

# The siege of Ironforge

# 3

After ten days on the road a column of smoke appeared on the horizon from the direction of Ironforge. As soon as Melvin called out and pointed towards it, Grimm dug his heels into Beefsteak and galloped away. Sir Jean and Mariel followed instantly, with Melvin on Zack close behind. Soon after it became clear that there were multiple fires, and the closest one was in a farmhouse. Mariel and Grimm arrived together, and they jumped off their horses. A half-elf woman stood outside, crying and looking at her burning home. The flames licked the roof, and through the small farmstead's windows they could see that the interior was a mass of flames.

"Is there someone still inside?" Grimm asked the woman gruffly, turning her towards him.

"Yes!" she cried, and before she could speak any more, Grimm released her and ran into the farmhouse.

Mariel managed to lay her hands on him before he rushed past, and protected him somewhat with a Resist Elements spell. She quickly casted an Ice Shield on herself so the flames could not touch her, and ran into the burning farmstead after Grimm. As Grimm took the stairs three steps at a time, she looked around downstairs, and pulled a small boy out from under a wrecked table. As soon as she had him in her arms, she turned around, and took him outside, knowing Grimm was still in there, trying to find more people.

When Mariel arrived outside, Sir Jean was comforting the sobbing woman, Melvin was holding the horses, and Aaron stood around watching the fire. Mariel carefully put the boy down, and checked his injuries. After pulling his ruined clothes aside, she casted a healing spell to make sure he would not die of his injuries, and Grimm arrived outside, carrying a wounded man.

"Put him here." Mariel said, and cared for him as well. Grimm, meanwhile, went back over to the woman.

"Were there any more people in there?"

"No, just my husband and son. Good sir, you saved them. How can I ever..."

"Don't mention it, it's my job." Grimm turned around, and looked at the smoke rising from other farmsteads. "Do you have anywhere to go?" he asked the woman.

"No, Ironforge is under siege, and my family lives too far away."

Grimm turned towards Sir Jean. "Take a cart, if you can find it, and pick up anyone else you meet and needs your help. I'll ride on ahead towards Ironforge. Try to avoid the main gates, if the city is under siege it will do you no good."

Grimm mounted his horse once more, and rode off at a full gallop towards the gates of Ironforge and the next column of smoke. Melvin looked around for a cart, and they helped the family into it. The woman was no longer sobbing, but now fussing over her husband and son, though there was little left of their injuries. Melvin sat down on the cart as well, looking around at the landscape, trying to find whatever lit those fires. Sir Jean and Mariel stayed on their horses, Mariel covering the rear, so she was closer to the wounded. Aaron had taken advantage of the situation, and had sat down in the hay next to the half-elf family. He was paying attention, but in a lazy way.

The cart arrived at the next burning home, another farm ruined, and they picked up an elderly lady.

"A dwarf came galloping," she told Sir Jean, who was probably the most handsome paladin to cross her path in her many years.

"He asked if there was anyone in the house, and when he knew there wasn't, said I would hitch a ride with you towards the city. I hope he knows it is besieged, because he rode his horse as if the devils were behind him, in stead of between him and the city."

They traveled onwards, sometimes passing burning farms with no survivors waiting for them, often picking up more wounded, always hearing tales of the dwarf who ran into wrecked buildings to find their lost husbands, wives and children. The closer the cart got to Ironforge and the gates of Andorhall, the more alert Sir Jean got. In the distance they saw large shapes, sometimes as big as the trees, loom and lumber in a menacing way. They were always far off, and never close enough to pose any threat. When night fell and the mountains loomed over them, Sir Jean pointed out a dark shape to Mariel: a winged demon flew high overhead.

"They will not attack us, I think." Sir Jean quietly said, and they make their way to the moutainside, avoiding all campfires they saw in the distance. There were a great many, and the shout and cheering of goblins, a high-pitched whining and wailing, reached their ears over the many miles that lay between them.

Finally, they came to a high cliffside, that looked uncommonly smooth, yet there was nothing Mariel could distinguish as a doorway. Sir Jean dismounted, and with his gauntleted fist banged on the cliffside as if knocking on a door.

"Please open this door for those in need." Sir Jean said to the wall, and waited. After a few moments, part of the cliff moved, and a small doorway appeared, bearded faces peering out at who would come to call. Once they saw it was Sir Jean, and noticed the cart with wounded and bedraggled people, they opened up the doorway in earnest, and they could enter.

Sir Jean followed Grimm's trail, and after half an hour they entered Andorhall, largest of the four Dwarven halls surrounding and protecting Ironforge. There was not a traveller that would enter Ironforge without first passing one of the Halls. Andorhall itself was spread out wide in many dwarven tunnels underneath the mountain range, but the main hall had huge stone doors opening up to one of four main roads to Ironforge. They were bolted securely shut with intricate dwarven machinery. The ceiling of the main hall was at least eight stories up, and around the walls of the cavern were ramps and walkways, joining the rooms that were carven into the stone walls. From all levels there were larger passages branching out towards other rooms and chambers.

On each side of the Andorhall doorway there was a huge tower, also carved from the stone of the cavern. Their arrowslits were hidden in the crevasses of the rock, and the only way into the tower could be guarded by half a dozen men or dwarves. The stone staircase inside could easily be defended as well, and each level had doorways that could be bolted shut for maximum defense.

All in all, the cavern and its many walkways was a very impressive sight, but not as much as the besieging army they could see from the towers. It was a combination the likes and size of which Mariel had never seen before. The front ranks looked like they were a combination of gnolls, goblins, and other small rabble. Behind that were rows and rows of demons, flanked by bebeliths, atins, vrockes, and groups of glabrezus. It was a terrible and powerful combination from one of the nine hells, she knew. Apparently, the voice that had spoken in their head had not been bluffing when it had said the first gate to hell was opened.

Grimm was instantly named general in command of the defense of the main gate of Andorhall. Sir Jean was dispatched to the cavalry, and lead a host of other armoured riders out on a quest. Melvin joined the other mages on the highest level of the towers, coordinating his spellcasting with theirs. Mariel, in the mean time, took up station with the healers, coordinating her efforts with theirs, appointing runners who would take care of clean bandages and water. They informed her that so far, the enemy had mostly bided their time, one or two groups of small rabble testing their defenses, and pulling back again after having taken lots of casualties.

The army took a long time to build their trebuchets, but once the waiting was done, the enemy bombarded the great walls of Andorhall with huge chunks of rocks. Fragments and splinters soared through the air, piercing human and dwarf flesh alike wherever a shield was not raised high enough to protect. Most dwarves were sporting huge tower shields, but still the air was thick with cries of pain. While Grimm showed how the dwarves had to shut the arrowslits with their shields so the splinters could not get inside, Mariel ran around bandaging and healing the wounded. She shouted orders to the other healers and runners, and ran up and down the many stairs of the tower to get to where she was needed.

When night fell, the trebuchets fell silent again, and when Mariel had finished in the tower, she went to the infirmary. Kneeling at every bed, she determined how bad their wounds were, and healed as many as she could. When she had cast one last spell, she stood up and stumbled towards an empty bed, and without taking off her armour, she fell down - physically and mentally exhausted - and did not move again. Grimm found her there later that night, and softly woke her. He helped her to their quarters, where he took off her armour and laid her in bed to rest for real.

The next morning Sir Jean returned, his cavalrily having taken many losses. When Mariel saw him, in one of the bustling halls, she couldn't help but notice his face shining like the sun, as if he was wearing an aura of Godly grace. Sir Jean himself didn't notice, though, and Mariel decided not to press him.

The next day everyone gathered in the main hall of Andorhall, just behind the great gates. People, all sorts of fighters, mages, paladins and clerics, were milling about; humans, dwarves, halflings and elves. They were gathered around a table where the generals and chiefs were peering at a ghostly image of the battlefield in front of the gates.

"Johan, priest of Hieroneous, and Willem, paladin of Ehlonna" said the Dwarven Chief - Mariel caught Willem's eye, and nodded - "will each take a portion of the cavalry and flank the enemy. Sir Jean, meanwhile, will charge with the remainder of the cavalry forward, straight into the heart of the enemy forces." The Chief looked at Grimm.

"I will lead the dwarves on foot, and follow sir Jean, straight ahead." Grimm said. "I've seen bebeliths, numerous demons and of course masses of gnolls, trolls, and the usual rabble. There's also a pitfiend in there." Grimm paused and looked at Sir Jean, "If we go in to take him out, we should work together, and it'll be tough."

Sir Jean merely nodded, and then the Chief turned his attention on Melvin Greatfeet, who also had a seat at the table. "What about you, Melvin?"

"Welllll..." Melvin mused, "...if you have a war chariot I could use, and a driver, I could bombard the enemy with Fireballs and Cones of Cold where needed. And if you have a second mage to come along, we could mark where the mages in the towers should place fireballs as well. A quiver of crossbow bolts, cast a Light spell on them, and shoot them in the fray as markers. Should work like a charm."

The Chief thought for a moment, and nodded. "Discuss it with the head mage, and I'll get you your chariot and driver. Take along a small and light third person, so you'll be manouverable. Mariel?"

Mariel, with her helmet on the table, studied the image of the soon to be battlefield. "It looks like we'll be needed most here." She poked a finger at the center of the fray. "I'll join with the cavalry and Grimm. If any of us gets severely wounded, I can make sure they make it back to safety and receive healing."

"Will you be going on horse?"

"I wouldn't expose Para to such a battle. She's not used to wearing armour, so it would impede her movement. A ride from Melvin will be fine, though." Melvin nodded at her and smiled mischievously.

"With those kinds of foes against us, I might need a better weapon than my regular waraxe, Chief." Grimm said. The Chief nodded.

"I'll get you something. Do you want to say a few words to the troops before we go?"

Grimm stood. "Are all your axes sharpened?!" The dwarves cheered. Grimm sat back down. Then Melvin stood up.

"My fellow halflings, you know what to fight and you know what to cook!" The Chief looked at Mariel, and she stood on her



chair.

"Folks of Ironforge. Today it is not just the battle of the dwarves, or of the elves, or of men, today it is all of our battle! It will not be the first or the last battle, and not even the most important one. But it is today's battle, and we will win it! May our Gods be with us,"

"kick some ass," Melvin broke in quietly.

"...and kick some ass!" Mariel finished. There were cheers, and the men dispersed. Sir Jean dashed off to his horse, and Melvin went to the Mage's tower, while the Chief got Grimm a much better waraxe. Mariel moved towards Willem, the paladin of Ehlonna that would lead the left flank. "Are you ready?" she asked him, and he replied that he was. Before he mounted his horse Mariel placed her hands on his head carefully, and blessed him before the battle.

The chariot was ready, so were the troops, and Grimm took it upon himself to open the big gates of Andorhall. Behind him, the dwarf troops he commanded were ready and waiting, row upon row of dwarf. With a light push, Grimm opened the doors, and they swayed open as though they were as light as a feather. Grimm gave the command, and the dwarves started to move out. Melvin in his chariot and the cavalry were next. The pounding of the hooves was a mighty thunder, and soon Melvin and Mariel in the chariot charged past Grimm.

The army in the distance stood ready, a row of pikemen at their front. When they saw the cavalry charging straight at them, the pikemen raised their lances, waiting for the cavalry to rush to their deaths. Melvin raised his crossbow, and aimed an arrow with Light on them. The marker was away, and from the towers besides the doors of Andorhall, two fireballs shot out and blossomed in the midst of the pikemen, killing and wounding many. Melvin repeated the action again, and again two fireballs shot out. At last, he shot his own fireball in the midst of the remaining pikemen, killing off another twenty, so the few pikemen that remained would have little or no effect on the cavalry. Indeed, when the horse troops arrived, they waltzed over them as if they were nothing. The cavalry split up, and parts charged the bebeliths, while others branched off towards other foes.

Mariel concentrated on the bebeliths, remembering what those foul spider daemons had done to Grimm, and concentrated. She cast Flame Strike, and expected divine fire to rain down from the sky. Instead, fifteen of the bebeliths shrieked in agony, fell over, and lay unmoving.

The main spider, leader of the bebeliths, would probably have focused his attentions on her, if it hadn't been for Sir Jean. He arrived with his portion of the cavalry, and manouevred Silver Spirit around the long legs of the spiders to get to the leader. His face screwed up in concentration, he raised his lance and aimed for the bebelith's heart. The lance must have penetrated critically, right into the heart, because when Sir Jean hit the beast, it shrieked in pain, and started to fall over. Before it could hit the ground or squash any of the horses, it disappeared without a trace along with its minions. None of the bebeliths remained, and Sir Jean rallied his forces and galloped on ahead.

Mariel arrived at the center of the fray, and jumped off the chariot, joining Grimm. They came upon a troupe of glabrezus. Grimm launched himself at the first one that was in front of him, and whacked away, given power by the spells Melvin had cast on him. Mariel cast some defensive spells as well, and joined Grimm. The glabrezus tried to get their hands on them, and they wielded their weapons and pinchers ferociously, but often missed Grimm. The times they did hit him though, became more and more, and Mariel took an opportunity to lay her hands on him and cast a healing spell. Grimm kept hacking furiously, and soon found he had fought his way to the leader of the glabrezus. It was a lot larger than the others, and loomed over them, even though Melvin had cast an Enlarge on Grimm. He pulled his axe back, and struck the demon lord at his chest, renting a huge gap in the armour. Mariel tried to strike the demon as well, but missed. The glabrezu ignored her, and focused mainly on Grimm, who defly dodged the attacks and buried his axe into the glabrezu time and again, until it stood panting and hurt.

With one mighty blow, Grimm ended its misery.

The remaining glabrezus broke out in a howl of frenzy, a blood-curdling screech that drove fear into the hearts of their enemies. They were frantic, and tried to shove their mates out of their way to get to Grimm and Mariel.

Behind them, only fifty feet away, Melvin stopped his chariot. "Come on!" he shouted at them.

As if time stood still, Mariel looked at Grimm, who curtly nodded, as if telling her to 'go, he would keep them at bay'. Mariel cast a Sanctuary on herself, and turned around, running as fast as she could to make it to the chariot, leaving Grimm behind in the midst of the frantic demons.

Grimm dodged an attack, and turned his back to the glabrezus that were almost on him. One of them struck out to bury his weapon between Grimm's shoulder blades, but missed Grimm by only an inch. And then he was away, sprinting to the chariot, jumping on it, and holding on for dear life as Melvin nudged the driver to make a run for it.

The air was heavy with the cries of the wounded and dying, the clashing of swords and the shrieks of the demons. From the left flank came the retreat signal, followed a similar signal from the right flank. The cavalry, or what was left of them, thundered past, discouraging any persuing demon and covering the retreat of the dwarves. Sir Jean, with his portion of the cavalry, was last to come. Overlooking the battlefield from the back of his horse, his eye fell on a fallen person, lying next to his dying horse. Sir Jean cantered over to him, and lifted him over his saddle, picking the banner of Ehlonna he still held along with it. Turning Silver Spirit around again, they galloped back to the doors of Andorhall.

The gates closed swiftly behind them, silently swinging shut on the perfectly maintained hinges. Everywhere there were horses, men, dwarves and elves. Their armour battle-stained, many of the folks gathered there used scraps of cloth to wipe the filthy blood from their weapons, and clean up their armour as best they could, before dispersing to their quarters, the stables, or the infirmary.

Shortly after returning, Grimm barged into their room, and Aaron - who had been conveniently missing during the sortie - slipped out. "Chief needs us in Dun Morgh. He says the wall is breached, and we're asked to reinforce the dwarf troupes there until the Chief can send us more reinforcements. Sir Jean has gone to saddle the horses."

They packed up and left the room, being joined by a younger dwarf, who was eagerly following Grimm's every move. Grimm and Sir Jean up front, they turned down a hall Mariel had never been before. It was a long and straight tunnel, as wide as two carts, and connected Andorhall to the neighbouring Dun Morgh, another one of the four Dwarf halls that protected Ironforge.

After an hour's ride, they heard the clash of weapons, and slowly, carefully, they exited the mouth of the tunnel into the main hall of Dun Morgh. The wall was a mess, whole chunks of it broken down or cast aside, and in the gaping hole was a huge shadow, that moved slowly as if it was surveying its troops.

Grimm jumped off of Beefsteak and started to shout orders to the defending line of dwarves. Most of them snapped more upright when they heard his voice. Sir Jean stayed on his mount, but grabbed his longbow and started to shoot into the enemy lines. The gnolls and trolls that were attacking the dwarves and trying to force them back were more impressed by Melvin's accuracy and deftness at throwing Fireballs into their midst. Mariel dismounted and concerned herself with the wounded in the far corner of the cavern. Silently working on bandaging the poor dwarves, she hardly noticed the arrangements Melvin made inbetween his casting.

"If I put down a Wall of Force, can you let the dwarves build a barrier that will keep the enemy out?" Melvin discussed with Sir Jean.

"Probably. I will tell Grimm about your plan, and intercept any wounded dwarves Mariel is done with so they can get the materials."

When Grimm heard about the plan, he nodded. "We'll have to drive the buggers back, and kill off any that are behind the wall."

"That will be arranged. I will ask Melvin for a distraction." Sir Jean replied, and rode back.

When the dwarves were ready, Sir Jean gave Melvin a signal, and as Melvin cast an Ice Storm into the mass of enemies that had penetrated the breach in the wall, Sir Jean drew his sword, uttered a battle cry, and rode out to drive them back.

Soon after that, the dwarves could begin building their barrier, unbothered by the huge shadow in the doorway or the troops behind the Wall of Force.

During the watch of the night Sir Jean woke up after a mere two hours of sleep, and joined Mariel at the lookout. They overlooked the hall, lit in brilliant torchlight. The barrier the dwarves had built was still intact, and all seemed quiet.

"Jean, awake already, again? You really should stop worrying. Shall I make some tea?"

Sir Jean nodded, and took over on the ramp while Mariel went into the side chamber to make some tea. She returned, and they sat down to talk.

"I've been meaning to ask you something, Jean, and I've not gotten around to it." Mariel began. She tried to sip the tea - too hot - and continued. "I've been thinking about ways to serve my Goddess more, to become closer to her and serve her as never before. I suppose in the temple of Heironeous you were trained they told you about divine crusaders?"

Sir Jean said he had, and motioned for her to go on.

"I haven't yet spoken with Ehlonna about this, but she knows what is in my heart."

"She can hardly say 'do not';" Sir Jean replied, "I think she would be very well off having you as a divine crusader for her cause."

"It's just that it is another big step into the great unknown. The priests of Ehlonna who raised me taught me about divine crusaders, but exactly what it is they do is all I know about them. At the very least, I'll have to develop those fighting skills I admire you and Grimm for."

Sir Jean thought for a moment, and then said: "I have not yet told you this, but I have a small house in the city here. After this," he gestured at the hall below, with the barrier still in place behind the gaping hole in the doors; "is all over, I suggest we go there to rest a bit, get our strength back. It has a stable, so Para and Silver Spirit can stay comfortably there as well, with the other horses. I would be happy to help you train those weapon skills you covet so badly."

"That would be great, we can really use a breather and some time to prepare potions. I never knew you had a house here, why didn't you tell?"

"It is not that large, really. Not every house has a stable, but do not expect too much."

"Jean, farmers have 'just' a house and a stable. I'm sure we'll be very comfortable in your home."

They sipped their tea in silence for a while and looked at the hall below. Behind the barrier a couple of dwarves were patrolling to keep an eye on the enemy. Here and there, torches were stuck into crevasses of the barrier, providing adequate light to see by, although the dwarves didn't need it.

"I went to the head mage of the dwarves, and he told me what the ring does." Sir Jean suddenly burst out excitedly.

"What, this ring?" Mariel held up the hand with the ring she got from Lorian on it. "The one I got from Lorian?"

"Er.. no. This one, it keeps me alive."

"What?!" Mariel burst out.

"No, well, not like that. It is not that when I take it off I suddenly will die. It is mostly a ring that provides me with sustenance and rest when I can not have any. It is the reason I do not need more than two hours of sleep each night." Sir Jean explained.

"Still, you're not supposed to sleep only two hours a night. You're not half the elf you would like to be." Mariel said. "Besides,



you still eat, don't you?"

"Yes, but I do not have to." Sir Jean smiled.

"I can't see why you wouldn't want to eat, and don't go scaring Melvin by telling him about that. He'd probably be heartbroken."

They sat in silence again, until Mariel finally worked up the courage.

"Speaking of Lorian, I mean, I have tried looking for him and I've not really gotten around to finding him, what with the siege and all, but he is here, isn't he?"

"Yes, I believe he is on a quest." Sir Jean replied.

"For Heironeous."

"For Heironeous and Ironforge. I am sure he is doing his duties."

"I would have..." Mariel formed the words carefully, "...liked... to see him."

"Well, that can still be arranged. After all this is over, I can invite him to my house. We can have a small celebration we are still alive." Sir Jean said.

"That would be very nice. I'm just scared Grimm will try to overprotect me and chase Lorian away again." Mariel said.

"Perhaps you should talk to him." Sir Jean suggested.

"I will." Mariel replied; "If you don't mind, I'm going to rest a bit first. Wake us if there is anything wrong."

"Always."

The next morning, when Grimm woke up, Mariel was standing next to his bunk. From the kitchen were the sounds of Melvin cooking breakfast.

"If we survive today, Grimm, I'd like to talk to you. But not now. And to Melvin, too." Mariel said, and turned to leave.

"Whoa! What do you mean, 'if'. Wasn't today the day we'd have black dragon burgers for dinner?" Grimm sat up, grabbing her arm, and getting up to stand looking at her.

"That's what I meant. Not all battles are won, and it is a black dragon out there."

"We'll kick his ass anyway. What's this talk thing all about then?"

"I can't say. If I do, you will start a discussion, and we might as well have the talk now." Mariel turned and walked outside the small chamber, standing at the lookout balcony to overview the hall.

"Why don't we then!" Grimm said, behind her.

"Because we have a big day ahead of us, and none of us can afford to be distracted."

Just that moment, Aaron stepped into the hall. He looked up at the walkways and noticed Mariel.

"Oh, no. Just what we needed." Mariel sighed, and went inside to get some tea and bread. Aaron climbed the stairs, and entered their quarters as well, his eyes swiftly adjusting to the low light. Grimm stopped fussing with his armour, and turned to face him, planting his fists on his hips. "And what the hell are you doing here?!"

"I'm just checking up with you guys. You left me in Andorhall, you know."

"Myeah." Melvin replied with his mouth full from the kitchen. "MHis chief sent us here hmmbecause the hall was compromised. We're mmmdoing damage control."

"We're kicking that black dragon's ass, you mean." Grimm replied. "Are you going to help or not; I can't keep an eye on you when we're out there fighting a dragon."

"Yeah sure. If you are asking for help it sounds like you're outnumbered."

"Hey! We've got fourty battle-ready dwarves here who are willing to kick ass, or they'd better or else they'd have me to answer to. I'm just not very good at keeping an eye on you while I'm fighting a dragon. Who knows what you're up to, and I don't trust you one bit!"

"I'm a very trustworthy person!" Aaron said indignantly.

"You're a thief, and a liar!" Grimm burst out.

"I'm a dungeoneer, you bearded gnome!" Aaron spat.

"WHAT!!!" Grimm exploded.

Aaron turned around and ran, Grimm chasing after him as fast as he could, until Sir Jean called him back.

"Grimm! Let him go, we have to prepare." Grimm grumbled and turned around, walking back up the stairs and entering the room again. He began to strap on his armour.

"The huge shadow, it is indeed a black dragon, and I think it might be Bachtor." Sir Jean looked meaningfully at Mariel, who paled, remembering what she and Sir Jean did to Bachtor's altar.

"I will go out on my horse to taunt him, try and get him to come into the hall, dragons are notoriously vain." Sir Jean continued.

"We had better discuss tactics. It is probably best if we fight the dragon in here. He will not be able to fly over us in here, giving us a slight advantage. "

"I've a spell called Stone Shape. I can mold stone and shape it with my hands" Mariel suggested.

"You could try to trap him with that. Try and shape it over his feet?" Melvin replied.

"That could be worth a try. Trap his tail, so he really can not fly, and it will make sure he will not be able to slap us around with it." Sir Jean pondered. "I hope I will be able to taunt the dragon and get him back in here, but make sure you are ready when he gets here. Prepare all spells you wish to cast. Melvin?"

"I can't cast on the dragon, so I'll focus on buffing you and dispelling anything he casts. Mass Haste, Bull's Strength, Enlarge for all?"

"Alright. Gear up."

Sir Jean rode out to meet the dragon, and when he rode around the barrier the ranks and ranks of gnolls, trolls, and other scum that was holding the dwarves in just parted for him. He rode through undisturbed, and saw the dragon a mile off, out in the fields. Sir Jean rode halfway, and started to talk, or so the rest assumed. They saw the Dragon's jaw move in reply, and Sir Jean suddenly turned his horse around and blew the retreat signal on his horn.

"He's not going to get such an easy entry, that scum isn't going to be moving out of the way for him!" Grimm shouted, and jumped into the ranks of gnolls, killing three in his first stroke. Melvin got up as well and threw Fireballs and cones of cold into the ranks of the gnolls and goblins. It definitely was an easy entry for Sir Jean after that, but the dragon was not far behind. Grimm, Sir Jean, Melvin and Mariel stood inside the hall, behind the barrier, and Grimm ordered the dwarves to stand with them in a line, awaiting the dragon's arrival. It burst through the barrier in a shower of debris, hitting Grimm and Mariel. The dwarves turned tail and ran, but the rest of the party was not really affected by the aura of fear the dragon was emanating.

Meanwhile, in a tavern at the back of the hall, Aaron was sipping a dwarven ale.

The moment Bachtor entered through the wall he tried to get at Sir Jean. The first blow was a hit, and though Grimm tried to hit the huge beast it was initially too fast for him. Mariel kept an eye out for the tail, but she could not possibly get to it without having to move around the dragon, inevitably getting attacked in the process. Melvin, meanwhile, made himself useful by dispelling some spells the dragon had cast on himself. Grimm tried to hit the dragon again, and now jammed his waraxe into the dragon's scales, doing some damage. The dragon attacked Sir Jean again, whipping his tail around and missing him by an inch. Now the tail was closer, and Mariel sank down on one knee to embed it into the rock floor of the hall.

The fight continued, but the tail was now caught. Grimm moved under the soft belly of the dragon and started to hack at the scales there. All of a sudden, Sir Jean was caught by the dragon in his jaws. Lucky for him, he was too large to be swallowed, but now he was stuck in between the huge teeth, unable to move or even heal himself. Melvin, Grimm and Mariel did their best to disable the dragon, doing damage, but not as much as they would have liked to.

Suddenly, from the lookout ramp above, someone jumped on the neck of the huge beast. In a flash, the half-elf landed on the neck of Bachtor, and with a handy manoeuvre secured himself into place on the beast's neck. Aaron stabbed a shocking dagger between the scales where he sat, and watched the fireworks. The dragon spit Sir Jean out onto the rock surface, and tried to shake Aaron off, but Aaron was hard to dislodge.

When Mariel ran to Sir Jean to heal him, Melvin anticipated this and protected them by placing a Wall of Force around them. There was spittle and blood all over Sir Jean, but this could not bother Mariel in the slightest, and she concentrated on keeping Sir Jean alive.

And then it was over. With a last shriek, the dragon toppled over, grazing Grimm but not squashing him, and it fell heavily on the rocks of the hall. Aaron was riding the neck like a dragon tamer. When the shrieks died away, Grimm dusted off his armour, and moved over to Aaron. They stood glaring at one another, until Grimm clapped Aaron on the shoulder with a grin, and sat down brotherly next to him. "You did well, ye little punk."

Grimm then dispatched the young dwarf with a message for the Chief, saying the dragon was dead, and that they'd hold the hall until reinforcements could come. The dwarf left at once, glad to be away from the huge corpse blocking most of the hall. After that, Grimm started to talk with the dwarves that turned tail and ran away from the dragon, leaving him and his buddies to fight it. Needless to explain, he wasn't very pleased and there was some shuffling of feet.

Mariel sat down on the block of stone that still held the dragon's tail, despite the cracks in the stone of the force the dragon had applied trying to get free. After resting a while, and making sure that Sir Jean was okay, after his escapade in the dragon's mouth, she motioned for Grimm to come closer. Pointing towards the gaping hole in the wall, she said: "I have a spell called Stone Wall, which would probably help with this hole somewhat. If you could draw me a sketch of where the doors and arrowslits and everything should be, I could use that as a reference to mend the hole."

Grimm shouted at the dwarves to get him some writing materials, and set to work. Mariel suggested some enhancements in the form of illustrations or drawings, and when Grimm was done she stood up and studied the drawing. Focusing hard, she cast the spell, and drew her hands in front of her upwards, as if drawing the wall from the ground up. The stone of the hall rumbled, and obeyed her will. With a loud thundering, the wall grew upwards, following the motion of her hands, until it reached the ceiling, where it blended seamlessly to the cliffs. The sides of the wall were rugged, and didn't quite reach into the rock face, so Mariel concentrated once more, cast Stone Shape, and began to shape the wall and the cliff into seamless unity. She tried to see the cliff and the wall being one, blending and growing together, as if the entire wall was once made of pure cliff, and it was shaped from that, instead of having been put there like it was. When that was done, Mariel moved towards the front, where there was a gaping hole for two huge doors.

"Grimm, how about a text, right there," she pointed to a spot above where the doors would be, "saying 'Defenders of Dun Morgh' and our names?"

"Sounds...good." Grimm said, sounding a bit stunned that within minutes, a new wall had replaced the old and broken one.

Mariel motioned to Melvin to get his attention. "How about a Spider Climb? It would make my work so much easier."

Before walking up the wall, she said to Grimm: "Get Sir Jean to write his entire name down, he's told us but it's too long to remember completely, and I think the spelling is tricky."



Grimm returned shortly after, while Mariel was working on a leaf border surrounding the doorposts. She walked up and down the wall, embossing the names of Grimm, Sir Jean, Melvin and herself into it, finishing the leaf border, adding dwarf icons such as axes and hammers. As a finishing touch, above the doors, she drew Grimm's feather, the shining blade of Heironeous, two rearing unicorns -the sign of Ehlonna-, above the doors, and two spoons for Melvin besides them.

Right that moment, the young dwarf runner returned. He was mesmerized by the wall, but Grimm sent him back immediately with a message to the Chief that the breach in the wall was mended and that except for new doors, there would be no need for further stoneworks.

When the wall was finished, Mariel sank down on the rock around the dragon's tail again. Slowly at first, but more and more the dwarves that were the last defense of Dun Morgh went to look at the wall. Sir Jean was softly talking to Silver Spirit, and Mariel just sat back to relax a bit. The remaining troops of the besieging army of Dun Morgh had retreated, their leader slaughtered without even a casualty on the other side had crushed their morale greatly, and the dwarves could easily wander outside their new gate without even having to fear for a stray arrow. Defending the wall, even without doors in it, would not take much now.

Only a few hours had passed since they had slain Bachtor, the black dragon and possibly deity-wannabe, but Grimm, Sir Jean and Mariel felt refreshed without even having to sleep. Even Sir Jean, who had been too large for the dragon to swallow, but had almost died in between the huge teeth of the dragon's mouth, was rested and ready to defend the walls in case of need. Melvin and Grimm were taking along some souvenirs, Melvin tapping some black dragon's blood into four phials, and Grimm taking off some scales and teeth as a souvenir.

"You know," he called to Aaron, who was trying to pry some gemstones from between the dragon's scales, his endeavors hidden behind the corpse itself. "I could make you a nice armour from these dragon scales, if you'd like."

Three dwarves, large for their kind and very heavily muscled, stepped into the hall from the Andorhall tunnel. They looked around, their eyes lingering on the new wall and the corpse of the dragon, before stepping aside and admitting the Chief into the hall. The Chief walked over to Grimm, who had stopped prying at the dragon's teeth the moment the Chief's bodyguard had stepped into the hall.

"Good job." The Chief said to him, and sauntered over to the wall. He nodded to one of his bodyguards, who took out his axe and turned it around so a large spike, not unlike a pickaxe, was in front. The bodyguard took a running start, and launched himself at the wall, stabbing the spike at the stone as if expecting to break through it with one stab.

The axe stuck.

"Good job, indeed." the Chief murmured, and patted Mariel on the shoulder. Buckling slightly under the force of his attentions, Mariel smiled, hoping her platemail would not dent.

"Thank you. I hope it meets with your approval."

"It does, it does indeed. I wanted to see for myself, though this young man was quite impressed." gesturing at the young runner dwarf. "I'll have doors installed here in no time, you've made our job a lot easier."

"I was thinking, maybe the mages can preserve the dragon, and put it somewhere on Ironforge spires. A message for anyone who dares take up a weapon against Ironforge and the Halls." Grimm suggested.

"We'll make sure of that." the Chief replied. "And where are you off to now?"

Sir Jean cleared his throat. "I have a small home in the city, and I offered my friends some time there to recuperate."

"A good idea. But I expect you in Andorhall tavern tonight, for a beer and a party!"