. He had no idea how much Tarly paid for them. When asked why people might want children he said that people might need children for a ritual element, perhaps. Or they might have them kidnapped for ransom. There are also elements here who keep slaves where it is not a matter of paying off a debt. Genies might pay to get kids. The Dao in particular might be interested in children of more subterranean races to work in their mines.

Then they had one of the most important conversations of Joybell's life:

Black Irnod: Why are you asking about them?

Taman: Because we want to kill them.

Black Irnod: That's refreshingly honest.

Joybell: They destroyed my village.

Black Irnod: You can claim vendetta.

Joybell: I can?!?! Really?

He reiterated the advice we'd gotten before about not letting them surround you. At this Joybell remembered Barnett's description of being in a "swarm of Goliaths". He said to make sure we have spellcasters.

He also told us that they will react differently to psychic and necrotic damage than we might be expecting, but not to be discouraged by it, because that is the key to dealing with them.

We then thanked him and left.

Back at the library, having failed the test to get in, Mo walked out the door and around the block, casting invisibility on himself when out of sight of the library. He walked back to the library and entered. As soon as he walked in the door, his clothing and gear all became visible again, though Mo himself remained invisible.

Mo: Well, this is suboptimal.

Then he turned around and left without missing a beat, going back to the Flaming Quill to play some music to make a bit of money. He met up with Joybell and Taman relaxing there.

Fiona, Imaktis, and Orryk got a bit of an introduction to Thani-Breel - just enough to learn that it's as big as the Demasthy, but the layout is a bit different. Thani-Breel will let them bring in a guest when they return.

Then they joined up with the others at the Flaming Quill and we shared information about what we'd learned. Including that Joybell had an actual legit vendetta against the Masks and we could kill them. We began to start making plans to do so. Including sorting out who had what spells that would be useful. Imaktis had Toll The Dead, which does necrotic damage. Mo had Vicious Mockery, which does psychic damage. Both cantrips they could cast all day. Joybell had Wrathful Smite, which does psychic damage, but she could only cast that four times.

We decided to have Orryk go in and talk to the Masks to see if he could learn anything. And to give Taman an opportunity to try and get into the building invisibly. He wasn't going to lie and pretend that he was ordering a bunch of kids, because he isn't a good liar. Instead, the plan was for him to talk to them truthfully and give Taman a chance to get inside. Taman used his potion of invisibility and had the Cape of the Mountebank, so he could dimension door out of the building if he got into a tight spot. If it got really bad, the plan was for him to grab Orryk before bamfing out, if possible, otherwise he was to go and leave Orryk to get out on his own.

The rest of the party was in the alleys on either side of the building, out of sight.

Orryk went into the House of Masks, holding the door open for an extra moment to let Taman enter. There were two Masks inside, one standing about 10 feet from a desk with two chairs

and the other near a closed inner door that lead to the rest of the building. They turned to look at Orryk in unison.

Orryk: Do you deal in information? I'm looking for items that control elementals.

Masks (in unison): That is not something we do.

While they were talking, Taman sneaked over to the desk to see if there were any papers on top of it, but there was nothing especially interesting to him. The interior door was the only way out of the room other than the main entrance, and that door was closed with a Mask standing about five feet in front of it.

Orryk: If I find information about the location of something of interest to me, do you do acquisitions? I won't be able to acquire the items myself if they are heavily defended.

Masks (in unison): You want burglars. We do acquisitions, but not of that nature. We do wetwork.

Taman snuck around to the side of the room near the interior door, hoping to be able to pass through if one of them opened it. One of the Masks turned to look directly at Taman. In response the other moved to immediately in front of the door and began looking around.

(Note: So the one sensed Taman (probably heard him) and the other knew he'd picked something up, but didn't know what. Which means that they share thoughts but not senses.)

Orryk: That's unfortunate. Can you recommend anyone?

Masks (in unison): We cannot help you.

Orryk, having taken the conversation as far as he could, started walking toward the door. After he left, the Mask that had sensed Taman looked at him and they said, in unison: It's time for you to go.

Taman went.

We all went back to the Flaming Quill, keeping an eye out for anyone to be following us. Which no one was.

Taman decided to go hide on a roof across the street from the House of Masks to keep an eye on things and see if he could learn anything. In preparation for that, Orryk gave him the party's Gloves of Climbing and Swimming. We rested for an hour at the Flaming Quill, during which time Taman attuned with the gloves.

Orryk also reminded us that we had a Potion of Clairvoyance, so we could get a peek inside the House beyond that closed door before we went in.

While we were resting and talking, we decided to see if the Cracked Shield Orcs wanted to help us take on the Masks. We also decided that we were going to move first thing in the morning. An open and legitimate vendetta doesn't need to be pursued under cover of night.

While Taman was heading off to watch the House of Masks for a while, the rest of us went to talk to the Cracked Shield. On the way, we agreed that Mo would do most of the talking because he's the most persuasive of us.

When we got to the door, Mo asked the door guard (a different half-orc than earlier in the day) if we could speak to Rask. The door guard went to get him.

When Rask appeared, Joybell jumped in before Mo could talk.

Joybell: Before you get started, I want to say first that I found out that I have an actual legitimate vendetta against the Masks so we're planning on going and busting them up some and you know killing them and the children may have a vendetta too and maybe you want to help and I'm gonna let Mo talk now.

Mo: So...what are you doing tomorrow morning?

Rask asked if we were sure we had the right kind of magic. We assured him that three members of our group would be able to cast the right kinds of magic.

At that, Rask said that some members of the Cracked Shield had a vendetta against the Masks. Some of their orcs would meet us at an inn between their place and the House of Masks at first light.

On the way back to the Flaming Quill, we went to Turalee, the herbalist in Bloom Cliffs that had been recommended to Mo by the priest of the Purveyors and Wrights

Mo: I've seen some poisons that do damage that's necrotic in nature. I was wondering if you have anything like that.

Joybell, whispering: Nice! Good thinking.

Turalee: I don't have anything like that, though there are poisons that do it.

She also didn't have, or wouldn't admit to having, poisons that did paralysis or that made people unconscious.

Fiona and Mo bought potions of healing and we returned to the Flaming Quill to wait for Taman to show up.

Taman stayed on the roof for a couple of hours and, seeing nothing of interest, returned to the Quill. Once he was back with the rest of us, Joybell gave him and Orryk each one of the potions of healing she made.

21 Sunnin 748 (Campaign day 22)

Mask-killing time!!

Mo and Joybell were so excited!!

We met up with six orcs of the Cracked Shields at their chosen place and discussed tactics. The tactical decisions we made in advance were that we wanted to focus fire on one at a time because reducing their numbers would be important. Orryk pointed out that we don't know how their "moving in unison" works, so if one seemed to react or move little bit, even a split second, before the others we wanted to focus on that one because that might be a coordinator or hub of the collective.

While we were at the bar, Orryk quaffed the Potion of Clairvoyance, putting the sensor just on the other side of the door from the House of Masks front room into the unknown rear of the establishment. He could see what looked like a storage room with shelves of rations and a cabinet with doors. Outside the room was what looked like a large open area and a small cart, possibly the one we'd seen them transport the Orcphans in, parked inside the building.

As he watched through the clairvoyance, Orryk could see Masks walking around and doing things - getting rations off the shelf, moving things around. He got the impression that maybe there were four of them inside. But he wasn't at all sure.

At the building, we decided to split our forces, so we wouldn't get bottled up trying to get through the door from the front room into the back. Mo, Joybell and four of the Cracked Shield went to the back door, breaking some boards out of the fence as needed to get through. Fiona, Orryk, Taman, Imaktis and two orcs went to the front door.

When we were all in place, Joybell yelled, "Vendetta for the Wold!! " at the top of her lungs, then kicked in the back door.

When he heard the yell, Taman opened the front door. There were 3 Masks in the front room. Taman, throwing caution to the wind, ran into the room and held his attack until one of the party was engaged with a Mask.

In the back of the building, Mo cast vicious mockery on the nearer of the 2 Masks (running total: **5 Masks**) in the large back room. The information we'd gotten about psychic damage was clearly correct, because it got a derpy look on its face and Mo thought he could see a wisp of smoke coming out of an ear. It also was stunned and unable to do anything.

Awesome!!

Joybell moved in and got a nice big crit on one, kneecapping the goliath-sized humanoid that towered over her.

Unfortunately, then she found herself surrounded by both of the ones in the back, though one of them missed with both of its attacks and the one that had been mocked just stood there, smoking a little, coming to after a few seconds (at the end of its turn).

Taman was in a much worse position, surrounded by all three of the ones up front. The first one attacked twice. Taman used all of his dodging ability and his luck to try and avoid the damage. The second one, hitting in unison on the same places, dropped him. The third nudged him with a boot, shrugged, then turned to look at the door.

Orryk went in, acrobatically tumbling over the desk and beat on one of them, landing a stunning strike that immobilized it. Sweet!! Imaktis followed that up with some healing words for Taman, then cast toll the dead on another one. Toll the dead had a similar effect to Mo's vicious mockery -- leaving the Mask stunned for a time.

Taman, healed and conscious again, took his held attack from the ground and missed.

Then the Cracked Shield Orcs went in -- four in the back and two in the front, all raging in a mighty berserker fury. In the front, one jumped nimbly on the table in the front room, hitting high. The other one also got a good hit after going around the table.

In the back the four orcs moved in on the stunned Mask and pounded on it with two crits and another regular hit, badly injuring that one.

In front, Fiona dropped a fireball into the front room (from well outside the door of the building), elegantly sculpting the flames to avoid the party members and the orcs but doing a lot of damage to the Masks, none of which saved. The one Orryk stunned fell, smoldering, to the ground with smoke coming out of his ears..

Taman finally got to stand up, disengage from the combat, and move out of the scrum so he could take a healing potion.

In the back, Mo viciously mocked the same Mask again, stunning it and leaving it vulnerable to the orcs' pummeling. Then he moved inside the building and found a good spot behind his "new orc best friend".

Joybell cast wrathful smite, which would do one of the right kinds of damage on a hit, only she missed with both of her attacks. Fortunately, the Mask in front of her missed with both of its attacks as well.

In front, Imaktis used a shield spell to hold off an attack but took a crit from another one.

Another Mask appeared at the bottom of the stairs to the second floor, but wasn't able to get into combat. (Running total: **6 Masks**)

With one down in the front room, Orryk moved to a second one, but missed with all of his attacks, which totally sucked. (The Masks were hard to hit. And had regeneration and some vicious advanced pack tactics. Nasty.)

Imaktis cast toll the dead on the one that Orryk had attacked and missed, stunning it, though he noticed that the actual damage wasn't as much as he would have expected.

The orcs in the front room attacked the one Imaktis had stunned -- one got a crit and the other got in a really good hit. In the back, there were three hits from the four orcs, including a crit that did maximum damage, dropping one of the Masks (though it hadn't taken any psychic or necrotic damage this round). It was a good round for the Cracked Shield.

Fiona, still outside the building, fired a Melf's Acid Arrow at one of the Masks, but the arrow missed.

Taman snuck in on one that was already engaged with other party members and got in a good hit, but it didn't fall. It was wobbling, but stayed up.

Mo viciously mocked the one that had dropped in the back, to prevent it from regenerating this turn.

Joybell, with the wrathful smite still going, missed with her first swing but hit with the second. The psychic damage stunned the Mask and the wrath of her smiting left it afraid of her.

Then the Masks got their turn. In the back room, one died, and the one in front of Joybell was too stunned to attack. The Mask at the bottom of the stairs charged at the orcs, hitting one with a big swing. We could also see another take its place at the bottom of the stairs (running total: **7 Masks**).

In the front room, one was stunned and unable to attack. It shook that off at the end of the round. The other one regenerated, and attacked Orryk twice for a lot of damage, but he was still standing.

Orryk then swung back at it and got a stunning strike in on it with his first attack. Then he focused on attacking that one while it was stunned. After that, he moved through the door toward the back room, figuring that the orcs and the rest of the party could handle the situation in the front room.

Imaktis cast toll the dead on the other one (the one Taman had left badly hurt and which had not regenerated) and it fell over twitching briefly before finally subsiding.

The two Cracked Shield orcs in the front room attacked the one that Orryk stunned, one of them moving around the Mask so that both of them could attack and take advantage of it being stunned. Despite both of them hitting (one with a crit) they didn't actually manage to drop it.

The four orcs in the back focused their attack on the one which had just charged into the fray (#6), which was otherwise unhurt. Two of them missed but two hit.

Fiona, still outside, cast magic missile on the one that Orryk stunned, but it still didn't drop. Then Taman moved to it and got a lucky crit on a sneak attack. It dropped, but was going to regenerate.

Mo, realizing that while he could stun one with his vicious mockery, it would recover immediately after on their turn, held his spell until after the end of their turn.

Joybell seeing that she had two of them on her, maintained concentration on the wrathful smite (so that the fearful one would be at disadvantage attacking), but missed with both of her swings.

On the Masks' turn, one of the two in the front room died. The one that was just dropped by Taman's sneak attack regenerated, but was still prone and stunned (by Orryk's stunning strike) and neither attacked nor stood up.

The one in the back that the Cracked Shield were focusing on moved away from them, drawing three opportunity attacks from them, to Joybell. Unfortunately, only one of those attacks hit. The one that had just gotten to the base of the stairs the previous round also moved up on Joybell. Then that pack of three attacked her, moving in unison and hitting her over and over in the same place -- two of them each did one hit but the third, the fearful one, hit her twice (despite the disadvantage) and Joybell got dropped by the swarm of goliaths.

Another Mask appeared at the bottom of the stairs (final total: **8 Masks**).

Orryk came through the storeroom into the back room and threw one of the beads from the Necklace of Fireballs so that it caught two of the ones that had dropped Joybell and the new one at the bottom of the stairs. It was a big fireball (30 points of damage) and dropped the one that Joybell had smited. The other two were able to dodge out of the way, but still took damage.

Imaktis cast toll the dead on the Mask in the front room that had regenerated the previous turn, then he went through the door into the storeroom heading to the back.

Mo viciously mocked the one on Joybell that hadn't been involved in the fireball, using his held action.

The orcs in the front room finished off the one remaining Mask up there -- one of them critting it while it was prone and stunned. The other hit it in his rage as he went by, then both of them headed into the back of the building, the front having been cleared.

The orcs in the back focused their attacks on the one Mo stunned with his vicious mockery, but only one hit.

Fiona entered the building!

Taman, still injured, found a position behind the orcs and threw a dagger at one of the ones that had been in the fireball, but it went wide.

Mo healed Joybell then mocked the one that had been dropped by the fireball so it would stay dead. Joybell, really, really angry now, stood up, cast wrathful smite again, and hit the one in the pack on her that wasn't stunned. Which left all of the three surrounding her stunned and unable to attack on their turn. (Which was very good because she was still badly hurt.)

On their turn, one of the Masks, the last one to come down the stairs, healed some of the damage it had taken from the fireball and moved up and attacked one of the Cracked Shield, but missed.

Thank goodness, because the Cracked Shield Orcs were amazing and made this whole vendetta-raid on the House of Masks possible.

Two of the Masks died (the last one in the front room and one on Joybell) and two of them that had been stunned recovered, but couldn't attack. At this point only three remained (of eight). Of the three one looked about half gone, one looked lightly singed by the fireball and one was not badly hurt.

Orryk went to attack the more badly hurt of the remaining three -- only one of his hits got through but he was able to get a stunning strike with that hit, disabling it for the round. Imaktis then moved into the room and tolled the dead on the same one, leaving it even more damaged, thoroughly stunned, and with its regeneration disabled for the round.

Then the Cracked Shields went -- the two that had been in the front room came into a situation where there was no room for them to get into combat, so they ended their rage and moped off to the side. Two of the other four hit hit on the stunned one, but two missed. That Mask was looking badly hurt, but not at death's door.

Fiona did a double move to get to where she could cast spells into the back room.

Taman attacked the slightly singed looking one, but missed. Mo decided that doing a lot of damage to both would be better than stunning one, so he blew his flute and cast shatter (at level 3) on the two least damaged looking ones. Then he inspired Joybell.

Joybell hit the most damaged looking one (the one that Orryk stunned and the orcs were focusing on), dropping it (it had taken a toll the dead and would not be regenerating), then cast wrathful smite and hit the other one she could reach (the least damaged of the ones remaining), stunning it with her wrath.

On the Masks' turn one died, one was stunned, and one regenerated. The one who regenerated turned and attacked Taman, missing once. The second swing would have hit except Mo said some cutting words to him and his swing faltered and ultimately missed.

Out of Ki points, Orryk threw some darts at the one Joybell stunned with her wrathful smite, hitting with both, then he moved out of melee.

Imaktis moved into the room and cast toll the dead on the one that had regenerated, stunning it and leaving it vulnerable. Immediately, two of the orcs attacked it, one of them hitting it. The other two attacked the one that Joybell stunned and one of them got a hit.

Joybell, seeing that the two orcs who had been in the front room were uncertain how to help, asked them to bash up the teleportation circle we'd seen when we entered the back room. They got to work on that.

Fiona cast a very powerful fireball to get the two standing Masks -- both of them were stunned and failed their saves, taking 38 points of damage. One of them fell, smoldering, and would die on their turn.

The other remained standing and Taman took a swing at it, doing 21 points of damage. Despite looking like it was about to fall over, it stayed up. Then Mo used two charges off his Wand of Magic Missiles and dropped it.

Both of them died a few seconds later (on their turn).

We all took a deep breath and Mo took the mask off one of their faces. Underneath was a Goliath-sized human, but one with acromegaly (note: think Andre the Giant). Looking at all of them, we could see that the faces were not identical.