

# In Search of Lost Souls

Galatyne Knightwyng

*The half-dwarf Indigo leads Falana and others on a quest into the ruins of a dwarven city port to discover the fate of his father, who had reportedly died fighting goblins. But Indigo's father was more than simply a war chief, and his death sealed in something much more dangerous than goblins.*

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“This is not right,” Khallil said, stopping just past the bend in the passage and holding up his staff, which burned with a magical flame. The flickering light made the stylized leaves of his leather armour appear to rustle as though from a breeze.

Ahead of him, Indigo turned around. The torchlight glinted off the edges of mail that hung out from the bottom of his bright red coat. “Sure it is,” he said. “This passage will connect with the one that leads to where my half-sister said our father fell. I saw the map.”

Khallil shook his head. “No. That’s not what I mean. I don’t doubt this is the right way, but something is *wrong* about the *rock*. Look...” he pointed with his staff to the numerous fractures running through the walls, ceiling, and floor ahead of them, “here...” then to the smooth stone of the passage behind them, “and here... Up till now the outer city has been in-tact. From this point on, everything is broken – some of the stone doesn’t even have any support – but nothing has fallen.”

“Dwarves don’t make things that fall down,” Indigo explained. Since he had found out he was half dwarf, he seemed to have become an expert on their ways.

Stalzer stepped up behind Khallil and squinted at the rock. “Dwarves do build sturdy,” he shifted the mace and shield slung over his shoulder and rested a hand on the hammer at his side. For an instant, his clerical robes parted, revealing the glimmer of steel beneath, “but I don’t think the dwarves who built this city had a cataclysm in mind.”

“Exactly,” Khallil confirmed. “This part shouldn’t be standing... It doesn’t feel right. Something is holding it together.”

“You worry too much,” Indigo said. “It’s fine. It’s stood this long; it isn’t going to come down now.” To prove his point, the half-dwarf drew out the warhammer his sister had brought to him and tapped the wall.

A pale blue light parted the darkness behind the cleric. In its glow walked Galatyne with Ashleen and Kiriannin. Beneath the black and white of his Order, the paladin wore chain and half-plate. The other two wore only sturdy traveling clothes, somehow seeming all the more formidable for their disdain of visible protection. The air of magic about the enchantress was unmistakable, for her maroon suede coat seemed somehow to thwart every attempt made by dust to stick to it, and though the party had ridden for a week before entering the underground city, she always maintained the allure of someone who had just stepped out of a rose-scented bath.

“I think Khallil is more concerned about what’s holding it up than about it falling down,” Galatyne said.

The Druid nodded.

“It sounds like magic to me,” announced Sadosed as he and Falana emerged from the darkness at the rear of the party, “and that can’t mean nothing good, not if yer father died down here somewhere.” The surly celt clanked and jingled to a halt and leaned on his warhammer. Falana, though mailed, made hardly a sound.

“Well, we won’t know if we don’t keep going,” Indigo said. “Besides, my half-sister said my father only fought goblins. Goblins don’t use much magic.”

Kiriannin raised an eyebrow. “A dwarven war party came in with the express purpose of cleaning out the vermin, and they didn’t come back because of goblins? How much do you trust your half-sister’s word?”

Indigo shrugged. “So far, everything she said has been true.”

“Besides,” Ashleen purred, brushing aside a stray wisp of red hair that had escaped her braid, “we have four virtuous holy men to protect us should anything worse than goblins appear.”

Stalzer sighed and rolled his eyes.

The enchantress didn’t let up, “And I for one feel perfectly safe with a mighty paladin to protect me.”

Galatyne glowered at the slight redhead.

Kiriannin snickered, “Are we assigning guardians? I call Falana.”

“Why?” Falana asked “You want me to protect you?”

Kiriannin’s grin melted. “Hmmm.”

“This is all very sweet,” grouched Sadosed, “but I came down here to find some bones. What’re we doin’?”

Khallil waved a hand as if to dismiss his original concern. “I’m not suggesting we turn back. I merely think we should add a level of caution.”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Indigo as he turned and headed back down the passage, “of course we will.”

Khallil hurried forward to Indigo’s side, lighting the way with his staff, and the rest of the party followed with the two mercenaries bringing up the rear in the dark.

As they walked, Khallil took the opportunity to question Indigo about the city. “I heard you say this was a dwarven *port* city? We’ve been underground for half a day now. I know the cataclysm made a mess of things, but how is this a port city?”

“Most of the city *is* underground,” Indigo explained. “There’s also a village at the surface that primarily served visitors. We entered the dwarven complex just outside it. On the far side of the village is a steep cliff. Before the cataclysm, the cliff dropped off into the sea. The dwarves hollowed out the underside of the cliff into a great cavern and built an underground port. There was also a sea wall, and the cavern entrance was warded by two giant statues with lighthouses built on top. Supposedly, if a ship approached without being signaled, the statues would blow them back out to sea. Since the cataclysm, though, everything is dry.”

“Why didn’t we enter from the port side?” Khallil asked. “It seems like that would have gotten us into the heart of the city quicker.”

Indigo shook his head. “There’s no easy approach to that side, and it was supposed to have been heavily damaged by the cataclysm. I’m not sure we could find a way in. Besides, we really want the mining quarter which is off from the main city. This way is actually more direct. We avoid the city proper and hopefully most of the goblins – if they’re still here. This is also the way my father came in.”

Indigo stopped. They had reached a Y-fork. The passage to the left angled steeply downward and broad steps were cut into the stone. The one to the right sloped down more gradually, and there were no steps. Three great columns, set between the passages, held up a vaulted ceiling. One of the columns was broken, the top half shifted completely off the lower half. It hung in place over empty air. Another of the columns was so fractured, it looked like as though the scene had been frozen an instant before it crumbled.

The rest of the party filed into the room looking with skepticism at the columns.

“I don’t like this,” Khallil said.

Stalzer nodded his agreement.

“Could it be an illusion?” Kiriannin asked.

“No,” Ashleen said. “I don’t think so. I’m not certain, but if it were, I think I would be able to recognize it as such; however, I will agree that there is magic at work here.”

Indigo appeared unconcerned as he pulled out his journal and checked his notes. “The left fork leads into the main city. My father would have gone that way first. There are other passages that lead from there back up into the mines, but the right fork should go directly there.”

“Then right it is,” Khallil said and set off down the right fork.

Indigo hurried after.

Stalzer and Galatyne hesitated a moment as they looked with uncertainty at the columns. They exchanged a worried look and shook their heads slightly but didn’t speak as they followed the Druid and half-dwarf.

At the rear of the party, Sadosed nudged Falana. “I don’t like that,” he said. “Stalzer and the paladin don’t like somethin’ and they went all quiet. Quiet clerics are a sign of trouble. What’s a quiet paladin mean?”

“Not good,” was all Falana said.

“Aaaaaa, that’s what I thought.”

The party walked for about an hour, winding steadily down into the rock. The mining tunnels were more rough hewn than those of the upper city and there were numerous smaller cross passages. Still, they had seen no sign of battle or, fortunately, goblins.

Khallil stepped out of the passage into a room – a very large room, for his torch suddenly became nothing more than a point of light in the darkness, illuminating only a small section of floor and the wall behind him.

“I think we’re here,” he said.

Indigo peered around the Druid. “Yes, this should be the main chamber of the silver mine. We need more light.” He opened a pouch and began rummaging through its contents. “I may have something here...”

Stalzer hurriedly stepped into the room and raised his hands. He spoke a few words in an arcane tongue, and light, bright as full daylight, filled the center of the cavern. Even so, the chamber was several hundred feet in breadth and the farthest recesses remained in shadow. What the small party did see, however, gave them pause. The floor was littered with skeletons, both dwarven and goblin – though many more goblin – as well as rusted weapons and armour.

“Looks like a last stand,” Sadosed commented.

“Indeed,” said Kiriannin, “and by the looks of things the dwarves made a pretty good accounting of themselves.”

Indigo looked around disheartened. “If my father died in here, how will I know which one is him?”

Khallil tapped Indigo on his shoulder and pointed to the half-dwarf’s hip. “Ahh... I think that might help?”

Everyone looked at Indigo. The warhammer slung at his side, his father’s warhammer, glowed with a faint, silvery light. Indigo pulled out the hammer and led off across the cavern. The rest of the party followed in single file, except for Galatyne and Stalzer who each took up a flanking position a good ten yards to either side. Sadosed shot Falana another, ‘*See? Something’s up*’ scowl.

While Indigo followed the hammer, going first this way, then that as the glow intensified or lessened, the others took in the mine. Judging by the size of the cavern, the dwarves had not simply mined the veins of silver. Instead they had quarried out *all* the rock, finding a use for everything – granite, iron, and a host of pure minerals. The ceiling was barely visible in the light cast by the cleric, but ledges and ramps, cut into the

walls, were clearly visible. Here and there, black holes announced entrances to tunnels leading back into the rock.

As the party crossed the cavern, the density of bodies increased, and by the time they neared the far wall, Indigo's hammer was glowing brightly. From the base of the wall came a similar glow. By its light, they made out a wide vein of silver. In the silver was cut a rough door engraved with runes. Against the door rested a single dwarven skeleton, still wearing a laminated steel cuirass, which, oddly enough, showed no signs of rust. It was from the cuirass that the other glow emanated.

Indigo started to run forward, but Khallil grabbed him by the back of his jacket. "Not so fast, Indigo," he said. "We don't know if this is safe."

"Why not?" the half-dwarf asked.

"Well... look at the door..." the Druid answered. "It's of dwarven make, but it's rough, no fine craftsmanship there, and the stone around it is blackened and melted in places. Then there's the floor..."

For a radius of about ten feet around the armoured skeleton, the floor was bare. Around the bare section of floor was a ring of dwarven bodies. Beyond that, the bones of goblins completely obscured the floor; many of them were only charred, blasted fragments.

"But, that's my father," Indigo protested.

"It's also a ward," warned Stalzer as he stepped onto the bare stone around the door and knelt before the skeleton. The Ankh around the cleric's neck glowed a bright white. Light also leaked out of the covering shrouding the mace strapped to his back. He studied the air around the body for a moment. "Your father was a cleric."

"He was a cleric?" Indigo asked, surprise evident on his face.

"There is a glowing glyph covering the body and the armour," Stalzer continued. "Your father set the ward. There is another glyph, hovering above the first and binding it. It is that of your fathers deity. I also sense a great evil... Galatyne?"

"I sense it is well," the paladin answered, moving forward to stand next to the cleric. "I think I have felt it since the fork where the column was broken, but it was very faint then. I wasn't sure if it was a single source or related to the presence of goblins in the city. I have no doubt now that what I sensed lies behind that door."

"I also sense a disharmony in the song," commented Falana. "It's different than evil. Even evil can have a melody in the song, but this is different... though faint."

"So," Kiriannin said, "what you're all saying is, we should leave all this just as it is and go home."

"Exactly," answered Stalzer.

Galatyne nodded his assent.

"Uhh uhh," Indigo said, shaking his head. "I'm not leaving here without my fathers bones. My half-sister said I needed to bring them back to claim my birthright. Besides, that armour looks magical. Can't one of you holymen-types remove the ward?"

Ashleen grinned. "Are you kidding? Holymen are good at putting *up* guards. They never *let them down*."

Stalzer and Galatyne both graced the enchantress with a stern glower, but the paladin said nothing, and the cleric only shook his head.

"No," Stalzer said in answer to Indigo's question. "Only the one who set it can remove it safely, and he's dead. Anyone else would likely be killed. By the looks of some of these goblin bodies, more than a few tried, though why, I couldn't say. The ward is quite powerful, and your father appears to have been in very good standing with his deity for the ward to have been doubled. Such an act also attests to the nature of what might be bound. We should leave well enough alone."

"How did you say your sister got that hammer?" Ashleen asked.

"She said one dwarf escaped with it," Indigo answered.

Ashleen frowned, thinking. “Sounds like she didn’t tell you everything. You didn’t know your father was a cleric.... One dwarf got out with his hammer which glows in response to the presence of this ward.... If it were me, I would have expected some sort of instruction to accompany the hammer. I think your sister set you up.”

“Ashleen may have something,” Stalzer speculated out loud. “It is possible that the bearer of the hammer could safely remove the ward. But it doesn’t matter; that ward is binding something evil, and we don’t know enough to just go letting it out. I also agree that your half-sister has misled us, probably intentionally. Perhaps if we learn more about the hammer and come back some other time...”

“I agree,” Galatyne said. “Under no circumstances should this ward be lifted. This must all be left in peace.” He looked at Indigo. “We have found your father’s bones and learned the manner of his death. That will have to suffice for your sister.”

“But-”

Sadosed smacked the head of his hammer against the floor, shattering a skull and cutting Indigo’s protest short. “No buts,” he growled. “Stalzer said not to touch. If I have to, I’ll make you not touch.”

Indigo pouted and kicked a couple of charred goblin bones. “Fine, I guess we can go then.”

With Indigo’s acquiescence, the party turned and headed back the way they had come. This time Indigo brought up the rear, shuffling his feet through the bones and grumbling quietly to himself.

They hadn’t gone far when Ashleen, who was walking in front with Galatyne and Khallil, turned to ask a question of the cleric and suddenly shouted, “Indigo! No!”

The party turned as one to see Indigo sprinting back toward the faintly glowing armour. He held a glowing orb in his hand, and his feet made no sound as he raced over bones. Everyone immediately began running back toward him, shouting for him to stop, but the half-dwarf paid them no heed.

“Wait, wait!” Stalzer said. “We can’t be near him when he touches it.”

“Khallil,” Galatyne said, stopping and grabbing the Druid’s arm. “Bring him down.... We’ll heal him later.”

Khallil nodded and unslung his bow. He knocked an arrow and let it fly. The arrow caught the half-dwarf just below the right shoulder and sent him sprawling into the pile of bones that ringed the door. The little group breathed a collective sigh of relief. But then Indigo climbed to his feet and ran to his father’s body.

“Damned elven chain,” Sadosed cursed.

Indigo reached out with his hammer and touched the cuirass.

“No, no, no...” Stalzer whispered, holding a hand to his head.

As steel touched steel there was a bright, silvery flare of light.

Falana stumbled, and put her hands to her temples in pain. Kiriannin reached out and steadied her.

“He’s disrupted the song,” Falana said. “Something other than the ward is broken... the essence of life... but the ward was helping hold it together.”

Then Indigo grabbed the armour. Before he could turn to run, there was another flash – this time gold – and the air shook as though from a thunderclap. The floor heaved once and a visible wave of roiling, crackling energy roared outward from the body of Indigo’s father, throwing the half-dwarf through the air.

“Down!” Stalzer yelled, and he and Sadosed bore the shaken Falana and unarmoured Kiriannin to the ground, shielding them.

Galatyne and Khallil followed suit, protecting Ashleen.

The wave hit them with the combined force of a hurricane wind and an earthquake. Had they been standing, no one had any doubt that they would have been hurled against the cavern’s far wall. Then it was past, and the party climbed unsteadily to their feet.

“I think those of us who serve gods, and goddesses, of Light were just blessed by a dwarven deity,” Stalzer said as he brushed dust from his robes.

Galatyne cast a quizzical glance at the cleric. “You sound like you’re surprised to be standing here.”

Stalzer shrugged. “I’ve never had to consider the implications of breaking such a ward before I met Indigo. Even Aranek listens when I say to leave a ward alone.”

Kiriannin sighed. “Just our luck.”

The party hurried over to where Indigo had come to rest, nearly twenty yards from the door. As they approached, the half-dwarf climbed to his knees, spitting out rock dust. His coat was shredded, and he appeared stunned but was otherwise unharmed.

“I can’t believe you shot me,” he said.

“You’re lucky,” Stalzer told him. “The hammer seems to have protected you from both the breaking of your father’s ward and his patron’s. You are very lucky.”

“Not so lucky when I’m through,” Sadosed growled.

“Save it,” Galatyne said. “The ward’s gone and I think we’re about to have a bigger problem.”

As if in affirmation of the paladin’s words, a low groan echoed through the cavern. The party looked toward the silver door. It bulged outward, then returned to the plane of the wall. Tiny, bright flashes of fire flared briefly on the door’s surface, one after the other.

“It’s the runes,” Stalzer groaned. “They were likely a temporary binding put in place till Indigo’s father could set a proper ward.”

The party fanned out with Stalzer and Galatyne in the center. Sadosed took up a position just in front of the cleric while Falana and Indigo stood to his left, weapons drawn. The celt slung his warhammer in favor of his curved elven longsword. Khallil and Kiriannin held Galatyne’s right, blades in hand, and Ashleen moved to stand behind them. The paladin wore a longsword, but he left it sheathed at his side. Stalzer likewise left both his warhammer and mace where they were.

When the last rune flared and vanished, there was a long moment of calm and silence in which no one seemed to breathe. Then the door exploded outward sending shards of silver flying in all directions, and a high-pitched wail filled the vast chamber, echoing off the walls and ceiling.

A black form shot through the blasted doorway and halted just outside. As the dust settled around it, the nature of its disharmony became apparent. It was about seven feet tall and clothed in tattered black rags. Where the fabric parted, only bone and ligaments were visible. Its head was a blackened skull, and bright green sparks burned with a dark malice in the eye sockets. The head turned slowly, taking in the cavern and the ruins of its former prison. The twin sparks came to rest on the eight companions. Feet shuffled, Stalzer’s ankh glowed, and blue flames flickered around Galatyne’s hands.

“Lich,” Sadosed groaned.

The lich screamed, a cross between metal on stone and shattering glass, and the floor began to move. Actually the bones on the floor began to move as the skeletons rose, took up rusted weapons, and began lurching toward the party. More shambled out of tunnels leading into the mine from the city proper, and the party suddenly found themselves surrounded.

“Too many,” Galatyne said, shaking his head.

“What do we do?” asked Ashleen. Her voice bore a hint of worry. Her charms and illusions weren’t likely to be of much use against the undead.

“Give Stalzer a moment, and he’ll open a way!” shouted Sadosed. “Keep them back!”

The warriors immediately formed a ring with the cleric and enchantress in the center. Galatyne drew his sword, and the blue fire wreathing his hands crept up the blade.

With the undead host closing in, Stalzer gripped his ankh in one hand and held his other above his head as he began to chant. A soft white glow formed around him and gradually grew brighter. The lich screeched,

and its minions rushed forward to try and interrupt the cleric's rite, but his companions stood firm, blocking the way.

Kiriannin's blade moved almost faster than the eye could follow; Falana's did. Sadosed's own blade seemed to move of its own accord while his hands merely followed, providing support, as it hewed away at bone. About them, the undead fell, but continued to crawl forward on shattered limbs.

Indigo seemed to be having more success with his father's magical hammer. Undead struck by the head froze, rimed with ice. When the half-dwarf reversed his swing and struck with the spike, the frozen skeletons shattered into pieces too small to rise. Unfortunately, his success drew him forward as he eagerly sought new foes to engage and left a gap in the protective ring.

"Indigo!" Sadosed shouted. "Hold the line!"

The half-dwarf immediately leapt back into place and waited for the enemy to come to him.

On the other side of the circle, the undead tried to give the paladin and his flaming sword a wide berth, for where his blade fell, blue fire erupted and bone turned to ash. The press of undead, however, ensured that more than enough stumbled within his reach, and at his side, Khallil made certain a few more reeled his way – usually minus a limb or two.

Stalzer's voice rose, and a white light burned bright in his eyes. About his upstretched arm, white crackling energies swirled. As he finished his invocation, he held forth his hand and white light lanced out through the undead, turning all those it struck to ash and opening a broad corridor toward the front wall of the cavern.

"Go! Now!" Stalzer shouted, unslinging his shield and drawing forth his magical hammer as he joined Galatyne who had leapt forward as soon as the light flared. Together, the cleric and paladin led off through the rapidly narrowing breach.

For the most part, the undead hesitated to close ranks before the flaming sword and glowing hammer. Those that did fell wreathed in blue fire or scorched by white light, and the companions quickly gained the relative protection of the wall. There they took a few brief seconds to regroup.

"Stay near the wall," Galatyne said. "Stalzer, Indigo, and I will take the outside. We go out the way we came in. There were no dead to rise against us in those halls." The paladin turned and opened his hand. Blue fire swept out before him and a half score of the skeletons fell in burning heaps that turned quickly to ash.

The companions hurried forward through the opening, hugging the wall to their right. To their left, the paladin, cleric, and half-dwarf kept the undead from pressing too close. Occasionally, blue flames would flare out before the party, clearing the path ahead. At the rear, Indigo pulled something out of his pouch, turned, and flung his hand open behind him. Tiny, silver caltrops sparkled and flashed as they flew through the air. Several struck undead, erupting into flame and toppling their victims. The rest scattered across the floor, and any skeletal warrior who touched one became a pillar of fire.

"It's following us!" Indigo called as he turned to hurl another handful of the tiny, fiery caltrops.

The lich shadowed their movements well off to their left. It kept pace easily, but neither moved closer nor launched a new attack.

Stalked by the lich and besieged by its minions, the companions' trek across the cavern seemed to take an eternity, but at last the black mouth of the entrance tunnel came into view. As the party hurried toward it, the lich gave out three barking screeches and a clamor arose from the darkness.

"Goblins!" warned Khallil as the first of the new foe emerged from the passage.

"Blades front!" Galatyne called as he fell back. His fire would be of more use against the undead who continued to press in from the rear. Sadosed, Falana, and Kiriannin rushed forward to join the Druid as two score goblins rushed from the passage.

Ashleen grinned. “Goblins? Now that’s something I can work with.” Her form blurred, then merged with the shadows as once again the party found themselves in a defensive ring with Stalzer at the center. Galatyne and Indigo kept back the undead with fire and ice while the cleric renewed his chanting.

Behind the cleric, the other four companions had formed a tight line against the goblins who seemed unwilling to go to near the undiscerning undead or fiery paladin in order to attempt a flanking maneuver. Even so, they found themselves fighting hard to avoid being pushed back. Suddenly, several goblins in the front ranks yelped and dropped their swords. A couple of others fell to the ground, rolling around and beating at their bodies with their hands.

Falana’s blade unexpectedly burst into flame and the goblins before her fell back. Almost as surprised as her opponents, the elf nonetheless pressed her momentary advantage, edging forward and raining lightning blows. As she struck one of the goblins, it fell screaming to the ground, beating at his arm as if he were on fire, though no flames were visible. His companions scrambled to get out of the elf’s way, unsure of what magic had been loosed upon them.

Ashleen’s sultry laugh echoed in the air above the goblins as Falana rushed forward, flaming blade darting to either side, scattering the foe before her. The enchantress’ phantom flames were apparently as effective on the weak minded goblins as holy fire was on the undead. Then Sadosed charged, bellowing “Tir Thalor!” and another wedge was driven into the goblin line.

The goblins were wavering, but still fighting, when a chanting arose from the dark tunnel behind them. For a brief moment both sides paused, wondering what new threat was about to present itself. Then the chant grew louder; it bore the distinctive intonation of dwarves and was accompanied by the clank of armour and weapons:

*Dvergen hamrer, Dvergen maket,  
Marsjering av tal krig!  
Herrer av stein og nisse fiende,  
Vi riktig gale en gangen breg!*

Stalzer finished his invocation and streamers of white light lanced out into the undead, felling well over a score and driving others back. Blue fire followed the light and more skeletons fell into ash. It was all too much for the goblins – fire, light, dwarves. They broke and fled back into the darkness of the tunnel and the nearest hole they could find as a second throaty laugh filtered through the dwindling chant and rattle of dwarves.

Sadosed let out another roar of “Tir Thalor!” and raced after them, lending speed to their short legs, and Falana followed on his heels, reinforcing the wisdom of their choice.

For the space of a few breaths, the party was free, and they raced for the tunnel the goblins had vacated. The lich shrieked its rage and raised its hands. Green lightning flared out, raking the rock wall to the left of the tunnel. Galatyne, Khallil, Indigo, and Stalzer had not yet gained the tunnel and dived to the ground as dust and gravel showered down around them.

Galatyne rolled up onto one knee and hurled blue fire back at the lich. It screamed as the flames wrapped around it, but it quickly turned them aside with a wave of its clawed hand. Then everyone saw the lich’s real target. Green flames burned on the shattered rock face where the lightning had struck it, and a section of a ledge had tumbled down. Atop the rubble, Ashleen struggled against four skeletons as they dragged her toward their beckoning master.

Galatyne leapt to his feet and ran headlong into the regrouping undead, cleaving a path with blue fire. Khallil raced in behind him, scooping up the paladin’s sword as he ran, hewing bone to either side if anything came to close.



“Wait-” Stalzer called out from the mouth of the tunnel, but it was too late for the undead had already closed in behind the pair. Instead, the cleric yelled, “Tir Thalor! To me!” and began chanting once more as Indigo and Kiriannin held back the ever-advancing undead.

Sadosed howled out of the tunnel like a steel whirlwind, warhammer in one hand, sword in the other, and began laying about with unrestrained fury, knowing only that his brother-in-arms had called for his aid. Though his weapons revealed no magical energies, the sheer ferocity of his attacks left little but splinters of his opponents. Falana followed right behind the celt, but as soon as she saw the flashes of blue farther out in the cavern, she darted off into the skeletal host, dancing between the undead so fast she was a blur. As they reached for her, she was gone, and if a bony talon did stray close, her blade dealt with it just as swiftly.

When Galatyne and Khallil reached Ashleen, the paladin ran to the two cadavers who held her legs and placed a hand on each of their chests. Blue fire erupted from their backs as they fell. He dealt with her other two captors in a similar manner, pulling the enchantress away as blue flame coiled around them.

The lich shrieked in fury as it saw its magical prize liberated and reached out a clawed hand toward the trio. Green lightning lanced out, searing through the undead in its path.

“Down!” Galatyne yelled, pushing Ashleen toward Khallil, who dropped the paladin’s blade and pulled her to the floor. Galatyne knelt over them, sweeping one hand in an arc from the floor up over his head. A shell of blue flame followed it. The green lightning struck the fire-shield and crackled over and around it, raking the surrounding floor and igniting green fires that burned on the rock.

As the web of lightning flickered and died, white light flared across the cavern between Stalzer and his embattled friends. As skeletons fell into ash, the four remaining companions rushed after Falana. Freed from both the lightning and any immediate threat from the undead army, Galatyne whirled and sent blue fire back at the lich who raised its own shield, turning the flames aside. After several futile attempts to penetrate the shield, the paladin realized he was succeeding only in depleting his own energy and ceased his attacks.

The lich thrust its hands into the air and hissed, and the green fire flickering on the floor burned higher and began closing in on the enchantress and her guardians. Tongues of fire snaked out toward them like flickering claws.

As Khallil helped Ashleen to her feet, Galatyne let his hands fall to his sides and closed his eyes. A blue glow surrounded him and spread out across the floor. At its edge, blue fire sprung up; it was only a few inches high, but it kept the green blaze back. The green fire soon faltered, and Falana appeared beside them, leaping through the dying flames to land in the paladin’s circle of protection. She was breathing hard, but appeared uninjured.

Kiriannin and Sadosed rushed in behind her looking spent. Stalzer and Indigo were a little further behind, wading through the never-ending tide of undead that marched out of the tunnels to close the gaps opened by the cleric. Stalzer now wielded the mace which glowed brightly, and their battle was marked by flashes of light and flying shards of ice as their weapons found their marks on weathered bone. Twice, green lightning arced toward the cleric as the lich sought to keep him from rejoining his companions. Twice the magical energies were turned aside with a flare of white light as Stalzer took shelter behind his shield.

A corpse attempted to step into the small circle of blue light and grab Ashleen, but it reeled away burning.

“Make it bigger!” Sadosed called.

“Can’t,” was all the paladin said. His face was pale and strained and his breathing labored.

Khallil closed his eyes and placed his hand on Galatyne’s shoulder and the struggling paladin immediately seemed to breathe easier. The circle of light brightened, and the fire spread another few feet, igniting the skeletal warriors who had gathered just beyond its perimeter.

Stalzer stepped up next to Falana. “How long can he hold this?”

The elf shrugged, “Didn’t know he could do it at all, but I don’t think he has much left.”

Stalzer nodded. No one had much left. He slung his shield and let his mace hang from his wrist. Then he faced the lich and began his invocation of turning.

The lich shrieked and raised both hands toward the protective circle.

“Won’t hold...” the paladin warned.

As green lightning arced toward the group, Kiriannin leapt in front of the cleric, sword raised. The crackling energies struck the paladin’s ward. Some of it rolled around the perimeter, but the rest punched through, collapsing it entirely. Kiriannin’s eyes flashed gold as he swung at the sizzling bolt. There was a loud crack as the blade shattered, burying shards of metal in Kiriannin’s chest. Most of the lightning was turned aside into the undead and back at the lich, who screamed and sought to raise a shield. The rest arced over Kiriannin who crumpled to the stone.

The lich stumbled for the first time as its own assault flashed over it, searing off the tattered remains of its clothing. As it struggled with the backlash of its own magic, Stalzer completed his rite. White light flared from his eyes and hands streaked out through the undead toward the lich. As its minions fell, the lich traced a glowing rune in the air before it. The cleric’s light burned through the rune, striking the evil creature... but nothing happened. No fire... no ash... nothing.

Stalzer sighed, letting his head drop for a moment.

“What happened?” Indigo asked.

“This thing of death holds tightly to its false existence,” Stalzer answered. “It will not be made to face truth by my hand; nor can I put to rest any more of these tortured souls it has enslaved.”

A weary Galatyne joined the cleric and half-dwarf, sword in hand. “Kiriannin-” he began.

“I’ll see to our friend,” Stalzer said, slinging his shield. “Keep this evil at bay but a bit longer and we’ll find a way out.”

The paladin nodded. He knew he had not the strength necessary to help Kiriannin; he wasn’t even sure he had the strength to combat the lich, but he also knew that if the lich did not fall, none of them would leave this place. Falana, Sadosed, Khallil, and Indigo leapt forward as soon as the protective circle had fallen and fought now with renewed resolve as the cleric prayed over their injured friend, but they could not hold back the undead horde for long. Galatyne reached for fire, but could manage nothing more than faint blue flames along his blade.

The lich laughed, a low, resonating chuckle. The cleric had withdrawn, and the paladin’s fire was spent. The warriors’ strength was fading, and there was no more protective circle.

Seeing his friends faltering and falling was too much for Indigo, and he had read the resigned looks on the faces of both the cleric and the paladin. His sister’s hate and greed would not bring his friends to this end. The half-dwarf reached into his pouch and pulled out a clear crystal wand. He held it before him and spoke a single word. The air in front of him shimmered, and a wave of force rolled forward, shattering or throwing aside skeletal warriors as it passed. Indigo hefted his hammer and set off at a run behind it, past the paladin and directly toward the lich.

“Indigo! No!” Galatyne shouted, hurrying after him.

The lich dispersed the force wave without apparent effort and raised its bony hands toward Indigo, who only growled and lowered his head. The half-dwarf vanished. Galatyne stopped. The lich stepped back in surprise and looked around. Back beside Stalzer, Ashleen’s lips moved as she chanted quietly, and her body quivered slightly as if she were exerting a great effort.

Suddenly, the lich staggered and doubled over. Frost appeared on its chest and began spreading across its body. The cavern shuddered and some of the skeletons collapsed. The lich reached out a clawed hand and closed it in the air. Indigo appeared in its grip, held by his neck, feet dangling a foot off the floor. At the same time, an exhausted Ashleen let out a small cry and crumpled to the ground as she abruptly released her magical trance.

The ice crept slowly across the lich, while in its grasp, the half-dwarf's skin began to turn an ashen grey. Indigo snarled and gripped the hammer with both hands, drawing it back behind his head. He heaved the spiked end forward and down in a mighty overhand swing, but the lich raised its other hand, and the hammer stopped in midair. Blood began to run from the half-dwarf's nose and mouth.

Galatyne raised a hand toward the lich. Blue fire coiled about his hand but flickered and died, and the paladin dropped to his knees, his head slumping forward to rest on his chest. As he fell, an arrow streaked over his head, striking the lich's upraised hand and shattering the frosted bone. Khallil nodded his approval as he lowered his bow and rushed forward to drive back the undead who had quickly closed in on the exhausted paladin.

Freed, Indigo's hammer continued its descent. The spike drove through the lich's skull and into its frozen torso, shattering it. Green lightning roiled out of the broken body, lancing through the half-dwarf and engulfing him in flame. Bolts of lightning arced out into the cavern, striking the walls and ceiling, shattering rock and igniting green fires. Both the lich and Indigo crumpled to the floor in a column of flame. At the same time, all the undead collapsed into heaps of bones, and the cavern shook. Rock grated and the floor began to shift and buckle along cracks that had previously been obscured by bones and decades of dust.

Stalzer rose from Kiriannin's side. "The lich's magic was holding this portion of the city together!" he yelled. "We have to get out now!" The cleric helped Falana haul the wind dancer to his feet, then turned and ran toward Indigo, who was rapidly being consumed by the green lich-fire. Falana supported Kiriannin as they hurried toward the exit, while behind her, Sadosed simply picked up the unconscious enchantress, threw her over his shoulder, and ran.

As soon as the undead collapsed, Khallil knelt down to aid Galatyne. When he bent near, he noticed that a blue light shone through the paladin's skin and behind his eyes. When he grabbed him to pull him to his feet, the Druid found him burning hot.

Stalzer paused as he came up beside the two. "Get him out," he said to Khallil. "I'll see if anything can be done for Indigo."

Khallil nodded and started to say something, but stopped as Stalzer's mace flared a brilliant white. The Druid squeezed his eyes shut against the sudden brightness. When he opened them again, he saw Stalzer staring into the air before them. The cleric's mouth was moving, but no sound issued forth; however, the sharp-eyed Druid thought he could make out a few words... *Tefnut... forgive me... know now... must do...*

Suddenly, Galatyne's head snapped up and the light in his eyes grew brighter. Khallil followed the paladin's gaze. Two stringers of green flames ran out from Indigo's body and across the floor, arcing around to form a circle. As the ends touched, a sanguine rune flared on the floor in the circle's center. It was the same rune the lich had traced in the air. An inky black shadow materialized in the circle, swirling rapidly around the bodies of the lich and half-dwarf. As it coalesced, two eyes like coals opened in the blackness.

Just then, Stalzer came back to the present. "I understand," he said and ran toward the dark enemy, shield before him and mace held high. Red flames and flashes of lightning flared inside the shadow. A bolt flashed out at the cleric but was turned aside by his shield.

Galatyne tried to pull away from Khallil and climb to his feet, but the Druid, feeling him growing warmer yet, held him back.

"Stop it!" the elf warned. "You'll turn yourself into ashes and do none of us any good. I think Stalzer knows what he's about..."

The blue glow dimmed and Galatyne slumped back.

As the cleric reached the ring of fire, he yelled, "By Tefnut's will!" and leapt into the circle. As he cleared the flames he swung his mace at the shadow creature. There was a bright flash that left everyone momentarily blinded. When they could see again, the circle of green fire, the shadow being, and the cleric were gone.

The cavern shuddered again, throwing everyone from their feet. Khallil slipped an arm under Galatyne's shoulders and began half dragging half leading him toward where Falana and Sadosed waited just inside the tunnel with a barely upright Kiriannin and still unconscious Ashleen. Before he got far, there was a roar and the floor heaved and shifted, throwing the Druid from his feet and the ceiling came down between them and the exit. When the dust settled, Khallil found himself looking across a wide chasm that split the room. On the far side, the Tir Thalor mercenaries looked back in despair.

"Go!" Khallil shouted, "Get to the surface! Your side won't hold long! We'll find a way to the old port and meet you there!"

The elf and celt both nodded once and disappeared up the tunnel with their charges.

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Galatyne woke slowly, painfully. His head hurt. No, his whole body hurt. He lay on cold, hard stone. The light created by Stalzer still burned. Stalzer... Stalzer was gone...

"You're awake," Khallil said as he knelt down and began transferring items from a bundle he had carried to a small pile on the floor. "I had feared you might not."

The paladin sat up on one elbow, holding his head. "How long?" he croaked. "Where are the others?"

"Almost a half a day... and, hopefully, on their way to the surface. Here, drink this." Khallil passed him a skin he had been carrying. "I found some water. It was seeping out of a new fissure."

Galatyne emptied half the skin. "Indigo? Stalzer?" he asked, already knowing the answer.

"No sign of the cleric," Khallil answered. "Indigo..." the Druid just shook his head.

Galatyne nodded once and changed the subject. "What do have there?" he asked, gesturing toward the pile of stuff the Druid had accumulated.

"Just some stuff I gathered up while you were resting," Khallil explained. "I asked a bat about the way out. She pointed me to a passage where I could definitely feel air moving, but I didn't want to leave you alone to go exploring."

Galatyne looked at the items: Indigo's father's armour and hammer, a tiger's-eye ring and a pouch the half-dwarf had been wearing that had somehow survived the lich-fire, the paladin's own sword, Ashleen's silken gloves, the fragments of Kiriannin's shattered sword, a fine silver chain... "What's this?" Galatyne asked, picking up the chain.

"I'm not sure," Khallil answered. "It was around Indigo's father's neck. It's of elven make..."

Galatyne nodded and laid it over the dwarven cuirass. He pointed to a broken spear. "And that?"

Khallil shrugged, "I've always wanted a dwarven weapon. The haft will need to be replaced, but the blade is in excellent shape. Besides, we can sling the armour over it. Can you walk? We should get moving."

The paladin nodded as he rose and helped the elf gather up their friends' things, leaving only the shattered, useless sword. They crossed the cavern quickly. When they reached the tunnel Khallil had found, the elf murmured something, and a magical flame flared around the top of his staff. Then, together, the Druid and paladin descended into the dark depths of the dwarven ruins.

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On the surface, Sadosed and Falana helped Ashleen astride her mount. She had regained consciousness quickly enough, though she was now blind due to her sorcerous exertions that far exceeded her training. The enchantress expected it would pass, though she couldn't say when.

They had had only minor difficulties exiting the city. The weakened Kiriannin and Ashleen had taken turns providing light for the small party to make their way through the tunnels. Once, they had to clear rubble in order to continue. Fortunately, no goblins had emerged from the side tunnels to harass them.

“I can travel now.” Kiriannin rose from where he had been kneeling since they had exited the underground city. His meditation skills had proven quite useful in speeding up his healing. He was at least able to stand, if not mount a horse, without assistance now.

When they had all mounted up, they set off through the village leading the horses belonging to Stalzer, Indigo, and Khallil. Galayne’s mount was gone, though its tracks led off toward the village.

“They’re moving west now,” Falana said, “same as the horse.”

“The horse can probably sense the paladin too,” Sadosed commented. “We can follow the trail... Not that I doubt your senses, but the horse will likely choose the easiest route.”

Falana nodded.

By dusk, they had reached the cliff on the far side of the city. Peering over the edge, they could see a small fire in the rocks below. Beside it sat two figures, and the paladin’s horse stood just a few yards away.

“Hey!” Sadosed shouted.

Khallil and Galatyne looked up and waved.

“Is everyone alright!” Khallil yelled up.

The four companions atop the cliff waved back.

“Yeah! Be down in the morning!” Sadosed called. “Not gonna break my neck tryin’ to find my way down there in the dark,” he grumbled as he moved away from the edge to begin setting up camp.

In the morning, they found the trail used by Galatyne’s horse to get down from the cliff. It took them well out of the way and it was nearly noon by the time they made their way back along the base of the rock face. As they approached the still smoldering fire ring of the lower camp, they noticed that only one figure sat by the fire, a staff resting on his shoulder.

“Where’s Galatyne?” Falana asked.

The Druid looked up. “Left at first light,” he said. “Said he had something important to do and that he would meet us at the home of Willow and Ellam.”

The three elves only nodded.

“What about Stalzer?” Sadosed asked. “What happened to him?”

“I do not know.” Khallil shrugged, then shook his head. “But there was no sign of him. Whatever has befallen him, he has left this place.”

The celt only nodded and grunted his satisfaction that the cleric had not been abandoned.

Khallil swung up onto his mount and the five rode away, leaving the dwarven city, and at least one of their friends, behind.