

Darkly I gaze into the days ahead...

I wipe clean my blade while the blood is still warm. What is this place? The hollowed earth runs deep, even my eyes cannot pierce the depth of it. A silver thread is woven into the darkness, a guide perhaps. The voices of the others are faint, but I can still hear them. Will he survive? It matters not, I must move quickly now.

Days pass and the quiet of the underdark takes hold. Arachne, where are you? Is this yet another test... A strand of your silk is all that I am given to follow. I thought you would be with me now, my would-be Queen. The sound of shifting rock is almost imperceptible, but I hear it. I am not alone.

A flash of red. My own stare reflected in the glossy back of a beetle, burrowed too deep. It wriggles in my hand with unexpected fear. There is so little life in this land, and equally little in its soil – no doubt this insect believed it was safe here. Alone. Its legs twitch and writhe even after I bite clean its head. It has been a long while since I have had to sustain myself in this way.

My rest, short as it is, is filled with dreams of cold. There are mountains to the south of this land, I believe this is where I must go. There is something hidden there. And yet these tunnels take me deeper, why? I look to the broken blade and wonder.

The smell of rotting flesh is evident now. The thing that follows me has forgone subtlety, I can feel its desperation.

“Mine...” a whispered word fills the air.

“Show yourself”, I say, “I grow tired of this game.”

A man emerges from the shadows, or at least something that once resembled a man. The one from the hill, the murderer. His grin replaced with the fangs of the beast that hunted us before my escape. It seems this vile creature, known once as Nicholas, can no longer keep separate the monster within. I will put an end to its miserable existence.

He holds my gaze, and I feel a chill. Shades hidden beneath me, clutch at my ankles and Nicholas lunges forward. Without need for thought, my dagger appears in hand, and I slash across his chest. He tumbles, but I too fall prone, my strength sapped by shadows. I feel Arachne's fire, it burns in my veins and bursts forth, shedding a fearsome light. The shades release me and recoil, but Nicholas is upon me once again. The ground crumbles and together we fall.

An unnatural glow illuminates the cavern where we land. A thin ledge is all that separates us from a drop into a sea of white, and yet we continue to struggle. A hateful poison drips from Nicholas' teeth, his hands like scythes cut through my armour. He grasps for the hilt. I did not expect him to be so strong.

But then I feel them, the source of that eerie light, a torrent of souls flowing behind us. I reach into the ethereal, hear the wails of thousands dead, and I channel their anguish towards my foe. They swell forth and overcome him. Initially he seems uncertain as to what is happening, and by the time he begins to struggle it is too late, they drag him down. For countless years this man has poisoned the land, and now at last his spirit shall join those of his victims, trapped forever in this Barovian river of the death.

I allow myself a moment to catch my breath. That pathetic man, he almost killed me. And it occurs to me that twice now, lowly shades have nearly led to my demise. I despise my own weakness, my fragile mortality.

I look towards the steady current of ghostly figures below.
Souls, funnelled from above into a swirling mass. Was I brought
here to see this?

Two streams flow outward, reaching in opposite directions, like
great veins. One path will take me to the mountains, I feel the
chill in the air. And the other leads to the heart of this land, and
I hear it. An actual living, beating heart. This valley is alive.