Faerun Diverge

This is a novelization of a D&D campaign I played in. Some events are paraphrased because I forgot or missed what happened, and some events are intentionally changed to add dramatic effect or flow or better as a story. Each chapter is based on a single session. I hope you enjoy the story of this campaign!

Content warning: blood, gore, sex

# Chapter 1 – The Emporer

A human paladin rode his warhorse up the cliffside path near the sea. The chainmail on his chest and around his horse’s body clink-clinked with each stride, and the battle-axe on his back shook. He held his horse’s mane in one hand and a shield in the other. The flowers on his white shield jostled as if they were about to fall off, but their sturdy roots grounded them onto the shield. The white shield, paint chipped as it were, still proudly displayed the sun and field symbol of Lathander. The paladin’s long golden hair flowed in the wind. He pulled the shield to his face and took a deep breathe. The flowers’ aroma and the sea air pleasured his wide nostrils. “Life,” he smiled.

He rode several miles on the path, galloping the whole way. The morning sun shone brilliantly, casting his shadow towards the cliffedge. The cloudless sky let Lathander’s full sunny smile bare down on the path in front of him and the many travelers therin. The paladin passed many a traveler on the way: merchants, mercenaries, tourists. All starting their day under Lathander’s faithful watch. The paladin paid them no mind, except for maybe a “G’day” here and a “Good morning!” there.

But one traveler in particular caught his eye. Up ahead, what can only be described as bipedal lion walked up the path, head low, but mane in full display. He carried a halberd that he used as both his walking stick and a means to carry his knapsack.

“Hey, I want to talk to that lion.” He patted his horse on the neck, pointing just up ahead.

The horse nodded, and slowed down to a walk next to the lion.

“Pardon me, but I have never seen a creature as spectacular as you. Are you a lion?” The paladin lowered his shield to the lion’s level.

The lion looked up at him, but kept walking. The lion spoke in a tongue unknown to the paladin, but seemed friendly. Sensing the paladin’s confusion, the lion switched to a different language, but the paladin still didn’t understand.

“/Do you speak Sylvan?/” The paladin asked in Sylvan.

“/Ah, yes I do./” The lion smiled. “/I learned the language from centaurs and satyrs in a forest about two years ago./”

“/Excellent. I learned it from the Fae myself./”

“/Well, that’s what they are. Centaurs and satyrs are also Fae./”

“/Yes of course./” The paladin nodded, despite not previously knowing that. “/So, where are you heading?/”

“/I’m actually heading to this town called Waterdeep. I’m trying to get some extra coin to…/” The lion let out a low rumbling while he thought. “/Let’s just say, do an important task.\”

The paladin slaps his knee and hops off his horse. Walking between his horse and the lion, his 7’2” height was more apparent. “/What luck! I’m also heading to Waterdeep. I heard they need some zombies killed.\”

“/Well that’s good! I heard there’s a 200 gold offer for those that join the hunt./” The lion extends a paw to the paladin. “/I’m Jack by the way./”

The paladin vigorously shakes Jack’s paw. “/I’m Larkwren Olivento Lightbrew. I’m here to bring life and kill death. Please to make your acquaintance, Jack./”

“/Likewise./” Jack sniffs the flowers on Larkwren’s shield. “/What do you worship? Or like, who?/” He gestures to the symbol on Larkwren’s shield.

Larkwren dons a huge smile. “/Lathander! The god of Dawn, Renewal, Spring!/” He traces the symbol: first the sun, the horizon, and then the fields. “/And who do you serve?/” He nods at Jack’s necklace.

Jack grimaces. “/I serve under Aslan, the Lion Spirit./”

“/What is he the god of?/”

“/He’s not a god; just an animal spirit, that I serve./”

“/An animal spirit? I can get behind that! Welcome brother in life!/” Larkwren pats Jack on the back, and Jack nearly drops his halberd. “You know, one time I saved a lion from poachers. There was a group of orcs cornering this *gorgeous* lion. It had a huge puffy mane and big muscular limbs. The poor thing was scared to death. The orcs had stabbed it repeatedly and it was taking its final breathes./”

Jack looked disturbed.

“/But that’s when I came in! I rode in on Cloverbraid here./” He patted his horse on the neck. “/I sliced the orcs up good, and saved the lion from being killed. Right before it took its final breathe, Lathander intervened. He blessed my hand, and through me he healed the wounds of the lion. That lion lived to breathe—and breed—another day. Last time I saw him, he had already sired five lion cubs./”

“/Oh, well that’s good./” Jack said. “/If I ever finish this task in the future…/” He paused for a moment to think. “Let’s just say that I’ll give you a pass./”

“/A pass? I’ve always wanted one of those!/” Larkwren whispered to Jack, “/What does a pass do?/”

Jack whispers back, “/You’ll know when, if ever, that day comes. That’s all I can say./”

“/Well then I shall be glad to help you accomplish this important task. What do you have to do?/”

“/Unfortunately, I can’t tell others what I have to do to finish this important task. But I assure you, when it is finished, you will be astonished./” Jack looked at the sky.

“/It’s ok, brother. I understand./” He lightly patted Jack on the shoulder. “/Share it when you are ready./”

Jack shook his head. “/I don’t think I can until it is finished./” He looked ahead. “/Well, what’s yours?/”

“/My task is clear, but difficult./” Larkwren looked at the ground. “/I doubt I will accomplish it within my lifetime./”

“/What is it?/”

“/To bring life, and… to kill death. But the forces of death are strong./”

“/Oh okay, yeah. That’s going to be tough./”

They walked to the front gates of Waterdeep on the south side of the city. The gate was guarded by two guards. One held a clipboard and the other held a spear.

“Pass?” He looked at Larkwren.

“No, I haven’t gotten it yet.”

The guard sighed, flipping through his clipboard. “Name?”

“I am Larkwren Olivento Lightbrew! I am here to bring life and kill death!”

“That’s great.” The guard said, absentmindedly. He wrote the name on the paper. He shifted his weight. “Just a moment, have to make sure you aren’t a criminal.”

“I can assure you, I’m not.”

“Well then you might want to avoid the Dock Ward. It’s a cesspool of criminal activity.” The guard gestured to an area of the city visible from the gate.

“They carry diseases down there?”

“No. Not any that should concern you.” The paper the guard was looking at scribbled a checkmark onto itself. The guard flipped through more papers and held out a slip the size of an identification card. “Here’s your pass. It’s good for one month. If you go to the admin building, you can get a permanent one.”

“Thanks.” Larkwren took the pass and looked at it.

LARREN LITDEW IS HEREBY PERMITTED TO ENTER WATERDEEP FOR ONE (1) MONTH STARTING ON THIS DAY, THE 7TH OF CHESS. REASON: ZOMBIE SLAYING

Larkwren smiled. “Ah, so this is a pass.”

“Yes.”

“Which way to the palace?”

“Take High Road up to Waterdeep Way, then it will be on your left.”

“Highway up to Waterdeep Road, got it.” Larkwren nodded. He led his horse through the gate.

Jack soon got through the gate too, going through a similar process.

“/I got a pass./” Larkwren held up the pass.

“/So did I./” Jack showed it before placing it in his knapsack.

“Do you need a guide?” A lady guard on the inside approached them.

“No, I know where I’m going.” Larkwren nodded to the Dock Ward.

“You don’t want to go there, sir.”

“I’m just going to check to see if they have diseases or not. Real quick.”

“No, you don’t want to go there.”

“Thanks.” Larkwren brushed off the lady guard. He walked with Cloverbraid and Jack to the Dock Ward.

“Guards!” The lady guard yelled. Two guards also on the inside came to her side. “Please escort this adventurer and his party to the throne room.”

The guards escorted Larkwren, despite his unwillingness, and his two friends. They got to the castle and went inside.

There, they waited in the lobby for a meeting with the emporer. After a while, several more adventurers arrived. Two short humans with cat ears and a tail walked in with a giant armored soldier.

“Hello!” Larkwren greeted them. “I’m Larkwren Olivento Lightbrew. I’m here to bring life and kill death!” He held out his hand to the armored soldier.

The soldier stood there. Its glassy grey eyes stared into Larkwren’s through the tiny gaps in its helmet. Its wood-jointed armored arms hung at its side. Its metal plating was covered in moss from head to toe. A little smiley face had been smudged out of the moss on the side of its shoulder where it couldn’t see. The sword on its back matched the shape of the sword symbol etched into its shield, which also had the same sigil carved into it as the being’s chest. The armored soldier didn’t say anything, but rigidly moved its hand up to greet Larkwren, but didn’t connect with his hand.

Larkwren met him where he was at, and shook his metal hand. It barely moved an inch. “Nice to meet you, metal man.” Larkwren then turned to the cat people.

The first cat person had a large red hat with a long white feather. Her cat ears laid flat under her wide-brimmed hat. Her long blonde hair poured out of her hat, stretching down to her blonde-furred tail. He red robe was lined with gold seems and pockets, with sleeves stretching down her arms to her black leather gloves. Each hand rested on a rapier on either side of her hips. “I’m Miko, and I’m here to kill zombies.” She smiled as she shook Larkwren’s hand.

“Excellent!” Larkwren knelt down to his her hand. “Pleasure to meet you, Miko.”

“Pleasure’s all mine. And this here is E’Zhule.” She gestured to the other cat person.

“Hey.” He waved, then put his hands back in his pockets. His hands were still clearly visible from inside his black jacket pockets. His blue-furred ears peeked out from the hairy black mess that he called a hair style. He blew strands of hair out of his eye, but they fell back anyway. The sword on his back pointed to his swishing blue tail. He looked at Larkwren’s outstretched hand for a moment, then shrugged. He didn’t shake it.

“What a fine lad.” Larkwren frowned. He then gestured to his lion friend. “This is Jack. He doesn’t speak common. And this is Cloverbraid.” He hugged his horse’s neck. “We’re all here to kill zombies!”

“Here! Here!” A voice called from behind Miko’s hat.

“Oh, yeah!” Miko took off bag. A metal head appeared out of it. “This is Rust.”

“I am Rust. I am rust.” The metal robot said. Its whole head was orange from years of rotting. Despite not being in full view, it was plain to see that the robot wasn’t all there. It waved an arm in greeting, but it was missing fingers that fell off from being rusted through. Not an inch was shiny or polished. “I am on my last legs.”

“Yes, Rust. But don’t worry, we’ll get that money from killing zombies and we’ll fix you right up. Don’t you worry.”

“Yay.” It said as Miko pushed it back into the bag.

“You’re the adventurers?” A guard came into the room.

Larkwren nodded as he rested his hands on his hips.

“The emporer will see you now. Follow me.”

“Excellent.” Larkwren followed first, and then Cloverbraid.

“Whoa whoa there.” The guard gestured to halt. “The horse stays.”

“Sorry Cloverbraid,” he said while stroking her snout. “I’ll be back real quick.”

Cloverbraid snorted and stomped a hoof.

“Yes, don’t worry, I won’t sign anything without you.”

“Don’t worry, sir, your horse will be taken care of while you’re in the meeting.” The guard assured him as he led the party through the castle. The way was long and winding. Navigating this without a map would be difficult.

The guard led them to a small room that had just enough seats for each of them along the walls. The entryway was built for normal human height, making Larkwren have to duck to get in. He sat on one of the seats, tensing his muscles, trying to keep the seat from breaking under his weight. He and the other adventurers faced a desk with piles of papers and notes on it. Behind it sat an empty chair, and the three slit windows that illuminated the room with natural light from the morning sun.

A large man pimped out in jewelry materialized in front of the chair. He was a balding old man in fancy dress, who was nevertheless large at 6’0”. He appeared no less large as he sat in the chair. The snake around his neck relaxed its neck on his shoulder. Each of his fingers held a unique ring, including a gold ring, a brain ring, a ruin-etched jewel ring, and an envelope ring. He opened the envelope ring and pulled out a stack of tiny papers. He slapped them on the desk, and they grew to a normal paper size. Despite his old age, he gave off a divine energy so strong it felt blinding to Larkwren’s paladin senses. “Aha! It’s the adventurers going down to the ancient gnome city!” He stroked his snake’s scales. “My name is Galya. You may call me Emperor Galya.” He flicked his finger, sending a paper floating to each adventurer. “This is the contract you are required to sign. Sign here, here, and here.”

Larkwren looked at the contract, stumped. “Emporer Galeo?”

“Galya. Gal*ya*.”

“Emperor Galya?” Larkwren stood up, crouching below the ceiling.

“Yes, Larkwren?”

“Excuse me for one moment. I need to go talk with—I mean, see—my horse. Just real quick.”

“With the contract?”

“Yes.” Larkwren nodded, already heading out the door.

Emperor Galya snapped. A blue guard appeared. “Escort him to his horse.”

The blue guard bowed and did just that. It guided Larkwren through the winding corridors to his horse.

“Well, Cloverbraid, you were right.” Larkwren brought the contract to his horse. “They asked me to sign a contract first thing. No greeting, no ale, no nothing. Just straight to business.”

Cloverbraid gave a smug look and snorted.

He crouched down and held the contract in her vision. “What do you think?”

The horse turned her head this and that, scanning the page.

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, DULY ACCEPT THIS QUEST TO SLAY ZOMBIES. I WILL COMPLETE THIS TASK AND REPORT BACK TO EMPEROR GALYA *(ALL HAIL GALYA)* IN A TIMELY MANNER. I WILL NOT DEVIATE FROM THIS TASK UNTIL IT IS COMPLETED. I AM HONOR BOUND TO EMPORER GALYA *(ALL HAIL GALYA)* UNTIL I COMPLETE THIS TASK.  
REWARD: 300 GP  
SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: 7TH OF CHESS

Cloverbraid snorted, stomped her hoof, and shook her head.

Larkwren hugged her neck. “Thank you, Cloverbraid.” He approached the blue guard. “Ok, take me back to the emperor. The blue guard guided him back.

When he reentered, hunched over as he was in that room, everyone else had finished signing the contract and were giving it back to the emperor.

“Well?” Emperor Galya eyed Larkwren.

“I will not sign it.” Larkwren handed the unsigned contract back to the emperor.

The emperor was unamused. “Is it because you don’t know how to write? Or read?”

“Um…” Larkwren slapped his own neck. “That is not my strong suit.”

“Fine. Come here.” The emperor motioned to Larkwren, sending him gliding across the floor to the emperor’s desk. He flicked his wrist, and Larkwren’s gauntlet slid right off, exposing his hand underneath. Pulling a needle out of one of his rings, he pricked Larkwren’s finger. “All you need to do is put a drop of your blood on the signature line.” He held out the contract.

Larkwren pulled his hand back, healing the prick point. “Um, no. I will not sign it.”

“You must sign it.” The emperor insisted.

“Look, I’ll just forgo the reward. Just point me to where the zombies are.”

“I can’t tell you unless you sign the contract.”

“Um… no.” Larkwren wiped the sweat from his brow with his ungloved hand.

“If you don’t sign it, then I’ll be forced to expel you from the castle.”

“Larkwren, we all signed it. It’s ok.” Miko assured.

“Not me.” Rust said, just now peeking out of Miko’s bag.

“What have we here?” Emperor Galya raised a hand, telekinetically lifting Rust out of Miko’s bag. His full, ugly rusted form was exposed. His legs were completely rusted through, ending in sharp metal stubs at the knee.

Larkwren grabbed Rust and held him. “If he doesn’t have to sign, then I don’t either.”

“Hold on. Yes, he has to sign.”

“Sign what?” Rust asked.

Emperor Galya floated him on over to the desk. “Here.” He handed the robot a pen.

It struggled, but Rust managed to sign it. “I signed it.”

The emperor put Rust back in Miko’s bag. He looked at Larkwren. “Now it’s your turn.”

“No sorry I have to go!” Larkwren ran out, banging his head on the way out. He ran through the corridors, but got lost.

The blue guard appeared and led him to his horse, and escorted both of them out.

On the outside of the castle grounds, Larkwren and Cloverbraid waited.

“No loitering. Move along.” The guard outside the castle gates told them.

“I’m just waiting for my friends to come out.”

“Move along.”

“Why can’t I stay here?”

“Because you didn’t sign the contract.” The guard said, almost uncharacteristically.

“You know about that?”

“Yes, I had to sign a contract to become a guard too.”

“And now look at you!” Larkwren gestured. “You’re stuck here in this one spot for the rest of your live. Wouldn’t you rather be free? Exploring the world, the multiverse maybe? Or at least your very own city?”

“I voluntarily serve my emperor, and gladly. Just like you serve Lathander.”

“Hmm…” Larkwren tilted his head. Then he smiled hugely, but hid it right after. “So, how did you become a guard, serving the emperor?”

The guard squinted at him. “I know what you’re doing. I’m not going to let you talk me into letting you loiter. Move along now.”

“I’ll just go over here and follow the party when they come out.” Larkwren mumbled under his breathe.

“And if you follow the party, you’ll be arrested.” The guard called out.

Larkwren cussed under his breath. He yelled back, “Wasn’t planning on it!”

Cloverbraid knickers, playfully stamping her hooves.

Larkwren waited at a tavern with outdoor seating that he predicted the party would walk by. He leaned over and held out his mug to another drinker. “Cheers!”

“Cheers,” said the other man.

They both took a swig of their beverages.

“So did you hear that the emperor is in town?” the man said.

“I did.” Larkwren nodded.

“Have you seen him around?”

“Seen him? I met him!”

“Fishlegs! The emperor only meets with very few people.”

“Well, I’m one of them.”

“You’re an adventurer, aren’t you?” The man took a sip.

“That I am.”

“And a paladin of Lathander, at that.” The man grabbed Larkwren’s shield to gaze upon it.

Larkwren nodded as he took another sip.

“My daughter wants to be a paladin, and is considering following Lathander. What are your thoughts?”

“By all means! Lathander welcomes all who bring life. Your daughter sounds like a fine young lass.”

“Many thanks. Could you bless this handkerchief for her?” He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket. It was brand new, pure white, and gold-trimmed.

“With pleasure.” Larkwren took and pressed it up against his shield. Closing his eyes, he said a small prayer. “Lathander, please bless this handkerchief, so that another may find their way in life.” He pulled the handkerchief away. Specks of gold, pieces of white paint, and plant fibers stained the fabric in the shape of Lathander’s holy symbol. “Here. It’s not much, but I hope this helps.”

“Many thanks. My daughter will be thrilled to here about this. An actual adventuring paladin of Lathander!”

“Do you not have Lathander paladins here?”

“We do, right down there.” The man gestured down the road to a building obscured from view. “We have a temple of Lathander here, but the priests there never leave the city. It’s great to meet someone with your experience.”

“The pleasures all mine.” Larkwren sat up in his chair. “But hey, I do need some help.”

“Oh?”

“I just got done talking with the emperor, and I forgot where he said to go to kill the zombies. Would you happen to know where an ancient gnome city is?”

The man shrugged. “I don’t have a clue. I’m just a blacksmith.”

“Ah, well thanks anyway.”

Larkwren talked for an hour or so with the man while watching for the party to walk by.

The party was still talking to Emperor Galya.

“Do you want a donut?” Miko produced a chunky piece of baked dough with powdered sugar on top.

“Donut?” Rust peaked out of her bag.

“Sure.” Emperor Galya floated the donut to his mouth and took a bite. “Very sweet.”

The armored soldier took notice of Rust. “What are your features?”

“I am here to protect.”

“That’s why I love you!” Miko reached around behind her to pat it on the head.

“You need repairs.” The armored soldier pulled out a coin purse.

“He does but I’m working on it.” Miko took off her bag to look Rust in the eyes.

“Is this your master?” The soldier gestured to Miko.

“Yes.”

“Nice to meet you.” Miko held out her hand.

“I’m happy to hear that you are taking care of Rust. He is very important and in need of maintenance. I can afford maintenance.” The soldier poured coins into Miko’s open hand.

“Oh, I don’t mean to take your money.” Miko tried handing the money back.

“I feel fine.” Rust scraped some iron oxide flakes off his chest.

“You *are* in need of repairs,” noted the emperor. “And if you’re going to be fighting zombies, you’ll need them before you leave here to today.”

“But repairs could take hours. We don’t have all day.” The soldier contradicted.

“Yes, so we’ll need a temporary replacement.” The emperor snapped his fingers, and a portal to a blacksmith’s workshop opened.

Out stepped a sexy 5’8” tiefling woman wearing leather armor and a flipped-up welding mask. “What’s up, daddy?”

“Cynthalia, this robot needs repairs. Give him the iron golem body in the meantime.”

“You got it.” Cynthalia grabbed Rust and delicately pulled out his central processing chip with a pair of pliers.

With the emperor’s wizardry, an iron golem body floated out of the portal and into the room. It hit its head on the ceiling and slumped over when it entered.

Cynthalia pulled a stepladder off her back, unfolded it, and climbed onto it. As soon as she put Rust’s chip into the golem, its eyes lit up and came to life.

First, its right arm spun around, nearly knocking Cynthalia off her stepladder. Then the other arm stretched outward and punched a whole in the wall. Its knees bent, and then it toppled over on its face. On the ground, its knees outstretched, pushing the stepladder out from under Cynthalia.

She screamed as she hit the ground. Spitting out carpet dirt, she muttered, “You’re not used to changing bodies, are you?”

“I am new.” Rust found his voice box. “I am new!”

“Is that all?” Cynthalia grabbed her stuff and headed to the portal.

“That’ll be all, thank you, Cynthalia.”

She left. Before the portal closed, the emperor floated Rust’s old rusty limp body through it.

“This is just temporary. Once Cynthalia fixes your old body, you can go back to it.”

“Great.” Rust gave a thumbs up while trying to get up, causing him to fall over to one side. “Great.”

“As for you…” Emperor Galya turned to the armored soldier. “You could use some new wood.” The emperor did his magic, and the soldier’s wooden joints were ripped off and instantaneously replaced with new wood material. “The full repair will take longer, but for now, that will do.”

Miko hugged Rust. “You’ll get through this, buddy. I know you’ll figure this foreign body out.” She watched as he learned how to control his new body.

“And about foreign bodies…” The emperor held a glowing finger and pointed it at Jack the lion. He touched his chest, sending a golden wave washing over him.

Jack was still a lion.

“Hmmm… it didn’t react. Interesting.”

Jack stared ahead, bewildered.

“Nevermind then.” The emperor sat back down at his desk. “Now that everyone is in condition to fight, now it’s time to tell you where you’re going.”

Jack stared ahead, bewildered.

The party soon was on their way to the ancient gnome city where the zombies were. On the way, they passed by the tavern where Larkwren was waiting.

Larkwren threw his mug of beer at the lion, who was at the back of the party. The lion turned and looked at him.

“Psst!” Larkwren motioned for him to come over. “/Do you know where the zombies are?/”

“/I didn’t catch it, no. I’m following them./”

“/Ok, go on./” Larkwren stood up as Jack left. “Nice talking with you, sir.”

“You too.” The man took the last sip from his mug.

Larkwren turned to Cloverbraid. “Well, since we’re not allowed to follow them.” He put a flat hand up over his eyes. “We’ll have to use *stealthiness*. Ugh!” He shuddered.

Larkwren and Cloverbraid followed the party loosely, striking up conversation with merchants and passersby along the way. While Larkwren chatted up the strangers, Cloverbraid kept an eye on the party, stamping her hoof whenever they left line of sight. They followed them this way all the way to the entrance to the Dock Ward.

The party stopped when they saw a merchant being harassed by a group of three orcs.

“Give us the money!” One orc held a bat to the man.

“Now!”

“Hey!” Miko yelled. “What’s going on here?”

“Scram!” The orcs said.

“Leave that man alone!” Miko drew her rapiers.

“Do we have a problem here?” The orcs said.

“Yes.” Miko struck first, but a cramp in her hand caused her to miss.

“Get her.” The orc commanded.

“You can do this.” Rust encouraged.

Miko smiled back at him. Then with a focus of concentration, she used her other hand to pierce her rapier through the orc’s brain before he could clobber her with his club. She engulfed the same rapier with green flames, searing through the orc’s brain to let her rapier slide through and pierce the orc behind it in the heart. Both died on the spot and collapsed to the ground. But the rapier wasn’t long enough to pierce the third orc.

“Frost.” E’Zhule spoke a single word and dashed to the third orc. He pulled his sword out and immediately put it back in its sheath in an instant. But during that time it was out, a flurry of cuts appeared on the third orc. Frosty ice crystals grew from the cuts, freezing the orc’s skin as the orc died of its wounds on the ground. E’Zhule stood over the corpse, studying it. “Strong, but defenseless.”

“Are you alright?” Miko helped the merchant to his feet.

“Yes, I’m quite fine.” The merchant nervously fidgeted. “You can go now.”

“Oh! But your cart lost a wheel!”

“I’m actually working on that right now—”

“Rust!” Miko whistled.

“I can fix it.” Rust, in a new iron golem body, walked over. His 7’0” body held the sigil of the emperor but not even a smidge of dirt or rust. He effortlessly picked up the cart and the wheel and slid it on. Setting it back down gently, he said, “All done.”

“You’re welcome.” Miko waved as she and the party left.

“Thanks…” The merchant looked with disgust at the three corpses laying right in front of his shop.

Larkwren approached soon after and checked each orc. “Dead. Dead. Dead.” He knelt down and said a prayer. Then he noticed the merchant, who had blood stains on his clothes. “Are you injured?”

“No, I’m fine.” The merchant shivered. “Please leave.”

Larkwren nodded.

The merchant puked behind his counter as Larkwren left.

Once the party exited the city through the south gate, Larkwren and Cloverbraid caught up to them. “So, where are we heading?”

Miko filled him in, and they soon found the entrance just north of the Dessarin River. It was the entrance to Dolblunde, the ancient city of gnomes.

They go in, and slide down a muddy slope to the city gates. Miko, Larkwren, Cloverbraid, Jack, E’Zuhl, the armored soldier, and Rust all enter and walk down the corridors. Larkwren dismounts Cloverbraid due to the low ceiling.

The corridor is lit by evertorches on pedestals. Closed doors line the walls, stalactites the ceiling, and bloody pebbles the floor.

Larkwren puts a hand to his ear. “/I don’t sense any evil. Where are the zombies?/”

“/Maybe someone killed them already?/” Jack knocked on a door.

“/Maybe./”

Miko opened a door and peeked in. “Anyone want a donut?”

The poorly lit room didn’t greet her, and neither did the flipped table or toppled chairs.

“Ah, no one’s home.”

“No one’s home.” Rust confirmed.

Miko rubbed dirt off a door. Underneath was just stone. She opened it, and a zombie popped out!

“Arrrrgh!”

Miko screamed.

Jack lunged at it, knocking it to the ground. Rust held a foot up and stepped on its head, crushing its skull.

“I don’t think he wants a donut!” Miko commented.

“Ok, the zombies are here. Stay here, I’ll scout ahead.” Rust walked with his new long legs ahead of the group. There was a hole in the floor, and he was heading right for it. He got to the edge, and turned to the left, but instead of walking around, he fell right in.

“Ruuuust!” Miko ran to the edge of the pit. “Are you ok?”

In the pit, Rust lay on his side. Several spikes pierced straight through his chassis. The adamantine tips sparkled in the light. “It would appear that I am trapped in this hole.” But with little effort, he bent the spikes out of him, and stood back up. He jumped and reached for the edge of the pit. He only lifted himself a few inches and wound up on his butt, rolling backward. “I am trapped.”

“I’ll get help.”

“I got this.” E’Zhule pushed Miko aside. “Are you willing?” He called down into the pit.

“Yes.” Rust answered.

E’Zhule took a few steps from the pit, then ran straight in. He landed in Rust’s arms. “Then fly!” E’Zhule’s hand crackled with energy that he pushed into Rust’s body.

Rust held E’Zhule as he flew out of the pit, hitting his head on the low ceiling in the corridor. E’Zhule bounced out of his arms and landed feet first on the floor. Rust fell horizontal and flew across the room into a wall. The energy of flight left him to fall onto the floor.

“Are you ok?” Miko asked.

“Yes.”

The party moved around the pit and searched the doors on the other side. Miko opened a door and a spiked wooden board fell from the ceiling inside the room. Miko jumped back, dodging it completely.

“This place is booby trapped.” Rust hugged Miko. “I should go ahead. I’m not as valuable.”

“Now there’s a good lad!” Larkwren patted Rust on the back.

“No, Rust!” Miko protested. “You *are* valuable!”

“Yes, very valuable!” Larkwren agreed, pushing Rust forward. “For finding all the traps for us.”

“No! You’re my friend.” She reached for the next door. “You’re worth more than your ability to find traps.” She opened the door.

A horde of zombies moaned on the other side, approaching the door.

She quickly shut it. “I don’t have enough donuts for all of them.”

The zombies banged on the door, trying to burst it open.

Miko drove a rapier into the ground, stopping the door from opening.

As a last resort, the zombies started breaking down the door from the inside. They ripped a board off, and pulled another one out of its spot.

“Watch your head!” E’Zhule threw a magic bolt at the zombies, singing their fingers.

They recoiled and stopped breaking the door. But the door also took damage in the form of a hole. A zombie reached its arm out through it and swung wildly.

Miko took a step back, but hit a fluffy wall. Looking up, she saw it was Jack.

Jack two-handed his halberd into the zombie’s arm, pushing it back into the room. Black goo stuck to the edge of the halberd.

“Miko!” Rust comes over and punches a zombie, but the zombie miraculously dodges and his fist gets stuck in the door. He pulls it out, but takes a piece of the door with him. The door falls apart from all its years of decay and minutes of recent damage.

A zombie falls out of the room and falls on top of Miko.

Larkwren intervenes and slams his shield from above right in front of Miko. The zombie falls on Larkwren’s shield and Miko takes no damage.

Caught between a lion and a shield, Miko felt trapped. “I want out!” she screamed.

Rust reached around Larkwren and pulled Miko out of her position, flinging her back into open corridor. “Sorry.”

“Thanks!” Miko breathed a sigh of relief as she landed on the floor. “Fireball!” Fire spread across her whole hand, engulfing it. She flung her hand, throwing the fireball into the zombie room.

The flammable zombies exploded! Bits and chunks flew everywhere. Miko ducked as a whole necrotic arm flew over her.

The ground shook as the ceiling inside the room collapsed. The remaining zombies all got crushed and the entrance was sealed. A land slide of cement and rock slid out of the room. Larkwren jumped behind his shield and ducked, not getting dirty in the slightest.

Jack stood behind the shield, but stared ahead bemused. He took a rock to the face. He winced.

“/Need some healing?/” Larkwren asked.

“/I’m fine./”

“Arrrgh!” A zombie reached for Larkwren’s ankle as it writhed in pain on the ground. Its lower body was crushed by the rock avalanche, but it still hungered.

Larkwren swung his battleaxe, cutting off the arm. “DIE ZOMBIE!!” He held the axe above his head. “Lathander! Make room!” His axe glowed bright white as he brought it down onto the zombie’s skull, splitting it open.

Black goo splattered everywhere. The zombie stopped writhing.

“/High five./” Jack held up a paw.

“/High five./” Larkwren slapped his hand. He turned to the group. “We found the zombies.”

Back at the castle, Emperor Galya was watching the party through the astral plane. “I bet they all suck at sucking dick. Except for that Larkwren guy. He’s probably really good.” Then he jacks off to the thought of Larkwren sucking his dick. “Yeah, I bet he’s really good…” He watched the party continue through the corridor on his simulacrum.