

# Assault at Southshire

# 9

After the bone dragon had dissolved into grey dust, Grimm looked around the streets with Melvin and Leona. They set out towards the church, but Sir Jean had wiped the street clean and they encountered no more undead in their path. Grimm turned a corner and noticed a sound that had been a noise in the background. From inside one of the houses came the keening cry of a toddler. Grimm tried the door of the house, but it didn't open. With two shoves, his shoulder broke through the wood, and he could reach inside to open it. The crying came from upstairs.

"Melvin, you check downstairs." Grimm walked up the stairs with Leona. He turned right and motioned for Leona to go left. The crying got louder as both of them approached a door. Grimm found five toddlers in soiled beds. Stools were upturned and toys had been strewn around the room; in short it looked just like a regular nursery. Leona also found children, but these were younger. Four babies lay in cribs in the second room. Leona looked heartbroken at the sight of the abandoned children, and started to lift a baby girl out of her crib. From downstairs, Melvin called up to them that he had found a cart and a pony. Leona improvised a carrying cloth out of some sheets, and put the baby girl in it on her back. Grimm took two babies on his arms, and told the toddlers to follow him downstairs. Leona lifted the last baby out of its crib and followed Grimm downstairs. They lifted the children into the back of the cart, while Melvin put the pony to the cart.

"We need to keep moving." Quinga said to Grimm as he asked her if she had any suggestions. Grimm relayed the message to the others, and with some effort Leona managed to coax the pony into action. "Let's get these children safely to the church first." Grimm said. "We can pick up anyone we meet underway, and come back to finish off the undead later. Leona, if we are attacked, you get the children to safety. Melvin, you watch our back."

They made their way towards the church, navigating through the town of Southshire purely by following any road that went into the direction of the church tower that loomed over the buildings. Their going was slow because there was debris on the road that would hinder their cart. Leona steered the pony around the major debris, and had to lead the poor beast around the small fires that burned in some houses. When they turned the last corner and the church square was in view, it was clear to them that Sir Jean had not yet been there. Humans and undead were fighting in the square. It was hard to see where the ranks began, and it was more like a battlefield than a co-ordinated line of defense. The children started crying again, scared of the noise and the undead that were lumbering around the square.

Melvin cast a spell that dissolved the magic that kept the undead together, and the fighters looked up in confusion as their enemies crumbled at their feet. A small batch of undead were unaffected, but these were quickly dispatched of by the remaining fighters.

Around the church the humans had built barricades, and behind it were fighters with bow and arrow, women running around with blankets and tending to the wounded. When they got a little closer, they saw Sir Jean too, organizing the defenses. He was patiently pointing out to the villagers how best to build a barricade.

They took the cart inside the barricades and were met by Sir Jean, who handed Grimm a letter from the Chief. It warned of a large army approaching, and suggested they would get reinforcements. Lastly, the Chief expressed his regret he could not spare the forces from Ironforge and that Grimm would have to arrange the defenses himself.

"What do you think?" Grimm asked Sir Jean.

"We need to get reinforcements, someone who knows how we think and work. She;" he pointed at Leona; "will be needed to keep us alive."

"Do you have someone in mind?"

"Guys, I don't know what's in that letter, but what if we just evacuated these people?" Melvin broke in.

"The Chief said we should make a stand here. If he says that, evacuation is not an option. Not even if we take away the army's reason to come here." Sir Jean pointed out. "I have seen the army that is approaching, and it is large - two thousand strong at least. If we are on the run, we can not defend ourselves. Making a stand here is the best thing to do."

"And as for back-up. Are you thinking the same thing as I am?" Grimm asked the paladin.

"Probably. It is your call."

"You said it wasn't necessary." Grimm said.

"The situation has changed. You decide whether it is necessary. I think that the more people we have standing on our barricades, the more we are free to pick out targets like necromancers. Organise the defense here, I shall make sure that people retreat to this church." Sir Jean turned around and unfolded his wings. As he flew high over the church, he blew his horn thrice in the signal of retreat. The fighters around them who heard the signal looked up at Sir Jean, and then continued building the barricades.

"Melvin;" Grimm turned to face the halfling, who was holding the pony's reins. "How soon can you get Mariel here?"

"That depends on where in Margden Woods she is. If she's in the sanctuary itself, I can get her here in, er... two hours?"

"I think Sir Jean is right, and Mariel knows exactly how we think and work together. He wanted more healing, so we need Mariel. Get her here as soon as possible."

Leona took the children inside the church. She saw there were many women milling about, sharing bread, and taking care of their own children. She also noticed a group of young men, aged between 25 and 35, that would be very able to fight alongside the fighters. However, when she said they should report outside to Grimm, the men didn't move and ignored her. Leona called



Grimm inside to deal with them. The dwarf bellowed that all women should move to the left of the church, and all men to the right. He instructed the women first.

"The moment we get any wounded, we'll send them in here. I want you to make sure they are seen to. Get the medics to them, make them comfortable. The most badly wounded will be tended to first, so I need you to be strong for those who are in pain and cannot be treated right away. I also want you to take care of the children. Make a central stash of food and fresh water. The children can transport these things to the wounded where needed. If they're making themselves useful, they will be less scared." Then he raised his voice. "All the men except the medics, follow me outside!"

Melvin appeared under the apple tree in the sanctuary of Ehlonna. When he turned around, he saw Mariel. She sat dressed in full armour underneath a tree opposite him. She moved thoughtfully, like she had just awoken, and stood up.

"Were you waiting for me?" Melvin asked incredulously. He had expected her to be in leisurely clothes, if she was there at all. He had not expected her to be wearing armour.

"Tell me what is the matter." Mariel said.

"You...er... right. Hi!" Melvin stammered, clearly surprised. "Er...the Chief sent us to some village to retrieve an item and it is being attacked by undead. Masses of them."

"I wish I had known before that they were undead. Well, I am ready."

Melvin noticed for the first time that she had her rucksack on her back too, and that her belt had the usual pouches and scrollcases on them like she wore when they were on the road. Everything pointed towards the inevitable conclusion: she had known he would come for her.

"Er...can we ask some elves to come along to help us?" Melvin asked.

"We can try. The elven council was apprised of the situation around Ironforge. The main question is whether they have reached a decision already."

They found Sermon in another part of the Sanctuary, and Mariel asked him whether the elven council had reached a decision yet. Sermon replied that they hadn't, and nodded politely at Melvin.

"Sermon, can you spare us some help in our fight against the undead? There's supposedly two thousand undead on the way." Melvin asked.

Sermon looked thoughtful. "I shall inform the elven council of the situation, but that is all I can do for now."

"We cannot wait for their decision, father. I must go and help my friends." Mariel said, and sank on one knee before the high priest of the sanctuary. "Will you bless us before we go?" she asked in Elvish.

Sermon placed a hand on their heads and spoke the words of blessing, the warmth of the blessing spreading through their bodies. Then Mariel stood up and donned her helmet. For a moment, she looked into the eyes of Sermon, and then she turned around and walked with Melvin underneath the branches of the apple tree, and from there they teleported.

Melvin teleported them close to the church, and Mariel turned on the spot to survey her surroundings. When she had turned around fully, she found Grimm in front of her. She noticed he was wearing a pretty new armour, but she had time for little else for he hugged her quickly.

"What's the situation?" she asked him when he had let her go, and Grimm brought her up to date.

"I wish I had known we were dealing with necromancers." she said, glancing at the men.

"How are you here so quickly?" Grimm asked.

"A dwarf arrived at Margden Woods yesterday and told the council about the situation around Ironforge. I thought it best to be ready to go, just in case you needed me."

Mariel took her time greeting Para and Silver Spirit. She had missed her faithful mare terribly, knowing that Para would have loved to be back in the sanctuary as well, though it would have been hard for her to leave Silver Spirit behind. The two had become quite close, possibly as close as she herself had come to Sir Jean. Sir Jean himself was still flying around the town, calling troops to the church by blowing his horn.

Mariel checked on the wounded inside the church, and saw that the medics and women had organized things effectively. She introduced herself to the medics, and spoke kind words of approval at their alacrity and efficiency. When she returned outside, Sir Jean had returned, followed by troops on horseback, women and children. Mariel ushered the women and children inside the church, distributing them over the available space so they didn't clutter the space in front of the doors. Mariel selected a woman in her middle years, called Morwen, to take over for her. Then she approached Leona.

"If we take bales of hay and drench them in tar, we can ignite them from a distance with a burning arrow. It would make for an excellent line of defence against the undead."

Leona nodded, and said she would ask Sir Jean. Mariel returned to helping out the medics by bandaging the wounded. She also selected some women who were standing around idly to pay attention to what she was doing, so that they could do it without her help too. When they nodded that they understood, Mariel went to Morwen.

"Have several of the older children stand ready to call either Leona, the half-elf you just saw, or myself inside if you really need our help. We are both skilled healers, but will be out with the men keeping the undead at bay. Instruct more women in bandaging the wounded. Anyone who is particularly inept at bandaging can lend moral support and prepare food for all of us. I need you to keep them under control, keep them calm."

Morwen nodded gravely, and rolled up her sleeves. The woman walked over to the group of refugees and set to work

immediately. Mariel nodded at her competence, and went back outside. Grimm was busy helping the fletchers craft more arrows for their archers, while Melvin distributed quivers of arrows. The halfling gave Leona a quiver and spoke to her shortly, not letting go of the quiver until she nodded gravely. Mariel walked on, looking for Sir Jean. She found him near the barricade, keeping an eye on the streets. When she approached him, he smiled at her warmly. Mariel wrapped her arms around him, kissing him softly. They had little time to spare, with the undead army on the way, so she kept her greeting short but sweet. There would be more time later.

When she took her arms away, he smiled at her, and his eyes showed his tenderness for her.

Sir Jean discussed with Grimm the possibility to make a sortie. Such a large army of undead would have a couple of leaders in it. "If we take out the leaders, they will become weaker," he reasoned. "I think I would like to take Mariel along also, if that is alright," he looked at Mariel.

"I think I would like that," Mariel smiled at him.

Grimm nodded. "If you think that's wise, then by all means. The only thing I can do here is organize defenses and fight alongside these people. You two can do the most damage against these undead anyway, so go right ahead."

Grimm pulled off a quick salute, and walked back to the fletchers. Mariel stashed the things she would not need inside the church, near the doors. Her bow and quiver of arrows would be cumbersome, since Sir Jean wanted her to ride Silver Spirit. Then she mounted Silver Spirit graciously and said she was ready to go. They took off, gaining altitude above the village by circling once or twice. Mariel scanned the surroundings and saw the army immediately. It was stretched across the lands like a black scourge, rank upon rank of undead.

"Let's start at the front," Sir Jean said, and set out for the lead army. Silver Spirit followed him closely and landed forty feet from the army. Mariel had the distinct feeling the horse wanted her to do her thing, but Sir Jean motioned for her to be patient. The army marched forward towards them, and when they had closed to ten feet, the paladin nodded.

Raising her holy symbol to the sky, Mariel chanted her Turn Undead spell, calling on the power of her Goddess. Sir Jean chanted too, and altogether fifty undead crumbled to dust at their feet. The rest lumbered on, and when they had closed to ten feet, Mariel and Sir Jean chanted again. They repeated this several times in different places, until finally Sir Jean said that it was time to go.

Just at that moment, four Magic Missiles streaked from the army to them. They impacted, though the damage was light, and Sir Jean pointed in the crowd, handing Mariel his longbow and an arrow. Mariel took the bow and aimed, remembering the smell of spring and the lessons of Xantara, exhaling softly and loosing the arrow at the source of the Magic Missiles.

The arrow streaked into the mass of undead and a fireball exploded from the arrow as it impacted. In the blast crater dust of at least two hundred undead slowly settled as the smoke cleared.

Mariel stared for a moment, and carefully handed the bow back to Sir Jean, glad to be rid of the thing. She looked at it like it would explode in his hands and scrambled onto Silver Spirit again.

When they flew up into the air, Mariel looked around. The army had been hit heavily, but fear settled in her heart as she saw more undead than before. The estimate of two thousand undead had been doubled, if not tripled. There were at least five thousand undead converging on Southshire, from three directions.

They spent the next few hours preparing for the attack. When Sir Jean and Mariel returned, they had closed all gates to the village in the hope to slow the undead down. They would break through eventually, but it would buy them some time. Melvin and Grimm had thought of a way to let Sir Jean drop Melvin's enchanted arrows on the army below by a couple of tubes attached to a belt. One of the fletchers made Mastercraft crossbow bolts that Melvin would enchant, while the others still worked on regular arrows for the archers. The women inside the church had organized the supplies and made a hearty stew that would strengthen the men. Sir Jean went inside the church to sleep. He would need only two hours of sleep to be completely refreshed, and there was time before the armies reached Southshire.

Mariel walked around the church square. There were only two entrances to the square, and both were defended well. Furthermore, she could see rings of pitch near the entrance, that could be ignited as the undead approached. Archers stood ready behind the barricades, and several mages sat on the cobbles. The men were alert and determined, though she could see fear in their eyes.

"Who is on lookout?" Mariel asked Leona.

"Aethelinda," the half-elf replied.

"Who?" Mariel asked confused.

"The pseudodragon."

"A...dragon?" Mariel asked incredulously. Before Leona could explain though, she heard a voice in her head. "Look up!"

Mariel looked at the spires of the church and saw a small bronze shape on one of the spires. The long tail was wrapped around the spire and she flapped her wings at the elf.

"She's Melvin's," Leona shrugged.

"How convenient," Mariel said. "Let me know when she sees something, so we can prepare."

Mariel continued her rounds, talking to the troops. She told them to relax, take turns in taking breaks. There was no need for them to be completely stressed and alert for hours only to collapse when the armies finally arrived.

They waited for two hours.



The racket of the lumbering army came closer. For nearly an hour, they could hear them trying to break through the city gates. One by one, the gates fell. It was only a matter of time as they could not spare any of the fighters to defend the gates. When the gates fell, everyone got ready. Mariel and Grimm ordered the fighters back to their stations and spoke to them to strengthen their resolve. Then Mariel, Sir Jean and Melvin started casting spells to strengthen their armour, increase their strength and their agility. Mariel cast the spell Prayer on them all, saying a prayer for their strength and resolve to keep them alive through the night. Then she mounted Para, who was also clad in her armour, and with Grimm and Melvin moved to the south entrance to the square. Sir Jean and Leona took the north entrance.

Sir Jean's skin glowed silvery in the dusk light when he gave the command to loose arrows. All the archers, both on the north and the south entrance, the archers loosed the arrows into the hordes of undead. There was hardly any space left between the bodies that thronged in the street. The bottleneck crushed the undead together even more. As they came to the first ring of pitch, Aethelinda breathed a small trickle of lightning at the pitch, which ignited immediately. The flames were as high as the houses, black smoke billowing over the rooftops, but the undead kept on coming. They were burning now, though they felt no pain and were unhindered by the fire.

Mariel read her last scroll of Sunbeam and as the parchment crumbled in her hands she pushed her right hand forward in a thrusting motion. A sunbeam shot from her palm, cutting through row upon row of undead. In its wake nothing was left of the undead, just a cloud of dust.

"Ooh shiny!" the voice of Aethelinda cheered in her head.

The undead reached the second ring of pitch, their flaming bodies igniting it as they crossed it. Mariel shot the last three of her Sunbeams from her hands, the undead dissolving in its wake. Grimm could finally start using his axe. The undead had advanced far enough for him to hit them, and Mariel nudged Para forward as well. She managed to cut three undead in half. Grimm had found himself a giant to fight. It looked like an undead ogre, and the remarkable thing was that it wasn't on fire. Grimm seemed to effortlessly avoid the attacks of the giant. The club of the ogre alone was twice as large as Grimm, but that didn't stop him. Grimm made to strike the club from the ogre's hand, but the ogre held on to it. The axe reverberated in a way that a sonic boom echoed over the square. When his first plan failed, Grimm turned his attention to the beast itself. Seemingly effortless, he cut the ogre down, his axe making another sonic boom to emphasize the force of the attack. The undead ogre crumbled slowly to dust, its face still blank when it dissolved.

At the north gate, Leona cast a Fire Storm. The clouds above started to swirl, and then fire rained from the sky, crushing and igniting even more undead than before. "Kick ass!" Aethelinda piped up.

After the storm had taken its toll from the undead, Leona transformed into a rhinoceros. She snorted once, pawing the ground with a foreleg, and charged into the throng of undead. Her momentum carried her forward through the rows of undead that crumbled to dust as she passed. Sir Jean followed her into the throng, calling on the powers of heaven to aid him in this fight. His armour started to give off a faint light that grew in intensity quickly until he shone like a sun himself. On the other side of the church, Grimm and Mariel could feel the effects too. Grimm's armour also began to shine and Mariel felt stronger than ever before, like her Goddess was helping them in their fight. Para kicked, leaving a hoof-shaped imprint on the forehead of one of the zombies. Grimm's axes boomed again, tossing undead back from the displacement of air around the axe.

All they could see was wave after wave of undead. The fighters were brave and finished off enough zombies that were in their way. It took all but a few stabs of a knife to do it. The archers had enough arrows for another half hour and the undead were not yet climbing over the barricades. At some point, they would. Grimm knew too that his fighters would tire of battle, need to give their arms a rest. The zombies would keep coming until every last one of them was dead. Exhaustion would be their next greatest enemy. But there was something he would have to face first.

Grimm poked Mariel, and pointed to flying shapes above them.

"Gargoyles." Grimm said, pointing out the obvious. Mariel blanched. This was worse than the ogres, much, much worse. Grimm would not be able to reach them, because they flew too high, and nor would she be able to get to them except with spells. Just when she was about to tell Grimm to warn Sir Jean, she heard his voice in her head. "I have told Melvin to take care of them. Watch Grimm's back and make sure he stays alive. I am too busy to help you out on these gargoyles. Everything going okay over there?"

Mariel smiled, and answered him in her head. Then she looked over her shoulder at Melvin. He was waving his hands in an intricate gesture in the direction of the North gate. Only when he was done did he focus his gaze on the gargoyles. His lips mumbled a spell and his hands wove the gestures and then a Cone of Cold shot forward, and enveloped the gargoyles, who fell frozen from the air and shattered on the ground.

When she looked back to the zombies in front of her, she almost fell off her horse. A small, bronze pseudodragon was flapping its wings in front of her nose, holding out Grimm's holy mace to her. "Dragon delivery service!" she heard the small dragon's voice in her head. Startled, she turned her gaze from Aethelinda to Grimm, and at his nod, took the mace. "Thanks, you two." she said. Aethelinda turned around, and focused her stare on a zombie in front of Para, zapping it with another breath of electricity. Then she flew away again, leaving Mariel to attack the zombies and skeletons in front of her. Mariel raised the mace up high to the heavens and cried out a warcry: "For Ehlonna!" Then she attacked the first thing in front of her, and in a blaze of holy energy eighteen of the undead crumbled in the attack of the mace.

Leona turned around and charged back to the gate. The undead seemed to evaporate as she made a bullrush to the gate. She had

returned to her rhinoceros shape after she gave Aethelinda Grimm's mace. The shape had many advantages: she was larger and stronger than in her half-elf form, and if she charged, she was nigh unstoppable. When she got to the gate, she turned around. Sir Jean was still in the throng of undead, shining like a beacon of Heironeous - which probably was not so far from the truth. And beyond him, behind the rows of undead, she could make out a hydra in the distance. She had no sooner spotted it than she had warned the paladin of the impending danger. She saw his head whip up to look at the hydra, and suddenly he and his mount turned ghostlike. They rushed through the army of undead, touching no-one, and returned to normal right in front of the hydra. What magic trick this was, Leona knew not, but she did know that the paladin was in grave danger there.

Sir Jean raised his swords and started to pound at the hydra, aiming for the twelve heads, though it seemed foolish to Leona. Any head that was lobbed off, would grow back soon enough. She saw wounds start to appear on the flanks of the hydra, saw Silver Spirit kicking at the legs of the enormous monster. The hydra keeled over, taking down many undead in its wake. It stayed down for all but a minute, and then new heads sprouted from its body where the old ones had been severed. The heads started to attack Sir Jean, moving down in swooping motion to bite at the paladin and everything that was in their way.

Mariel felt something tickling on her hand. Before she could take off her gauntlet to check on the ring she wore there, she felt a connection sever. Instantly, she knew that her ring was gone. The ring was half of a pair and the connecting one was worn by Sir Jean. She stood up in her stirrups, trying to find a white pair of wings in the mass of swarming undead and paying no heed to the ones directly in front of her. She noticed the hydra and tried to count its heads, but they were moving too fast for her to do so. Then a spell sizzled from Melvin's hands towards the creature, and with a dissatisfyingly small amount of fuss, the hydra disintegrated.

Silver Spirit spread his wings and lifted off, circling around over the masses of undead. Sir Jean raised his swords to the heavens and cast a spell. The amount of power put in it was massive, like someone tossing a bucket of magic out of the window. Grimm's armour, that had gleamed with power, didn't gleam anymore. Worse, the power Sir Jean drained from his surroundings and used in his spell caused Mariel to lose her balance and slide off Para. Grimm caught her so she didn't hurt herself, and when he looked up, at least five hundred undead were gone. In the distance, larger undead, ogres, were closing the gaps they left, but it would take them a minute to catch up. Mariel mounted Para again, steadying herself in the saddle with one hand. She held onto the holy mace with her other, but first prepared a spell called Flame Strike. When she cast it, the undead stopped their approach. They seemed hesitant, but then slowly started moving towards them again.

Melvin called out to his archers and they loosed a volley of arrows. Before they reached the ogres they collided with an invisible wall. "He's got a Wall of Force." Melvin said, recognizing the effect immediately for what it was. "Aethelinda, see if you can find who cast it." The small pseudodragon bounced up and down on his shoulder.

Sir Jean had landed next to Mariel for a moment, and Mariel placed her hands on his shoulders, casting a few spells to strengthen him. Because of Melvin's Enlarge spell on the paladin, she needed to reach up to be able to reach that high. Then Sir Jean bent over her and kissed her lightly, then turned to the others and saluted them. He turned misty again, like a ghost, and flew through the rows of undead ogres at the spellcaster and leader of the undead. They could not see exactly what Sir Jean was doing, as the rows of ogres obscured him from view, until they all dissolved. Then Melvin pointed at the sky. "Look!" The clouds above them were boiling black ink. From the sky streaked seven, no eight lightning bolts down to the earth, centering on Sir Jean.

Para flicked an ear. Mariel sat on her back seemingly quiet, but Para reacted to the minute movements Mariel made.

Sir Jean came flying back, unhurt. The new armour Grimm had made was incredibly strong and could resist lightning bolts up to a certain point. The eight bolts of lightning that had streaked down from the sky had impacted the ground at Sir Jean's feet, scarring the earth but leaving the paladin unharmed.

"We have approximately thirty minutes of rest. After that we are in deep trouble. We need to find the man we came here for as soon as possible." Sir Jean announced.

Mariel went inside the church, and selected all the men. There were a few dozen of them, with scratches and bruises that had gone inside for some comfort and some food. Mariel asked that all men whose name started with a 'B' would step outside with her. Eight men followed her, and she called Sir Jean to her when they got outside.

Sir Jean made quite the impression, and asked all of the men if they could do magic. He sent five back inside, who went immediately, relieved. The three that were left were scrutinized even further. At last, Sir Jean shook his head, motioning for the men to go.

"We shall need to speak to the captain." Sir Jean sighed. Mariel went inside again immediately. With the help of Morwen, who was left in charge, she found the captain in a side chamber. He was heavily wounded and there were soaked red bandages all over his body. Mariel knelt next to him and checked his injuries. He was very badly wounded, and though she could heal him with her spells, saving her strength was more important. She reached for her wand of Cure Serious wounds, and waved it over the wounds of the captain. Three times she used the wand's spells, and then she reached over to a pitcher to sprinkle some water in the captain's face.

"Sir Jean wants to speak to you." Mariel said, doffing her helmet so the captain could see her face.

"Who?"

Mariel did not reply, but took the man by his elbow softly, to help him up. He was quite confused, but he got up slowly. She



first took him to get something to eat, and then took him outside. As the captain saw the enlarged Sir Jean, his gaze travelled up towards the paladin's face.

"Captain, meet Sir Jean. Sir Jean, this is him."

Sir Jean talked with the captain for a short time, and then straightened up again. "It is him;" he announced. "but we can not hold the church, not with what I have seen coming. There are more undead on the way, many more. Melvin, can you or any of the mages get a message to the Chief to call for reinforcements?"

Melvin frowned. "I can get there, but I can't get back when I do. I'm not leaving you here."

"We should evacuate these people." Mariel said.

Sir Jean thought for a moment. "Grimm, can you make a cart or a box? Two, one for Silver Spirit and one for me?"

Grimm nodded curtly and walked to the doors of the church. Without any consideration for anyone's feelings, ignoring the stares of the townsfolk, he put his axe in the crack of the door at the hinges and cracked the doors out of their hinges.

"I can shape wood with a spell." Leona said. "But you need to cut it up in smaller pieces."

Grimm did so, still ignoring the looks of the crowd. He cut the doors in three pieces, and Leona used her spell to shape the largest piece into a large box Silver Spirit could carry behind him, and then one of the smaller pieces for Sir Jean to carry.

Mariel gathered the children and young mothers together and told them what to expect. When Leona was done shaping the boxes, Grimm lashed them into place so the horse and paladin would not be unduly hindered by it. Then the people entered the boxes. It was a good thing both Sir Jean and Silver Spirit were still enlarged by Melvin's spell, or they would never have been able to lift the boxes filled with people. Sir Jean saluted once, and lifted off, closely followed by his noble mount.

Mariel, Grimm, Leona and Melvin prepared for the next wave of undead. The dark looming shapes in the distance turned out to be raptors. Mariel was assured they were dead, and before the raptors would get to them Sir Jean would have time to return once, but they would have to hold the church until he could return for a third time.

"Grimm, you and Leona take care of the other entrance. I shall hold this side." Mariel said, a look of determination in her eyes. Melvin frowned at her for a moment, but recalled a hard wooden staff she had wielded once upon a time, and did not speak.

"Be careful!" Grimm shouted after Mariel, as she mounted Para and rode to the gate with Grimm's holy mace still in her hands.

Sir Jean returned, and the boxes were loaded again. Two elder gentlemen sat on Silver Spirit's back, and they were holding some of Melvin's special arrows, dropping them as the horse rose over the rooftops of what used to be their home. The raptors were distracted by the onslaught, but this was only on the side where Grimm and Leona stood. At the gate where Mariel stood, they were not delayed and coming steadily closer.

Mariel took position in the middle of the gate, clear to the raptors whom they would need to pass to get to the church. Mariel focused and wove a spell around her, casting a Magic Circle against evil so that she would be stronger and the raptors would be weakened. As soon as they were close enough, Mariel cast a Flame Strike, raising one hand imploringly to the sky. A huge column of fire roared from the heavens, striking at least forty of the raptor dead before they could even come close to Mariel. Her armour began to give off a faint light now, and it only increased as she cast her next spell.

"Ehlonna!" Mariel called to her Goddess, "Show Thy wrath and grant me the power for a Holy Smite!"

Pandemonium ensued. The raptors, suddenly blinded by the spell and no longer sure of their footing or the position of their foe, bumped into each other. Blinded and mad with their objective, they snarled at each other, attacking whatever was closest to them, whether it was Mariel or another raptor. The snarling, heaving, fighting mass of raptors was less than twenty feet away from Mariel, but still closing in on her.

Behind Mariel, Melvin read from his scroll, he had spied something that would warrant the use of his Scroll of Disintegrate. Just as Mariel spotted the red dragon skeleton in the writhing mass of bodies, it disintegrated from Melvin's spell. If the raptors had been in a panic before, they were in a fury now. The heaving throng of undead closed in on her, slowly but surely.

On Grimm's side, the archers fired a volley of Melvin's special arrows. Not all of the archers had Melvin's special arrows, but the spread of the volley would have been extremely painful for any living foe. However, the raptors were no longer living - their undead bodies would keep going long after a living person would have been driving off. Another volley followed the first, and a dozen raptors fell to the earth never to rise again. Finally, the first raptors were close enough to Grimm for him to attack them. He whirled his axe around, its blade biting deep into the bodies and killing off several. His armour caught a few glancing blows, and Grimm noticed several scratches in the shining surface of his armour. This drove him into an even fouler mood. How dare they dent and scratch his lovely new armour!?

Leona behind him spotted several of the skeleton dragons, and put one of Melvin's special arrows on Quinga. She sighted down the arrow and loosed it, hoping to hit the dragons where it would hurt the most.

Her shot was more true than she could have dared dream. The arrow impacted in the first dragon, boring deep into the skull of the dragon and in the next instant everything went white. The shockwave hit Mariel at the other side of the church, who lost consciousness and slid off her horse. Leona too lost consciousness, and Grimm barely could remain standing in the wash of the explosion. Everything had gone white-hot for a moment, but as the first smoke cleared away, he could see Leona at his feet. There was nothing left of the town where the arrow had hit. A blast crater of at least sixty feet across was where the dragons had been, and some smoke still rose from it. The undead were gone, as far as he could see, and all of the men - fighters and archers alike - were out cold as well. He had little time to assess the situation further, because three of the remaining raptors fell upon

him and attacked. Two of them missed, but the third one inflicted some wounds on him before he could kill it. Within half a minute, they were all dead, but more raptors had seen him fight and came to attack him as well. There were nine raptors left, as far as he could see.

As soon as Leona had regained consciousness, she summoned three rhinos in front of her and Grimm, and told the beasts to attack the raptors in front of them. The rhinoceroses thundered into an attack, and she took out her bow and arrows again. This time she avoided taking one of Melvin's special arrows, and loosed three arrows into the raptors. One of them keeled over, the others remained standing.

From above them, Aethelinda used her own weapon: a trickle of electricity shot from her open mouth, zapping the raptor closest to Melvin immediately in front of Grimm. Melvin was still close to the church, surveying the fighters that were scrambling to get up.

When Mariel regained consciousness she realised that Para had fallen over as well and that the body of her horse was pinning her legs down. Para was struggling to get up and Mariel held on to the saddle so she would be lifted up with her horse. It wasn't graceful, but she succeeded. The raptors were swarming around her and her mount, and she had new wounds on her body. The raptors had been nibbling on her flesh when she was out cold. A great fury rose in her chest, and she cast a spell. Sunbeams shot from her hands, completely disintegrating one of the raptors. Para kicked the other raptor that was closest, and the beast crumbled to dust. This gave her a moment's respite: the next raptors were far enough away so she could dismount and wake up some of the men that were still unconscious around her. She managed to wake up one man, who then turned to the task of waking their fellows. Slowly, the army that had stood with her regained consciousness and grabbed their weapons again.

Preparing for the next wave of undead, Mariel mounted Para again and cast Righteous Might and Divine Power, ready to hold the church until Sir Jean would come back for them. She was barely done casting when the next raptors fell on them, wounding her even more. She was now bleeding badly, and had no idea how her friends were doing, but she took the time to mumble a healing spell. All she knew was that she needed to hold her position until Sir Jean would come back.

Another raptor attacked her, but she was faster. She swung Grimm's holy mace around in a great arc and hit the undead on his chest, and on his head in the backswing. The beast crumpled as it was fell, and she could continue the blow onto the next raptor. The mace crushed its shoulder, but the undead kept on coming, hardly hindred and not at all distraught at the damage inflicted upon him. He missed her completely, and Mariel blocked the claws and beak of another, fending them off.

When she had a moment's respite, Mariel took a scroll out of her scrollcase, and read it aloud. The scroll contained a spell called Holy Word. Four of the raptors crumbled to dust, five more were panicking because of their sudden blindness, and a further three were frozen in their tracks. All of a sudden Sir Jean landed behind Mariel. He raised his sword to the sky and cast a Turn Undead, waves of holy energy radiating from him. More than a dozen of raptors crumbled to dust, including many that Mariel had already affected with her scroll of Holy Word. When the dust settled, Mariel could see there were only four raptors left, and used her last Sunbeam spell to finish them off.

Silver Spirit landed next to Grimm, who started to order the soldiers into the box that was lashed behind the huge horse. When the horse took flight, only Leona and her three rhinos and Grimm were defending that side of the church. Leona had turned into a rhino as well, and together with her rhinosceros friends charged into the raptors that were attacking them. Aethelinda finished off the last one, shooting electricity at him from her perch on the spires. "Yiiiiihaaaa!" the small pseudodragon cheered.

They had a few minutes to heal themselves, and Sir Jean went by each of them in turn. Then they heard a marching army approach. Grimm recognized it immediately as a dwarven march, having marched with the dwarves for years, he could march in his sleep.

"Brace yourselves!" Sir Jean called out, so they all could hear. "They are not on our side."

Mariel peered at the approaching dwarves. They all wore dwarven armour, there were drums and the banners of Ironforge.

"You're telling me they're against us?" Grimm said, "You want to fight a thousand dwarves?"

"We can't fight them," Mariel said, "We need to evacuate as soon as possible."

"If these are dwarves of Ironforge, then what happened to Ironforge!" Grimm burst out.

"They could be the dead of Ironforge." Melvin pointed out. "So far, we've only fought undead here."

Melvin tried to cast a fireball in the midst of the dwarves, but before the spark of fire could blossom it was dispelled by the enemy.

Sir Jean and Mariel joined Grimm and Leona at the other gate, taking the troops that were left with them.

"I am unsure if they are undead, but I do know for sure they are our enemy." Sir Jean said.

"What do you want to do?" Grimm asked Sir Jean in Dwarvish.

"Retreat into the church, wait until Silver Spirit is back." Sir Jean answered him in Dwarvish, but switching to Common. "If we divide our forces now, we will not survive. By staying in the church we will form one front against the enemy."

The sun was blocked as a volley of arrows Grimm and Sir Jean had enough time to dive behind their shields, but Mariel and Para were not so swift. Arrows clattered on Grimm's shield, scratching the surface before the adamantinite could repair itself. Melvin had tried to hide behind Sir Jean, but one of the arrows pierced the side of his body. When the first volley passed, Sir Jean grabbed Leona by the scruff of her neck and bodily threw her into the church where she would be safe. Then he picked up Melvin and crushed the halfling between his body and his shield. Melvin was wedged in safely, but the shield obscured his



view.

Mariel took Para's bridle and drew her towards the church, and Sir Jean and Grimm also retreated, still facing the enemies and hidden behind their shields. Finally they were all inside, except Sir Jean, who was too large to fit into the church easily. The paladin kept his shield as a door, and was crouched in full defense behind it. The party was safe, but not all of the town warriors had made it. Only a third of the men that had stayed behind had made it into the church. Sir Jean managed to take five more inside, but said that the others would probably not make it.

"I can use my Sanctuary spell to get more of the wounded." Mariel said, but Sir Jean said that they were already too far gone, possibly beyond healing. He looked worried and a deep frown creased his forehead.

Mariel gathered all the wounded around her, including Melvin, and took out a scroll of Mass Cure Serious wounds. It would heal every wounded person in a circle around her and though it would cost some time to cast, it took little strength and it was the only hope for some of the wounded. There was just too little time.

When she was finished with the scroll, she approached Sir Jean, but she couldn't discern if the blood that was running off his armour was his or someone else's. But Sir Jean said he was fine, so she didn't question him any further.

The problem of Sir Jean not fitting into the church in his enlarged shape was solved quickly with a brilliant idea of Leona. She used a Stone Shape spell to make the church one massive block of stone, shaping the stone around the crouching paladin and extending it in a dome shape over him. They were now locked inside, but it would take the dwarf army a lot longer to break down the walls.

"We have another problem." Melvin said. "They have a caster along that can kill most of us with one spell."

"Like what Sirc'al did to me back in Ironforge?" Grimm winced. "That's not good."

They glanced at Leona, who was busy finishing the last stone wall around Sir Jean. Melvin caught a glimpse of movement from the corner of his eye. "Take cover! Behind you!" he screamed, disturbing their trains of thoughts abruptly. Behind them in the church some dwarves had materialized. They were standing in a roughly circle-shaped formation, and stepped out towards the group. Melvin needed no urging, and cast a Wall of Force to stop them immediately. The dwarves marched forward until they came to the Wall of Force, and stopped there.

"Can you cast your snowstorm in there?" Grimm asked Melvin, who shook his head.

"No, I've shaped the wall to the ceiling, and I'd have to cast around it to do so. Because of the stone, I can't."

"But Leona could shape the stone around them, though." Grimm said, and turned to look at his girlfriend. "If you use another Stone Shape to crush the dwarves, they will not be able to attack us."

Leona nodded. "Alright. Just tell me when."

"How about you use your Stone Shape to transform the church into a hollow tube?" Melvin suggested. "It would roll over the enemies still outside, and you can use the Stone Shape inside the church to crush those dwarves against the Wall of Force."

"Good idea." Grimm said. "Let's do it as soon as the spell on Sir Jean has ended."

It took only a minute until the small space behind Melvin's Wall of Force had filled up with dwarves. The front rows were very nearly pressed against the Wall, and then suddenly Sir Jean shrunk back to his normal size when the spell ended. After another ten minutes, the circle of teleportation disappeared. Leona used her spell then, before another circle could open and more dwarves could teleport inside. The church walls rumbled as the spell took hold, and all of the dwarves in the small enclosure were splattered against the Wall of Force. Mariel looked away, focusing instead on how the stone moved around them.

When Leona was done, they were trapped inside a stone ball, but they didn't start moving yet. Another Wall of Force, this time cast by their enemies, was keeping them inside a sort of box.

"Silver Spirit is nearby." Sir Jean said.

"What does he see?" Melvin asked.

"An army of dwarves, some spellcasters, and that he is being attacked." Sir Jean replied. "I should go and help him."

Mariel, Leona and Melvin gathered around the paladin, aware that the paladin could pick off the leaders and carve them a way out. They selected spells that would be helpful to him, digging in scrollcases for scrolls. "Make sure that there is a place at the top where you can leave from." Sir Jean said. "As soon as the Wall of Force outside is gone, we can pick you up from the top and we can leave. I am sure that the mage that can make a Circle of Teleportation can harm us and stop us from leaving. Stay out of sight until then."

For a moment, he paused, and then he turned to Mariel, taking his helmet off. Mariel followed suit, tucked her helmet under her arm, and kissed Sir Jean.

"Should I not return, take care of our children." Sir Jean said softly. "Be safe."

What Sir Jean did not tell them, but what was his main reason for this sortie, is that he knew that their situation was hopeless. They would need to escape because sooner or later the enemies would break down their defenses. They were running out of spells and strength fast, the undead ranks had drained their energy and the spellcasters from the dwarf army were still fresh. By going out there and attacking the leaders, he would grant his friends the opportunity to escape, because they could never hold.

Melvin cast his last two spells: a scroll of Greater Invisibility, which would enable Sir Jean to cause mayhem within the ranks of the army, and a spell of Haste.

"Go get 'em buddy!" Grimm called after Sir Jean. The paladin didn't seem to move at first, but his skin turned silver and then he became ghostlike. He streaked through the wall and the Wall of Force at the leading spellcaster. He was wielding his two swords, the vorpal shortsword shining in the night. His shield was tucked on his back, in between his wings where Grimm had

made sure the paladin would not be hindered by it. The first spellcaster was decapitated immediately, the dwarf was dead before anyone knew it. After a second success, Sir Jean took out his longbow and one of Melvin's special arrows. The explosions rattled the church, and Grimm nodded towards Leona to get to it. She shaped the former church into a long tower, raising the floor as the tower grew sixty feet high, with a flower-shaped bulb on the top. It would make it impossible for archers to shoot them, as they were invisible from the ground. Silver Spirit approached them and landed next to Grimm. The paladin's horse looked tired, but willing to let them get into the box he was still pulling. Melvin cast another Enlarge to make it easier for the horse to get them flying, and then followed with a Greater Invisibility scroll to make sure they would get away unnoticed.

When they were away from the tower, Mariel said so to Sir Jean telepathically. He would need to distract their enemies for a little while longer and try to get away unseen so that they could not be found easily, but they were safe.