

Munchkins and Monsters

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A group of people are playing a role-playing game at a table in a college students' center. The players are

- *a Finnish anthropology grad student nicknamed Barmy, playing Tik Tahk Tevor-tekhor (pronounced TEH-vor-teh-CORE), a human priest of Te'orha, the Great Serpent of the Rock;*
- *Lei, a chinese biology major playing a female elfin mage named Chichi;*
- *Gary, an 'citizen of the world' media design major playing a dwarf barbarian named Gog the Chomper;*
- *Paul from New Brunswick of undeclared major, playing Martin, a half-orc footpad with a very complicated history;*
- *Sid, an Indian full-time custodian with no degree, playing Mary Gowen, whom he describes as a "plumpish middle-aged seamstress with a wicked right-hook on a little adventuresome vacation" and whom the GM treats as that ever-popular martial artist type character that somehow came to be known by the appellation "monk," though Sid refuses to respond to the term.*

Currently, all five are on a short refreshment break, having just killed the dreaded red dragon Maelfeisch, leaving only the GM (game master) Terry, dual-major in philosophy and electrical engineering, feverishly sorting through notes and rule books. In the midst of this Dr. Jaraczewski (pronounced Dr. J.), emeritus professor of electrical engineering, and Dr. MacMaolruaidh (pronounced Dr. M.), professor of ancient history, walk up to the table.

Dr. M.: I say, that looks like a game of D&D, doesn't it? It's been a long time since I had a go at that sort of fun.

Dr. J.: You played D&D too? I was a keen DM in my day...

Dr. M.: I used to play all the time until I got married. My husband wasn't too keen on the game and it all kind of stopped.

I must admit, that DM doesn't seem to be having the best of times.

Dr. J.: No, I know that look. That's the "I had a twelve-hour adventure planned and they just killed the nemesis in under an hour, so what do I do now?" look. What do you say we lend a hand?

Dr. M.: Oh, that would be fun.

The two stroll over to the table and address the GM.

Dr. J.: So, they waste the dragon in the first ten minutes, did they?

GM: What?

Dr. J.: I said, it looks like your players just trashed your whole adventure.

GM: Yeh, first thing they did was cast Greater Silence, then used a scrying device and a Teleport to find the dragon and slit its throat while it was still asleep. I had it wake up and fight some, but it didn't last long.

Dr. M.: You mean to tell me that you had a dragon sleep right through an entire party Teleporting into its inner sanctum?

Dr. J.: And what did they slit it's throat with? A chainsaw? Dragon's necks don't cut like butter or anything.

GM: Hey, it's not that easy GMing; I mean, there are five of them against the one of me and they always have something to say to everything I say and... anyway, it's too late now, I already said it was dead and they cut off it's head and started to skin the thing before they went to get snacks. I guess the challenge now is to make an adventure out of their getting back with the loot.

Dr. M.: They don't have another teleport do they?

GM: Uh, I think not; leastwise—could you check Lei's character sheet there?

Dr. M.: This one? Chichi the elf?

GM: Yeah, that's it.

Dr. M.: No, no more teleports. Not that it would matter if she did; we could always invent a way around them. But you say they teleported into the inner sanctum of the lair directly, right?

GM: Yes...

Dr. J.: Tell you what. Why don't you give us control over the beasties they meet on the way back out? You can run the adventure like normal, but when they come upon some monster just let us control the monster's actions. You'll have to arbitrate and all that; this isn't D&D after all, and I certainly don't know all the rules—

Dr. M.: —nor I—

Dr. J.: —but no matter, we understand RPGs well enough to go on with.

GM: How would I break it to the players, though?

Dr. M.: Don't worry, kid, the old man and I will take care of that, right?

Dr. J.: You bet.

So, what's this place look like? I assume most of the critters have a fairly good understanding of the basic layout of the place.

GM: About all that live here are kolbolds. There was a huge band of rock trolls that saw them go in and decided to follow them, but I'm not sure if they would have kept going once they saw them disappear through the entrance.

Dr. M.: Don't be too hasty, kiddo, we can decide on that when the time comes.

Dr. J.: So, about the kolbolds; they friends of this dragon, or slaves, or what?

GM: I think its more of a symbiosis. The kolbolds negotiate with dark-dwarf smiths, keep away the riffraff, that sort of thing; in return, the dragon gives them protection and the corpses of anything it doesn't feel like eating itself.

Dr. J.: So, we're talking kolbolds *a la* Di'Terlizzi, not *a la* Brooks, I take it.

Dr. M.: Nor *a la* Cryptozoological Society definition, either. Still I take it they are no simpletons; lowlife, but not idiotic, otherwise they wouldn't have the smarts to work out such a favorable relationship?

GM: Yeah, pretty much.

Dr. M.: That sounds nigh on perfect. Let's see the layout of the caves, may we?

The GM hands them a rough sketch on a piece of engineering paper, which they study in silence for a bit.

Dr. J.: What's the scale here? That bedroom looks quite large. We're talking, what, 200 kolbolds?

GM: The tribe's about 340, but a lot of them are outside. Here's how the different rooms are occupied.

Dr. J.: Let's see, 2d12 here, 1d4+2 here... Looks good.

Dr. M.: Yes, but quite unlivable. Look how long it would take to get from this room to this one; if the kolbolds have any sense, they would have added a tunnel here (indicating with her finger) and, I think, here.

GM: Well... the second one's OK, but the first one would never fly; dragons don't like to have avenues like that unless they can use them themselves.

Dr. J.: What if it was a hidden passage, unknown to the dragon? Not likely, I know, but then I'd never have thought a dragon would let a tribe of three hundred kolbolds share its domicile either.

GM: Actually, we could do that. The dragon's a pretty recent arrival and would have only had time to attend to the obvious layout issues so far.

During the end of this exchange the players walk up with food and drinks.

Sid: Hey, who you talking to, Terry?

Dr. J.: I'm Dr. Jaraczewski and this is Dr. M.; we were just reminiscing about how much fun we used to have RPGing and your GM was good enough to offer us a spot in the current adventure.

Paul: Hey, already we're a full party deep in the middle of a dungeon; no room for professors butting in, pops.

Dr. M.: That's alright; the GM's going to let us take a few of the NPCs as you meet them, just to get a taste of role play. We don't really have time to become full members of your party or anything.

Gary: You like playing monsters? 'Cause them's the only NPCs we deal with, and we deal with them pretty fast, too, huh?

Paul: That's right. They've got the treasure and the XP, and we take it. But hey, if the fossils want a beat'n', they can have it, I say.

Dr. M.: Oh, good. I hate it when I have to stay in character for more than five minutes.

Gary: So, do I have a dragon skin yet?

GM: Yes, you finish skinning the dragon; it's a messy job and you are covered head to foot in blood, plus the inside of a dragon smells worse than any sewer, but you've skinned it.

Gary: Then let's get out of here. Lei?

Lei: Sorry, Gog, but I don't have it in me to pull off another teleport. They're hard work!

Paul: Come on, Chichi; we don't want to have to carry all this loot out of here on foot.

Barmy: We don't need it all right now anyway. Let us cleanse the rest of this hole of it's unholy residents and then we can deal with the lucre in whatever way we please.

Sid: Anything to get out of this stink! What possessed you to go skinning a barely-dead dragon, Gog?

Gary: Hey, the skin's worth a lot of money!

Sid: So is the *money* Gog; don't know if you ever thought about the fact that there's more money here than we can carry?

Gary: Eh, Lei'll get it all out soon as its morning. Anyway, come on, let's bust this joint.

GM: Lei?

Gary: Chichi—whatever. Come on, let's get on with it.

GM: You can see two large caverns leading out of the room, the one on the left slightly larger than the other; there are also a number of huge boulders along the wall, which you assume cover other, smaller exits in typical dragon fashion.

Gary: Let's take the big one; it'll lead out sooner.

Sid: I say we take the small one; no need to walk right out into the middle of everything.

Gary: Nonsense. We can take it. Come on, we can kill anything!

Sid: Nonetheless...

Paul: Are either of the exits finished, or are they just rough cave openings?

GM: The larger one is just a cave; the smaller one looks to have been cut, though none too well.

Paul: Then I'm for the smaller one. Caves bring back bad memories.

Gary: Paul, we—

GM: Paul?

Gary: —Martin then—we are *in* a cave. This whole place is a cave. You didn't have any trouble coming into the main cave entrance, now did you? Get over it!

Paul: It's not that it's a cave, it's that it's that kind of cave. It is too much like an arthritic esophagus; I won't go through it until I absolutely know there is no other way to go.

Gary: Paul, why do all your characters have complexes?

Barmy: I'm with Mary and Martin. Let's take the smaller exit.

Gary: Alright, alright.

GM: As you approach the smaller passage the light of your torches—

Gary: Torches? What about my hat?

GM: Ah, yes, I forgot. The light emitting from Gog's helmet clearly shows that the passage bends sharply to the right some twenty feet in. It seems to be rising slightly.

Dr. M.: Pardon me, but... Gog has a glowing helmet?

GM: Yes, he had a wizard cast Continual Light on a stone and had it mounted in a small depression on the front of his helmet.

Gary: I still don't get why I had to pay some goofy wizard to do it. We have a mage in our very own party...

Lei: Yes, and she doesn't much like the idea of following arround a dwarf dressed up like floor lamp. Hanging out with a dwarf at all is bad enough...

Paul: You have to admit it was a pretty dumb idea; I mean, we can never sneak up on anything anymore.

Gary: Hey, we caught the dragon napping, didn't we?

Dr. M. and Dr. J. look at one another and roll their eyes.

Dr. M.: Sorry I brought it up. I'm not really present yet, so I shouldn't be able to start and argument.

GM: Anyway, you walk down to the turn and, rounding it, are confronted by (*rolls some dice*) eleven kolbolds. (*rolls again*) You aren't surprised (*and again*) but the kolbolds are.

Dr. J.: Surprised? Are you kidding me? A troupe of bumblers comes sauntering up, a light bright as day glaring out to "clearly illuminate" the way, arguing heatedly about where to go and what to do with the loot, swanking about the dungeon in hob-nail boots and we are taken by *surprise*?

Gary: Hey! We don't have hobnail boots and our characters weren't arguing out loud! Besides, your own torches would cover up the light of my helmet.

GM: Kolbolds have infravision. They don't need torches.

Dr. M.: What footwear are you wearing, Gog?

Gary: Um... well, I've got on full plate.

Dr. M.: Soleated, one way or the other. And you can't tell me that your characters managed to pantomime in total silence the whole killing a dragon, cutting off its head, skinning it, sorting through the loot, arguing about whether or not you can teleport out, discussing which tunnel to take and learning about—was it Martin?—Martin's feeling that the left-hand tunnel looked like an esophagus.

Lei: What about that silence spell I cast? Has it worn off?

GM: Oh! I forgot about that. Uh... (*consults notes*)

Dr. J.: Let's hope so. Otherwise how you carried on all these heated debates is beyond me.

GM: ... Yeah, I think it only lasts fifteen turns; it would have taken longer than that to skin the dragon.

Sid: You mean we just sat there waiting for fifteen turns while Gog skinned the dragon? My word, that must have been about as exciting as watching the grass grow!

Dr. J.: So, what all this means is there isn't any chance that we could be anything but completely alerted and ready for them. They're loud, bright as day, and reek to high heavens.

GM: I guess you're right. Alright, no surprise on either side. What's everybody going to do?

Gary: Charge!

Dr. J.: I'll take the four in front, Dr. M.; you can have the other seven. How far does the dwarf have to go before he reaches us?

GM: Since you knew they were coming, you could have set that up yourselves I guess.

Dr. J.: Right. Let's say thirty feet to my cluster; Smeheh the Small's in front, a knife in each hand and the other three two paces behind him with spears. Smeheh's going to advance a step to meet the dwarf, then, when he's a few feet away he'll dive to the ground and try and trip him.

Gary: When I see him trying to trip me leap in the air and swing my axe through him as I sail over top.

Dr. J.: See me? Are you kidding? Charging for all you're worth wearing a full helm and you expect to somehow predict a nibble little kobold will drive right in under your feet?

GM: Maybe he could...

Dr. J.: Then make it a roll. His perception against my agility or something.

GM: (*rolls*) You don't make it, Gog. As you charge up the kolbold dives for your feet, causing you to go sprawling, your axe skidding across the floor away from you.

Gary: There's no way I let go of my axe. That thing's my life!

GM: Alright, so you don't stop your fall with your hands and your face collides full with a sharp rock, denting your helm up into your face, breaking your nose and chipping a tooth.

Gary: Hey, my helm's adamantite!

GM: Is it? Oh, I forgot. Let's see, adamantite is a lot harder, but also a bit brittle. I guess the helm just shatters, then. You still get a bloody nose, but no chipped tooth; there's not enough force left after the helm goes.

Gary: Alright alright, I'll take the chipped tooth.

GM: You what?

Gary: I'll take the chipped tooth. No need to destroy my helm about it.

GM: I don't understand. Is your helm adamantite or isn't it?

Gary: Yes, it is, but that's alright, let it dent; I don't mind.

GM: Adamantite doesn't dent; it shatters, like I told you.

Dr. M.: What happens to the glowing part of it?

GM: It, uh, clatters across the floor toward one of the walls. It still gives enough light to see pretty well, though.

Dr. M.: The fastest of my seven darts out and lays on it to extinguish the light.

Dr. J.: At the same time my three spearmen try to jab the dwarf through the neck-hole of his armor.

Paul: Martin throws a poisoned dart at one of the spearmen.

Sid: Mary sees the kolbold sprinting toward the wall where the light is and goes to deal with it.

Barmy: They're just kolbolds; I'll use my mace.

Lei: I guess I'll just throw darts this round. At the spearmen.

GM: Is Gog going to try to get up, squirm out of the way of the spears, or hit the kolbolds from the ground?

Gary: Squirm? Gog the Chomper? Never! I'll hack their legs out from under them, the little twerps!

Dr. M.: Do the other six kolbolds have any ranged weapons?

GM: Two slings, four short bows.

Dr. M.: Sounds good. We'll aim for the ones in the back; the two with darts.

Lei: Wait a minute! In that case I'll throw my darts at them instead.

GM: Got it. Six kolbolds shooting at Chichi and Martin, with Chichi returning fire; one going to tackle the glow stone with Mary playing interception; Tik Tahk Tevor-tekhor with his mace, Gog with his axe (while lying on his stomach), and Martin with a poisoned dart all going for the three spear kolbolds, who are trying to stab into Gog's armor. What's the kolbold who tripped Gog doing?

Dr. J.: Smeheh? Just trying to get away to safety.

There are die rolls and discussion. Chichi gets one dart off but causes only a flesh wound on an archer before the light is covered. Mary gets there moments later and lands a good solid kick, but doesn't uncover the light. Gog gets one of the kolbolds in the leg and it goes down;

one of the others missed but one spear gets in good (a critical hit) and causes a ton of damage. Gog, writhing in pain, snaps the shaft of the spear. Tik Tahk stumbles on a stone, recovers his balance but misjudges the distance to the kolbolds and swings at thin air. Smeheh, crawling out from under Gog, finds himself directly behind Tik Tahk and stabs him in the back, but the priest's chain mail blocks most of the damage. Martin's dart hits the kolbold who stabbed Gog and he stiffens and falls, dead in an instant. Lei gets a better hit in the second time and two arrows find her as well; the other arrows and stones all miss.

GM: Okay, what next?

Lei: Fireball.

Gary: No! We're all right here in the middle of them!

Sid: He's right, Chichi. Not a good idea.

Lei: Look. It's not going to kill any of you. Gog's half dead, Tik and Mary are both blind and Martin's scared of the dark, and we've only managed to kill one and maim another.

Gary: I'm more than half dead. I'll need to make my saving throw to survive, you know.

Lei: Don't worry, Tik'll heal you. I'm doing it.

GM: And the rest of you?

Gary, Sid, and Barmy: Run out of the way.

Paul: I am not scared of the dark.

Lei: You were last time.

Paul: That was different. It was an inky blackness; this is just an intestinal dark.

Anyway, I'll take out anyone who tries to come too close with a poisoned dart. If none do, I'll try and take out that Smeheh guy.

GM: And the kolbolds?

Dr. J.: How much do we know about what's going on? Obviously we know they yelled a bit and then all bolted; can we tell what Chichi's casting?

GM: You can all tell she is casting a spell, that's pretty obvious; It says here that about one in ten kolbolds can speak Common, (*rolls a bunch of times*) but none of you can, so you don't know what spell it is, exactly.

Dr. M.: Well, we know the warriors were arguing with a wizard, and now the wizard is casting a spell and the warriors are running for cover; we're bolting farther down the tunnel.

Dr. J.: My healthy spearman is, but the maimed one is going to try and get his spear into Gog's face—

GM: You dropped your spear when you fell.

Dr. J.: Alright, claw his eyes out then. And Smeheh is going to take advantage of this blind fellow he's got and try an upward thrust beneath the chain mail tunic into his thigh.

Again, dice and discussion lead to the following: Smeheh gets in a solid blow but is knock over by the cleric in his haste, causing Martin to hold his fire lest he kill the wrong man. Mary and Tik Takh both make it back to the main group with no problem; Gog finds himself still grappling with the kolbold when the fireball explodes, but fortunately the kolbold absorbs most of the damage. Dr. M.'s group all get away (except the one lying on the light, who had actually been killed by Mary's kick earlier) but Dr. J.'s all succumb to the blast. Gog takes enough damage to be only a single solid blow away from death.

Gary: Get that blighted priest over here and heal me before some stray arrow finishes me off!

Sid: I'm chasing the ones that got away.

GM: You can't. You can't see.

Sid: Did nothing catch fire in the explosion?

GM: What's there to burn? The kolbolds' and the dwarf's hair, I guess, but that just singes away, it doesn't really burn.

Paul: I can see; I'll look cautiously around the corner to make sure they aren't vanishing, but at the least sign of trouble I'm getting out of the way.

GM: The air's so hot you can't see much either, but I guess you can see well enough to do that.

Lei: I guess I'll light a torch.

Barmy: Why not cast Light?

Lei: You think I wasted time preparing that with ol' lamp-head here?

Barmy: See, you should be a priest instead. I don't have to prepare a certain set of incantations; I just appeal to the Great Serpent and he gives me what I need.

Lei: Yeah, as long as he's in a good mood and what you need happens to be what he feels like giving you at the moment.

Barmy: Aw, come off it. I don't go lambasting your magic, do I?

Lei: That's because mine always works the way I want it to.

Barmy: So... you *wanted* to fry this dwarf into a cinder?

GM: During your discussion Chichi gets a torch lit, Tik Takh manages to extract the broken spear from Gog's back preparatory to casting a cure on him, and Martin looks around the corner where he sees...

Dr. M.: Nothing. You remember our discussion earlier?

GM: Ah, yes. Quite so. You see an empty corridor winding back perhaps thirty feet before a gradual turn obscures your futher sight.

Paul: Blast it! Hey, uh, guys? I think the six that got away ran to get some help. They're nowhere in sight.

Gary: Good! Bring them on! I prefer a straight fight!

Dr. M. begins to write a note, with advice from Dr. J. Meanwhile the GM rolls a few dice and informs everyone how much damage Tik healed Gog.

Gary: Alright! Now let's go find those miserable kolbolds and have a little revenge!

GM: As you turn the corner you see the tunnel has a narrow curve to the left in it that keeps you from seeing more than a few dozen feet. It's seems to be more of an existing tunnel than the crudely cut chamber you just fought in, but it has been widened in places and the floor somewhat leveled. The tunnel is deserted.

Paul: I'll lead the way this time, if that's all right Gog.

Gary: Why?

Paul: Well, I can hold the torch higher than you, and besides, I'm not as easy to trip.

Gary: Is that a challenge?

Paul: Pike it, Gog. Your mouth's made for chomping, not chattering.

GM: You're going to follow the tunnel, then?

Paul: Until there's something worth seeing. And we're going at a reasonable walk too; we don't want to miss something by rushing.

The Drs pass their note to the GM, who pauses to read it.

GM: Just a minute, guys.

The GM scribbles a note to the Dr.s, who write a reply.

Gary: Oh no, everybody! The monsters are talking to each other! Maybe they'll hit us with pillows next time!

Lei: You're one to talk.

Gary: What are you talking about? I've hardly got a scratch on me. It takes more than a dozen tunnel rats to get Gog the Chomper down.

GM: The tunnel continues on with the same curve for some time, then you notice a little crack off to one side.

Paul: We investigate it.

GM: It seems to go back a little ways, but it pinches off to only an inch or two in width so you can't get inside.

Paul: Neither could the kolbolds; let's move on.

GM: A little further along there's another hole, a bit larger, in the roof of the tunnel.

Paul: Can we reach it?

GM: The tunnel roof's about ten feet high at this point.

Paul: What do you say; is it worth a levitate?

Lei: No; I've only got one.

Gary: Forget about the side tunnels for now; we can always come back if we need to.

Paul: What, you don't like the way I'm leading this show? Think I'm being too careful, do you?

Gary: What are you talking about?

Paul: You don't even listen to me when I'm talking! Nobody cares about me! (*bursts into tears*)

Dr. J.: Uh, are you OK?

Paul: What? Oh, yeah, I'm fine. It's just Martin; he's a little—emotional.

Dr. J.: Gotcha.

Gary: Alright, let's go. Straight down the center way unless there's a fork in the path, some sign of life down a side passage, or the main way ends.

GM: You walk maybe a hundred feet, passing a number of small openings on either side, when you see a lone kolbold, unarmed, running toward you waving a soiled white flag.

Gary: Charge!

Dr. M.: I fall on my face and yell out, Mercy! Peace! I come in peace!

Gary: Kill the twerp!

Paul: I'm going to throw a dart with a light coat of paralysis poison at Gog's exposed neck; not enough to knock him out, but enough to keep him from slaughtering the messenger right away.

GM: That's a called shot on a moving target—

Paul: —but one that's only a few feet away—

GM: —OK, I guess I'll give you a +3 for that. (*rolls*) You hit, Gog falls, muddled and unable to control his muscles, on the cave floor.

Paul: Tik Tahk, you negotiate; you're the public affairs guy.

Barmy: Uh...

Sid: Don't worry, I'll take it.

What is it little one? Why have you come unarmed and alone?

Dr. M.: When we discovered that you had come not to kill us, but to rescue us from the dragon we were overcome with joy and gratitude. I was sent to thank you and offer you whatever assistance our poor tribe may be capable of; but on the way here I met one of our gate guards who told me that you have brought a huge swarm of rock trolls; I can only assume they are here to cart the treasure, which office we were willing to help you with. However, they are mad and hungry and they are killing our people! Please call them off, for we mean you no harm, we swear!

Gary: He's lying! It's a trap!

GM: You're incapable of speech, Gog.

Gary: He is, but I'm not. I'm not going to have these idiots get us into a trap just because Paul decided to stick me with a dart!

Sid: Shut your trap, berk.

Little one—what's your name?

Dr. M.: In Common they call me Horsetail, fair lady.

Sid: Yeah, lay off the flattery; it's over twenty years since anyone thought me fair and they were mostly just pulling my leg even then. Fact of the matter is, though, we brought no trolls, nor others than you

see here before you. We might be able to help you fight them, though, if you will promise most dreadfully that you will not harm us and will help us to transport a large share of the treasure out of this cave.

Dr. M.: They are not yours? But they are following me, not a hundred feet away! In seconds they will be upon us!

Gary: Great. You see? I told you he brought no good news. And here I am, laid out cold by the misguided chivalry of a footpad!

GM: Scarcely has Horsetail finished speaking when you see the huge awkward forms of nine rock trolls come around the bend. When they see you they let out a cry of triumph and break into a run.

Gary: Great. I'm dead. It's all thanks to you, you miserable little sophmore! If you hadn't been cursed enough to complain about the bigger tunnel I'd still have my helmet. If you hadn't stabbed me in the back for thinking after your safety I wouldn't be lying here prone with a swarm of rock trolls charging me down!

Paul: Calm down, Gary! I'm sure Terry's not going to kill Gog off. Besides, we can get you back into action before the fighting becomes too bad. Right?

Lei: Wall of Force, I'll shut the trolls in.

Dr. M.: What's the casting time on that?

Lei: Normally 7, but I have that speed casting skill for that discipline, so 2; same as a dagger or dart.

GM: That shouldn't be too hard at that distance. You catch them.

Sid: How long do we have?

Lei: between 20 and 80 minutes; I never know exactly.

Paul: Gog'll definitely be up by then. Mary, you've fought troll before; what are we up against?

Sid: Rock trolls are tough. Their skin is tough as stone and only fire and acid can hurt them for long. They could probably take, oh, ten axe blows each.

Horsetail, go get us as much kindling, oil, and the like as you can.

Dr. M.: Uh. . .

Sid: Stuff to burn. Can you get us stuff to burn?

Dr. M.: Oh. I take off up the tunnel.

GM: What now?

Barmy: We'll wait for the wall.

GM: Ok. After about ten minutes Gog sits up, but it is another ten before he is fully in possession of his faculties.

Dr. J.: Students. Always dreaming about controlling their faculty.

GM: So, what's the plan when the wall comes up?

Sid: The kolbold's not back yet?

GM: No.

Lei: Do I feel when the wall is about to fail? It is my spell, after all.

GM: I don't know. Does it say anything about that in the book?

Lei: Not really.

GM: Well, I guess you know enough about magic to detect it a little before the others, but not by much. Why?

Lei: As soon as I feel it quavering I'm going to cast a fireball in the middle. It should soften them up a bit.

GM: How bold do you want to be? What percent chance of hitting the wall before it goes are you comfortable with?

Lei: Well. . . let's say 15%.

GM: (*rolls*) Ok. Any other plans anyone wants to make?

Gary: Just get ready to pummel them.

Sid: I'll stage six or so lit torches along the tunnel.

GM: Alright. The fireball explodes inside the crowd and catches every single troll full on, but not a single one falls. Dr. J., do you want to control the trolls?

Dr. J.: Nah, I think we'll stick to the kolbolds.

GM: Ok.

The ensuing battle goes on for several rounds, but it's not a fair fight. Most of the trolls are so scorched they take only two or three hits to fell, and Chichi summons a flaming sponge ball which rolls around and seals the wounds to prevent much regeneration. Only one troll poses a lasting problem, as will be shown momentarily. During the fighting the two Drs step a few paces away and carry on a hasty conference.

Dr. J.: So, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Dr. M.: Hit and run?

Dr. J.: Just so. By the time the battle's over I should have about forty kolbolds in the dragon's room; you should have a few more on down the passage. How should we go about it?

Dr. M.: I think we want to sap their magic first. If I'm right, Chichi still has nine spells left, though I doubt more than two or three are useful. Tik Tahk's still good for at least a half dozen heals, though.

Dr. J.: Let's start with a distraction, then. You remember that shaft just beyond where they are?

Dr. M.: You think we should hang a lure down from it?

Dr. J.: That's better than I had planned! I was thinking we could hide a couple archers in it and then light a bonfire in front of them so they would be obscured in smoke.

Dr. M.: Yeah, but the smoke would choke them too. No, what do you think; we hang a rope down, place one of the kolbods they already killed at the base?

Dr. J.: What do we put up inside?

Dr. M.: I'll have four or five warriors up there; just a token force. When they get to the second rise the rope'll be up and I'll drop boulders on them.

Dr. J.: Great! Meanwhile I'll have a force come in behind them to burn the rope and light that bonfire. That should deter their return. We'd better place a lot of small ambushes in the smaller side openings too; just in case they don't take the bait.

Dr. M.: Deal. Let's give the GM the outline and prepare some contingency notes before the battle ends.

They return to the table and begin writing. Meanwhile the battle with the trolls concludes.

Gary: There! Take that, scumbucket! Not used to the Chomper's brawn behind a magical battle-axe, are you?

GM: Your flaming sphere is gone, Chichi.

Lei: Great. I'll go get one of the torches.

Sid: Hurry up! They recover fast.

Gary: Who cares? I'll just axe it again if it does.

GM: You see the arm you chopped off earlier crawling toward the body.

Gary: Axe it!

GM: As you swing down, it leaps up and gashes your arm.

Gary: Augh! Rip it off!

GM: As you are wrestling to tear it out of your arm, you feel another hand grab your leg, then a huge weight causes you to stagger backward as you feel teeth close on your neck.

Barmy: I'll brain the part on his back. Hurry up with that torch, Chichi!

Sid: I'll help remove the arm.

GM: Ok. Tik gets a solid blow and the head-torso-arm part falls dead on the floor. Mary tears the arm off of Gog's arm and snaps its wrist, dropping it (also dead) on the ground. Chichi then comes up with the torch and—

Sid: I'll take it. I know trolls better than her.

GM: OK, so Mary begins to burn all the wounds, but there are so many the troll regains life before she finishes and gouges her leg something fierce.

Barmy: I'll bash it's brains again.

GM: Right. After a bit more torching you are satisfied the thing is really dead.

Barmy: Let's loot the corpses.

GM: Uh... hunting trolls don't normally carry much worth looting, unless you are fond of clubs and soiled rags.

Gary: Hey, speaking of looting, why didn't we get the light from my helmet out from under that kolbold?

Lei: I guess we just forgot about it. We can pick it up with the rest of the treasure later. Let's go on and see if we can find a way out of here.

Gary: I'm going back for the stone. I paid good money for that stone, I'm not going to leave it just lying there for any old goof-ball to abscond with!

GM: Abscond?

Gary: My freshman writing professor told me that if I used it in normal conversation, I would impress people and get my way more often than I do right now.

GM: Oh.

Paul: Well, you aren't impressing us enough to make us go all the way back there right now. We have light enough; let's go on.

Gary: No! I'm going back!

Sid: Well, the rest of us are going on without you then.

Gary: Look, you've made a slew of really bad decisions this trip, nearly got us killed on two occasions; I am done being bossed around by you all. I'm going.

GM: So, then, is the party splitting up?

Barmy: Looks like it. I hope you survive, Gog.

Gary: I will. Its the lot of you that are dead meat, believe me.

Lei: Whatever.

GM: I guess I'll take the larger group first. What are you doing?

Sid: Continuing on down the corridor. I don't see any reason to branch off until we see something interesting.

GM: OK, you continue along for a few hundred feet when you see a kolbold standing at the base of a rope dangling out of a hole in the ceiling.

Dr. M.: No! They see me? How could they have... I'm going to sprint up that rope as fast as I can, and pull it up after me!

Lei: Great. Double-crossing again.

GM: They're really close. There's no way you'll make it in time.

Dr. M.: I've got to! At least let me roll for it or something!

GM: Well, (*rolls*) O. Uh, you won't like this, but you so over exert yourself that you slip and, (*rolls again*) fall dead due to the impact.

Dr. M.: What? No! I... I'm dead?

GM: 'Fraid so.

Sid: What do you say? Shall we check it out?

Barmy: O'course we should. She's hiding something up there, I know it.

Paul: We're climbing the rope.

GM: The passage above is only wide enough for one at a time. Who's going first?

Paul: I'll go. I've got infravision and I'm pretty agile.

GM: And then?

Sid: Me, then Chichi, then Tik.

Barmy: Works for me.

GM: OK. It's a long climb and a skinny rope, but you make it up without too much trouble. At the top of about a forty-foot climb you find a clean small tunnel going straight off to the side. The rope continues up a bit further, but the hole quickly gets too narrow to follow.

Paul: I guess we'll go off to the side tunnel then. I'll light a torch for the others while they are climbing up.

GM: The torch doesn't show much new; it's just a narrow passage, a bit too low to walk upright, going on mostly straight into the darkness.

Paul: Once we're all there I guess we'll go along the tunnel in the same order.

Sid: No, I think I should go first, now that I can carry a torch.

Paul: Suit yourself.

GM: OK, so you start walking down the tunnel. It's tight going and you are cramped and stifled, the smoke of the torch in the close quarters fugging up the already stale air. After a short distance (or at least, you assume it was short, though the cramped quarters made it take a lot longer than otherwise and you are not really sure how far it was), the roof rises and the passage simply stops.

OK, I think I'll jump back to Gog. What was your plan?

Gary: I was going straight back the way we came to get my stone.

GM: OK, you have a fairly uneventful walk for the first part, but shortly before you get to the place you are going you bump into a crowd of over thirty kolbolds.

Gary: What are the creeps doing? Do they have that wood that Mary asked them to bring? It was Mary, right?

Dr. M.: They are almost all carrying either bundles of wood or torches, yes.

Gary: I guess I'll tell them that we don't need them, but it won't work—I suspect double play.

Dr. J.: (*surreptitiously passing the GM a note that says "say no, even if the answer is yes"*) Do any of us understand common?

GM: Um... not in this group, no.

Dr. J.: What is the chance I can understand?

GM: Well, let's see. Gog's got what, an eight charisma?

Gary: Seven, actually.

GM: And his wisdom is...

Gary: Nine. But who needs that stuff?

GM: The stats are how we can tell how good you are at things. Give us a skill roll, let's see how you do.

The roll clearly fails, being only a 2

Dr. J.: Alright, I don't have any idea what this dwarf is doing. Horsetail told us there were a lot of folk who needed this fire to fight trolls; since this is only one person, neither injured nor fighting trolls I don't have any idea what he's doing but since he appears to be neither a threat nor associated with the trolls we'll just go on.

GM: OK, the kolbolds all split and pass you on either side, chattering among themselves.

Gary: Hear that, guys? A welcome party is coming for you. I guess you'll be wanting me pretty soon...

GM: Who are you talking too, Gog?

Gary: *(sighs exasperatedly)* Do I have to be in character every minute of the day? Oh, never mind. I'm going on to get that stone.

GM: OK, you keep walking and soon reach the scene of the battle; but of any sign of any kolbold corpses, or your stone, you see nothing.

Gary: Bother. They probably took away their dead. Well, I can't talk to them and I didn't see any conspicuous glows—did I?

GM: No, you don't recall any light but that from the torches.

Gary: Then I'll try and search around; maybe it just fell in a crack somewhere.

GM: Your initial search shows nothing in the places you think at all likely to find it. Do you want to look further afield?

Gary: No, that probably means someone already stole it. Or maybe they put it back in the treasure room, thinking it was out of place? I'll go sort through all that again.

GM: Sort through it all?

Gary: Yeah, you never know where it could be; under a cup, inside an old helmet, anywhere.

GM: OK. Since that will take a while, I'll go back to the other crowd.

So, I think I left you at the dead end, which, as you look about yourselves, turns out to actually be the bottom of a tall chute. What now?

Lei: Precisely the question I was about to ask. Do you want me to use my only levitate to get us to the top of the chute, or should we hold that in reserve?

Sid: What looks to be up there?

GM: Well, it's hard to tell in torchlight, but there seems to be lots of scuff marks along the stone leading up to an opening high above your heads; but it could be a trick of your eyes.

Sid: Does anyone else see that?

GM: Chichi doesn't, but the others do.

Barmy: Can we climb up that way? Are the scuff marks signs of a climbing trail?

GM: Well, there are a few handholds, probably, but it would be a tricky climb; not likely you could make it.

Paul: Could I?

GM: Sure. You've a little experience as a cat burglar; it shouldn't be too bad, though still not a sure thing.

Paul: Up I go! Good thing the rest of you've got Martin the Modern Miracle!

Sid: Indeed. If all half-orcs were like Martin, they'd be so popular that—

Barmy: Mary! Watch your tongue.

GM: *(after rolling a whole slew of dice)* Martin, you're only a few yard from the opening when you hear a slight scraping noise and, looking up, are just in time to see a large rock falling toward you. Do you want to focus more on avoiding damage or avoiding falling?

Paul: Falling. Definitely.

GM: The rock hits you on the side of the head, bounces off your left shoulder, and drops to the ground below where it lands right where Mary had been standing a moment before her highly trained reflexes threw her out of the way. At the same time, Tik notices there seems to be too much smoke for your single torch to make, and it seems to be coming up the passage behind you.

Barmy: What! I'm darting back down the tunnel to investigate.

Lei: Can I see who tossed the rock at Martin?

GM: None of you see any life. Tik, you're not more than half way back when you can see a dull orange glow in front of you and the smoke becomes oppressive. Back at the chute, two more rocks fall, one glancing off of Martin's arm and both hitting Chichi's leg as she tries to get out of the way.

Barmy: I'm using Clear Breath and going on.

GM: And the rest of you?

Paul: How long to get to the top?

GM: It's only two yards to go, but they are not all that easy; you estimate a full two minutes.

Sid: I'm pulling Chichi and myself back into the passage opening. No sense getting smashed.

Paul: I'm going on up. The higher I get, the less the stones will hurt.

GM: Mary, Chichi, from the safety of the tunnel you are safe, but you see little and smell a bit of smoke. Martin, your hand grabs the top without encountering any more thrown rocks. Tik Tahk, when you reach the opening and look down you feel like you are looking into a chimney; there is nothing but roaring fire and smoke. The heat is unbearable and the rope you used to climb is just a charred bit hanging from the ceiling.

Barmy: Will my Clear Breath last long enough to go back, talk to the others, and return to the fire?

GM: I think so; it's a pretty long-term spell as I recall.

Barmy: Then that's what I'll do.

Paul: I'll pull myself up and prepare for a fight.

GM: As you are pulling yourself up a stone is slammed into your fingers and you lose your grip with one hand.

Dr. M.: I'll slam the other one too.

Paul: I'll swing over to the side and climb up beside the opening instead.

GM: Let's roll to see who gets it first. *(After bonuses and penalties, the roll is a tie)* You pull your hand out just as the stone comes crashing down on it; you are successful in swinging over to the side, but the pain makes you lose your grip momentarily and

you slide down a few feet before you can catch yourself.

Lei: Did the kolbold up there reveal itself during the maneuvers?

GM: I thought you were hiding in the cave.

Lei: Only enough to be able to back out of the way if a stone is hurled.

GM: Then yes, you did see the kolbold; in fact, you still do as it looks over the edge to see where its quarry went.

Lei: Magic Missile. If it falls before the last one hits it I'll just send the extras spread over my best guess of what the ledge up there must look like in hopes of hitting some other beast.

GM: OK. As you are casting Tik Tahk comes up.

Barmy: I don't think I've ever been to Kensington.

GM: What?

Barmy: GAAH! There's a fire down there!

Sid: There is? Is it too large to get through?

Barmy: The only reason I can breathe there at all is because of a spell.

GM: Chichi, your spell gets off and you think you killed the kolbold, though you can't see very well.

Sid: Look, we either have to get up there or we need to somehow get down and out. How's it coming, Martin?

Paul: Terry?

GM: You've still got a couple yards to go but no signs of renewed opposition.

Paul: Mary! Can't you let a man climb in peace? You ladies think everything we men do is easy just because we are efficient enough not to make the hard things *look* hard!

Lei: We can't stay here. Do we levitate up or try to go down?

Barmy: Down.

Sid: Up.

Paul: Up.

Lei: OK, up it is. I'll start casting levitate on the three of us.

Sid: No wait! If there is no outlet for the air up there we'll die if we go up!

Lei: But you just said up!

Sid: That seems safer, if there is an exit. But we need to check and see first.

GM: Martin, you are ready to pull yourself onto the ledge.

Paul: OK, let's do this thing. No hesitation; there's no time.

GM: The flickering shadows of the torch below make it hard to see, but there appears to be a small but navigable tunnel leading farther into the rock.

Paul: Come on, guys! What are you waiting for?

Barmy: When there's a fire, the last place I want to go is up the chimney. I'm going down.

Lei: Jumping into the fire? The drop alone will kill you.

Barmy: Then give me a Featherfall.

Lei: I can't do that and levitate; I only have one feather for the material component.

Barmy: What! You prepare two spells that both use feathers and you only bring one with you? Its not even like feathers are hard to find! You could have slit your pillow at the inn last night and had a thousand!

Lei: Look, this is not the time to give me advice. No matter what I should have done, what I did do was bring only one feather, so no Featherfall for you.

Paul: Come on! I'm not going to wait here all day. Terry, is there anything on the corpse of that kolbold that Chichi killed earlier?

GM: Nadda. So, what's the decision? The smoke is making things quite unpleasant.

Lei: Levitate on Mary and Tik, if Tik will stay.

Barmy: Not me. I'm going to climb down the chute; jump if I have to, and then scramble out of the fire as soon as I can.

Paul: I'm not waiting. Further in, out of the smoke.

GM: OK. Back to Gog. Your sorting through the treasure turns up nothing. What now?

Gary: Bother. I'll bet those idiot kolbolds with the torches and wood stole it. After them!

Dr. J. hands the GM a note, who reads it before continuing.

GM: As you head into the passage you hear lots of chattering and laughter. Rounding the corner—

Gary: Hold it! Sounds like a trap. I'm darting off to the side and waiting for them to come into view.

GM: As you wait you hear the voices draw closer, then fade off, echoing as though through a long tunnel. Finally there is a dull click and silence returns.

Gary: How far away were the voices at their closest?

GM: Not far, you think, but it is hard to judge.

Gary: Then there must be a secret passage nearby. I'm going to search for it.

GM: You quickly discover a hidden catch and a secret passage behind a well-crafted door.

Gary: Kolbolds never do anything well. Must have stolen this place from dwarves or something. After them!

Dr. J.: Remember our...?

GM: Don't worry.

Gog, you find the passage straight and well-crafted, but after a short distance it simply ends.

Gary: It just ends? Does the roof rise or something?

GM: The roof is out of reach for the entire length of the passage. By the way, did you close the door behind yourself or not?

Gary: No, I was in a hurry. I'll search around the tip of the passage for another secret or something.

GM: You find nothing.

Gary: Alright, I'll go back then. No use wasting time. If they won't come out and fight, let them hide!

GM: The other end of the passage also appears to be a dead end.

Gary: The door must have closed on me. I'll search for a latch on this side.

GM: Nothing.

Gary: What! There must be something. I'll try to bash it in.

GM: It makes an amazingly loud gong sound; you just about go deaf.

Dr. J.: We're being followed! Quick... uh...

GM: Yes? Quick what?

Dr. J.: *(Whispers to GM, who smiles.)*

GM: Gog, what next?

Gary: This is a pickle; with that noise they'll be at me from both sides. I'll move to the center of the passage, stand with my back to one wall, and await further developments.

GM: After waiting for a few minutes you hear a series of tapings at one end of the passage.

Gary: Do I see anything?

GM: No.

Gary: Does any other noise follow it up?

GM: No.

Gary: I'll creep quietly toward that end and investigate.

GM: Nothing seems to have changed.

Gary: Then I'll return to the center and await further developments.

GM: OK. Let's swap back to Tik Tahk Tevor-tekhoh. As I recall you were going to climb down the chute into the fire?

Barmy: Correct.

GM: Give us a skill role; let's see how well you do.

The role is a 1, meaning a guaranteed failure. The GM roles falling damage and Tik is still alive, though barely.

Dr. M.: Is my force ready?

GM: I thought Dr. J. had this force.

Dr. M.: No, it's mine now; right Dr. J.?

Dr. J.: Right.

GM: Then yes, you've got a full score.

Dr. M.: Every single one will unleash a projectile on the creep. We need him dead before any others follow him down.

Barmy: What? No! I'm calling on the Great Serpent of the Rock for a holy ward; something, anything! They'll kill me!

GM: Are you high enough level to cast Holy Ward?

Barmy: Well, not Holy Ward then; I'm just calling for divine intervention, Surely my god will not allow these creeps to kill his devoted follower?

GM: Well... you haven't been the most faithful; I mean, what was it that the Abbot was telling you

last time you visited? Something about needing to spend more time in the abbey and less grubbing for money, as I recall.

Barmy: You mean I get no divine help?

GM: Nothing. Dr. M., roll to see how you hit. He's got some good armor, and even though he is prone he's got 25% soft cover and 50% concealment so you need an 18 to hit.

Of the 20 rolls, only two are 18s and none 19 or 20. After damage roles Tik is still alive.

Barmy: Yes! Now I have a chance to heal myself.

GM: Wait—I haven't given you the fire damage yet.

Barmy: What! Come on; it doesn't take hardly any time to heal myself, fire doesn't hurt immediately.

GM: Yes, but you were trying to convince Te'orha you deserved a special favor, remember? 2d8.

Barmy: 2d8? NO! I only have 3 health points! I'm gonna die!

GM: *(After rolling a 1 and a 3)* You're right. You are now dead.

Barmy: NO! You can't do this to me!

Dr. J.: Surely you don't think it's his fault, do you?

Barmy: You beast! Why did you have to build a fire and shoot me with arrows and give the kolbolds this unprecedented cunning? You wanted to see me die, didn't you?

Dr. J.: Me? Are you kidding? Who is it that decided to jump down a tall chute into a bonfire set by enemies? You've got no one to blame but yourself, kiddo.

Barmy: I hate you! *(Storms off, but comes back a little later to watch and kibitz.)*

GM: While we're here, let's do the chaps in the chute.

Martin, I think, was going on ahead of the ladies. As you walk along you suddenly hear a rumble and the ceiling above you begins to cave in; leaping out of the way you escape injury but find yourself completely shut off from the ladies behind you.

Mary and Chichi, this cave-in happens as you are still levitating up to the ledge and right before you were about to step onto it. A cascade of rocks and dust pours out of the opening and completely blocks your way.

Dr. M.: *(quietly, to herself)* Score!

Sid: Bother! Chichi, what else you got up your bag of tricks?

Lei: I've got a Dig spell.

Sid: Can you cast it while still levitating?

Lei: Sure, but we could also stand on the ledge and cast it.

Sid: Sorry, there's no use to that. Whatever caused the fall-in will have left enough rubble above the heap in our way that after digging the blockage more would just cascade down. Dig straight up from the top of the chute; the hill's not very large, we can't be all that far from the surface.

Lei: What about Martin?

Sid: At least now he's safe from the smoke. There's really nothing much more we can do for him. Once we get to the surface we can worry about digging him out if we need to; for now, though, let's vent this smoke before we choke and get out of here.

Lei: We can't do that!

Sid: Chichi, have I ever deserted a friend?

Lei: Well, no.

Sid: Then trust me that this is in Martin's best interests.

Lei: I still don't like it.

Sid: Neither do I, but it is the thing to do; and we have to do it now before we are asphyxiated.

Lei: OK, I'll levitate us up to the very top of the passage and cast Dig into the ceiling.

GM: The chute actually goes up a dozen feet beyond the passage that just caved in; from the top of that your spell easily burrows to the surface, which is about twenty feet further up.

Sid: Up and out before the spell gives!

Lei: Right-o.

GM: And upon reaching the surface?

Sid: Is there any foe in sight?

GM: No; from the top of the hill you are some distance from the edge of the forest, but you see nothing untoward.

Sid: Chichi, what spells do you have left?

Lei: Not much; Aerial Servant, Sleep, Fiery Fire, a few attack spells.

Sid: You have your spell book?

Lei: I have the travel one.

Sid: Does it have Dig in it?

Lei: Yes, but I can't prepare it until I rest.

Sid: Then let's find a safe place to rest, cast sleep on yourself, and then we'll dig Martin out and see if we can rescue Tik and Gog as well.

Lei: I wish we didn't have to wait all that time. They could all die before we get to them

Sid: True, but if we go in by the gate on our own—or use the chimney we just dug, for that matter—we are more than likely to be killed ourselves.

Lei: Alright, let's find a safe place then. Away from this smoking pit.

GM: Martin next, I guess. There's a landslide; then what?

Paul: What's there to do? Follow the tunnel.

GM: After about a dozen yards it forks three ways and down each branch you see a kolbold.

Dr. J.: I got these three. No hesitation; we're going for a kill.

Paul: Greetings, kolbolds! I salute you for your brilliance! Though normally I would greet your effrontery with poison and oath, for such braveness and insight as you have shown I will repartee with rapier and main-gauche.

GM: Uh... right.

An adroit thrust of Martin kills one of the kolbolds; only one blow from them hits home, causing minor damage to the half-orc.

Dr. J.: Which two are still left?

GM: The one on each side passage; the center passage kolbold was killed.

Dr. J.: Then we're bolting.

Paul: I'll try to skewer the one on the right, but if he gets too far I'm not following.

GM: I think you get an attack of opportunity as they begin to flee; give us a roll.

The attack hits and kills.

Paul: Only one left? I'll chase him down. He must know a way out of here.

Dr. J.: I'll take left-right-left-straight-down-right.

GM: (*tracing the route on his map*) Left, right, left, straight, down?

Dr. J.: Yes: down, then right.

GM: Ah! Got it. Martin, give us a perception roll.

Paul: I rolled a 1; I guess that means I'm in for a rude surprise.

GM: Indeed. As you are running after the fleeing kolbold, shortly after scampering down a flight of steps and making a hard right turn the floor opens under you and you drop into a tunnel of sorts, a few feet along which stands Gog, his back to the wall of the tunnel.

Gog, as you are standing in the center of the passage, awaiting further developments, you hear a patter of feet above you, followed almost immediately by a much heavier tread, a scraping sound of stone on stone, and then Martin falls from above to the ground a few feet away.

Gary: How nice of you to drop in.

Paul: Ah, yes, I'm glad to see you too. Any sign of Tik lately?

Gary: Are you kidding?

Paul: No; I rather thought he was coming down here with you.

Gary: No sign. By the way, we are sort of trapped here. There is a door on each end of the passage, but they appear to only open from the outside or something.

Paul: How like my mind!

Gary: How what?

Paul: It is easy to put stuff into my mind, but it takes an outside stimuli to bring it out again.

GM: You hear some tapping from one end of the passage, followed almost immediately by tapping at the other end. You barely have time to react, though, when the doors at either end are opened and you see two swarms of kolbolds advancing from either end of the passage.

Dr. J.: Attack!

Dr. M.: Kill!

Gary: Back-to-back, Martin. We've got work to do.

This battle goes on for a LONG time. By in large, each round runs as follows. If Gog hits, he kills; all but two of Martin's blows kill as well. The kolbolds don't hit very often and never kill, but there are a LOT of them. Gog kills 40 kolbolds and is more than half dead by the end; Martin also kills 38 but suffers much more damage and is within a single blow of death by the end of the battle.

Gary: There! No kolbolds can kill us! Now let's get out of here.

GM: I'm afraid both of the doors are closed again.

Paul: We've got, what, a hundred corpses? Let's just stack them up and climb up the passage I dropped through.

GM: There are only 78, actually, but I guess that could work. The kolbolds make for unstable footing but you get to the top eventually and find the trap opens easily, emitting you into a passage.

Gary: Now where? Which way did you come from?

GM: You actually don't remember, Martin.

Paul: I don't remember, but it doesn't really matter; there were lots of passages I didn't explore, and the place I came from was blocked off by a cave-in.

Gary: Well, let's pick a direction and use the left-is-right rule unless we can find a more major passage to follow.

Dr. M.: Which way do they pick?

The GM indicates on the map behind his screen.

Dr. M.: That's you for the next while, Dr. J. Remember the rules?

Dr. J.: Cake. (*passes a note to the GM*)

GM: As you move along the passage a kolbold drops from a hole in the roof, landing on Gog with a knife in each hand.

Rolls indicate Gog is surprised but not knocked down; both knives find their mark and then Martin dispatches the foe.

GM: Let's go back to the ladies. You found a place to rest, slept well, and prepared Dig; do you want to take the extra time to get any others ready as well?

Lei: I'd like to have a Fireball and a Teleport; what do you say, Mary? Do we have time?

Sid: The teleport makes good sense. The fireball... how long will it take?

Lei: Twenty minutes.

Sid: Sure, go for it.

GM: OK, back to the lads, then. Just after passing a fork, Martin, you hear a slight sound behind you and, turning, are just in time to see an arrow heading straight for your chest. (*rolls*) It's a hit and (*rolls again and registers surprise*) a kill.

Paul: Salvation for mankind! Another orc has bit the dust, the world is a safer place! Now I may become a wraith and torment mankind in a less innocuous way.

Gary: What? How can he die? Let me see the dice.

The GM moves the screen back to show the dice.

Gary: That's not a hit! He'd need a 15, that's a 13!

GM: Ah, but it's close quarters shooting; +5.

Gary: (*grumbles*) I think that's really low.

Dr. J.: While he's trying to see if Martin is really dead, I'll shoot him too. Aiming for the head.

Gary: Hey! I'm not checking to see if he's dead; I'm going for revenge.

Dr. J.: Excuse me, but if asking to see the dice and arguing about hit chances is *not* checking to see if he's dead, I don't know what is.

GM: I think he's right. Don't worry, though, it's a called shot; his chances of hitting are pretty slim.

Dr. J.: (*rolls*) But I made it, I think.

GM: True; good roll.

Gary: Now let me kill the cretin!

Gog misses. The kolbold misses as well. Gog gets a critical hit and the kolbold dies.

Dr. M.: Can this kolbold (*pointing to the map*) hear the battle?

GM: Yes; it's not that far away.

Dr. M.: Then I'm going to sneak out and plug him in the back.

GM: Sorry, that roll indicates a catastrophic failure. The bow breaks.

Gary: I'm getting sick of this. I'm going to run along the corridors, killing anything in my way and ignoring the rest. This is getting beyond the joke.

Dr. M.: I'm going to try the tripping move again; it worked when Smeheh did it.

Gary: Ha! I've got no helmet now and I know the move. No way I'm surprised.

GM: We'll let the dice decide.

The rolls indicate that Gog not only avoids tripping, but that the kolbold trips and cracks his jaw on the rock.

Gary: Take that! Now I'm going to get out of here!

GM: As you are running you enter a larger passage and find two spear-toting kolbolds blocking your way.

Gary: Charge! If they scam, they're wise. Otherwise my plate can take their spears and my axe their heads.

GM: (*after rolling*) You're right. The spears cause no damage and you kill one as you bowl through.

Gary: Onward! Give them no time to regroup!

GM: A few yards further on the passage joins three others in a broad hallway with a huge door at one end.

Gary: No time for doors; I know the exit has no doors to it, a dragon's been living here. I'll take the largest of the three other passages.

GM: As you wheel hard and set off down the passage you hear the spearman you didn't kill yelling and the door behind you opens, emitting a horde.

Gary: Who cares? Onward!

Dr. J.: Where's he going? (*The GM indicates on the map*) OK, I'll send one group this way, one group that way, and... what do you say, Dr. M.? The third that way?

Dr. M.: No, this way.

Dr. J.: Brilliant! Yes, the third that way.

GM: The passage you are in turns and twists and numerous smaller ones open off of it, but it clearly remains the main way; Then, as you round a corner you see a bonfire burning low in the middle of the hallway and nine charred troll corpses, together with the badly burnt remains of Tik, identifiable by his chain mail, in the middle of the fire.

Gary: Idiot! What did he jump in the fire for? I'll skirt to one side and keep on going; back to the treasure room and then around to the passage I wanted to take in the beginning.

GM: As you run further you come to a group of kolbolds—

Dr. M.: —Lining each wall. You can run down the middle if you want, but not without them being able to strike out at you as you pass.

Gary: I'll hold my axe in front of my face to keep them from pounding that and keep going.

GM: Only one hits you as you barge through.

Dr. M.: Projectiles once he's passed.

GM: Only a few have them.

Dr. M.: Then only a few will use them.

GM: Wow! Three out of four hit, one critical. Gog, I'm afraid you are dead.

Gary: *(A good deal of shouting and banging things about)* You idiots! How could you have ruined things so much! Paul with your stupid phobias, the idiotic need to shimmy up a chimney, the stupidity of only brining one teleport. . . I HATE YOU!

A number of other people in the cafeteria turn and watch as Gary rips his character sheet into shreds and storms out of the room.

GM: Uh, well then, ladies?

Sid: As soon as Chichi's ready we're digging in at an angle near the chimney in hopes of hitting the passage Martin got stuck in.

Lei: Come on, Sid; we know they're all dead. Let's just split.

Sid: You and I know that, Lei, but Mary and Chichi do not. Come on, this is a role playing game; we need to play our roles. Besides, maybe we can regain the bodies and use the dragon horde to buy some resurrection spells.

Lei: Alright.

GM: So, how did you mark which direction you wanted to go from the chimney?

Sid: Um. . . I thought we could tell just by the location of our camp.

GM: OK, I guess that will work. How far away from the chimney do you want to dig and at what angle?

Lei: What, 10 feet?

Sid: Sounds about right. And I think 45° is the best we can do if we want to be able to climb back out.

A roll (4d20 - 42 is the one the GM picked) reveals that their sense of direction is about 15° left of the correct direction; since they have to go 30 feet down and start off 10 feet away from the pit, that means they miss the passage by a little over ten feet. Dig only creates a tunnel ten feet wide and the tunnel they are aiming for is no more than three feet wide, so there is still about four feet of rock between the two tunnels. Upon realizing they have missed the following discussion ensues.

Lei: The tunnel is definitely deep enough. We must have been off target.

Sid: Maybe we overshot. Maybe the tunnel was only a few feet deep and our 40 feet was too far to hit it. Or maybe it turned.

Lei: We could check the chimney and see where the ledge is.

Sid: Augh! How did we fail to think of that before? Come on, let's have a look.

GM: It's hard to be sure from the surface, but it looks like you were pretty close to correct; maybe a dozen degrees off, but no more.

Sid: Bother. Now we'll have to try again. Maybe this time we'll go down to the level of the passage in the tunnel we just dug and dig horizontally from there. Back to camp, I guess.

Lei: We could go down the chimney instead.

Sid: What good would that do us?

Lei: Well, we did leave three guys down there, not just one. Besides, if the wall Martin was climbing showed signs of many other climbs there is bound to be a passage at the top that connects to something, so even if we hit it we would probably not find Martin right away.

Sid: Even then we'll have to wait till the smoke clears out a bit more. Do you have a rope?

Lei: No, Gog carried that.

Sid: How about a Featherfall?

Lei: I'd need more feathers, remember?

Sid: How about if you go to sleep again and I'll go search some feathers out of the woods.

Lei: OK. But stay in sight; I do not want to have anything attack me while under a magical sleep.

Sid: You got it.

- GM:** Chichi's been asleep maybe twenty minutes and you've found two crow feathers when you happen to glance toward the chimney and see a bunch of kolbolds issuing forth in the setting sunlight.
- Dr. M.:** What on earth are we doing that for?
- GM:** You did write this note, didn't you?
- Dr. J.:** No, that was me. I thought it best to...
- Dr. M.:** Oh, I see. Yes, that makes sense.
- Dr. J.:** Do we see anyone around?
- GM:** Mary? Are you going to hide?
- Sid:** I think so, at least for now, but I'm also going to try to move closer to Chichi.
- GM:** Let's see, then... No, you don't see anyone.
- Dr. J.:** A few of us will inspect the tunnel Chichi dug.
- GM:** Not much to see.
- Dr. J.:** OK, then, if the area seems secure, haul them up.
- GM:** Mary, you see groups of kolbolds grab ropes and strain to raise something up the shaft.
- Sid:** How many are they?
- GM:** Three groups of eight and another ten or so standing about with drawn weapons looking in all directions.
- Sid:** Blast! I really wanted those ropes, too. I'll see if I can wake up Chichi.
- GM:** From a magical sleep?
- Sid:** Remember, I've got old and experienced hands.
- GM:** Ah, forgive me for forgetting. After a few minutes you pull the sleep from her body.
- Lei:** What? What's going on?
- Sid:** Sh! You see those kolbolds?
- Lei:** Wow, there's a lot of them. What are they doing?
- Sid:** Hauling something up to the surface; I'm not sure what. Maybe a cap of some kind to cover the chimney? Anyway, I want their ropes.
- Lei:** And you want my help in getting them?
- Sid:** What do you have in your bag of tricks?
- Lei:** Fireball would damage the ropes. How about Fiery Fire?
- Sid:** Will it work?
- Lei:** It will if they are superstitious.
- Sid:** And if not?
- Lei:** I've got a teleport.
- Sid:** No, it's too risky. Besides, we could lose the ropes in the confusion.
- GM:** Not likely. After hoisting them up a few feet they wrap them around some stakes to keep them from slipping.
- Dr. M. passes a note to the GM. He looks surprised as he reads it, but then nods.*
- Lei:** Did I have enough time asleep to prepare more spells?
- GM:** No, far from it.
- Lei:** Drat! And I don't have another sleep spell either. Well, Mary, what do you say?
- Sid:** We need those ropes. Let's try Fiery Fire.
- Dr. J.:** Not one I'm familiar with; what does it do?
- Lei:** It covers the target surface with harmless but spooky green and blue flames that sputter in and out of existence, containing ghostly images of faces, beasts, and other things in the way they fade.
- Dr. J.:** And what are you casting it on?
- Lei:** The ropes themselves? They'll spread to anything that touches them.
- Sid:** Excellent idea.
- GM:** What's the somatic and aural visibility of that spell?
- Lei:** Two.
- GM:** Then I think there's no chance you see it cast, kolbolds. All you know is suddenly spooky ghostly fire starts flickering along the ropes and spreading onto your hands and arms.
- Dr. J.:** Gha! How much farther do we have to raise them?
- GM:** Just a few feet.
- Dr. J.:** Forget it. Run!
- GM:** As soon as you drop the ropes the flames on your hands disappear.
- Dr. J.:** Head down for the main entrance. No playing around with wizardry!

Dr. M.: Do we notice anything?

GM: No; kolbolds tend to be mute when startled.

Sid: Quick! Let's go get the ropes.

Lei: Gotcha.

GM: When you reach the hole you see that on the end of each of the ropes is one of your three friends, each a lifeless corpse. Down below you see many kolbolds busily engaged in some task.

Lei: NO! They can't kill them! Fireball down the chute, kill the creeps!

Dr. M.: Do we hear the shout?

GM: Yes.

Dr. M.: Can any of us tell what she's doing?

GM: Yes, I think we established that earlier.

Dr. M.: Then drop everything and flee like the wind!

GM: And Mary?

Sid: Back up a few dozen paces. There's no stopping an angry elfin mage on a pyromania kick.

GM: Chichi, roll to see how fast you get it off. (*she does*) OK, so you catch about half of the kolbolds. As the fire envelops the lower reaches of the chute you suddenly hear a series of massive explosions and a blinding light and gyser of rock and earth blasts you into the air. Chichi, you need three saving throws; one for the explosion itself, one for the landing after being rocketed into the air, and one for the rocks that fall all around you; Mary, you only need the falling rocks.

Lei: I make the explosion and falling rock, but not the crash landing.

Sid: I don't make mine.

After damage roles, Chichi is left with only a couple health points; Mary is only slightly hurt.

GM: Before your astonished eyes the entire area surrounding the chute caves in, leaving only a large crater and no sign of the ropes, your friend's bodies, or the chute.

Sid: I'm going to go get Chichi and take her to the safety of the trees.

Lei: I won't go! We have to get our friends!

Sid: Chichi, they're dead, burnt, blasted to bits, and buried at the bottom of this crater. There is nothing

more we can do for them. Not even a resurrect can save them now, not after that explosion.

Lei: No! It can't be! Those were my friends!

Sid: I know, they were my friends too, but we have to leave here. The kolbolds are sure to come here and inspect their handiwork and the last thing we want is to be standing here when they come.

Lei: They're coming here? Then I'm waiting for them here. They'll die for what they did!

Sid: Chichi, you're not strong enough to face them. At the slightest blow you'll die. Come; let us regain our strength and return with a stronger force to avenge our friends.

Lei: I won't leave them! Those rats will unearth their remains and eat them! I won't let anyone treat my friends like that.

Sid: They won't; there's nothing left to eat, and they don't even like human flesh. Now come on, please.

Lei: Never.

Sid: (*sighs*) I guess we'll set up camp here, Terry.

GM: Got it. What kind of camp?

Sid: We don't have our tents or anything and it doesn't seem like a good idea to go get them from the mouth of the cave right now; I guess we just sleep on empty stomachs under the stars.

Lei: I'm not sleeping. I've been sleeping all day. I'm watching for the return of the kolbolds.

GM: And a fire?

Sid: Do we need one for warmth?

GM: Not at this time of year.

Sid: Then no, it will only attract more attention.

GM: And what do the kolbolds do?

Dr. J.: We do need to investigate the scene from outside, make sure we don't have any secret entrances we don't know about.

Dr. M.: But we don't want to run into that trigger-happy witch again. We'll wait till midnight to send out a cautious group of scouts.

GM: When you do your infravision clearly shows the head and shoulders of an elfin maid peering over the rim of the crater, though she does not seem to be looking in your direction.

Lei: I'm looking in all directions.

GM: Yes, but not all at once and not turning too quickly either or else you would have collapsed from dizziness long ago.

Dr. J.: We'll spread out as much as we can, surround the place (staying out of sight) so that we won't all be in danger of the same spell and then when the leader gives the call of an owl we'll all fire on her at once. If she doesn't die we'll flee; otherwise we'll wait some time to see that nothing moves, then creep closer.

GM: Chichi, roll a perception roll to see if you notice anything. Alas, that doesn't make it. This is a long-range shot with the target in 75% cover and concealment, so you'll need a 19 or 20 to hit and no criticals.

Dr. M.: I got one 19; six damage.

GM: Chichi, you are dead.

Lei: Ah, well, it seems the thing this adventure. Why are you doing this to us?

GM: Uh, I'm not. It's just that five adventurers aren't much for a hundred kolbolds.

Barmy: Nonsense. In a fair fight they wouldn't have stood a chance. Goodness, Gog and Martin alone and unaided, and neither in perfect health, managed to kill seventy-eight without any trouble and could have gone for more.

Dr. J.: Since when did kolbolds fight fair?

Sid: Did Chichi's death wake me?

GM: She didn't cry out, but the noise of the falling body and fourteen arrows and stones clattering around the perimeter of the crater might have waken you. I'll give you a perception, -4.

Sid: 16; I make it.

GM: Yes, but not by a whole lot. You're not really sure what woke you, but then you see Chichi slumped on the ground with an arrow protruding from her shoulder.

Sid: Great. She was too weak to take even a single arrow. I'll feel for a pulse.

GM: None.

Sid: I'll peer cautiously over the rim of the crater.

Dr. J.: Do we see her?

GM: You do; infravision is pretty useful that way.

Dr. J.: Then we scamper for cover.

GM: Mary, you don't see anything but you do hear the sound of receding footsteps, the occasional snapped twig and other telltale signs of a hasty retreat.

Sid: I think it time I made the same. Off for the nearest town. How much does Chichi weigh?

Lei: Next to nothing, being an elf. Five stone two.

Sid: I can carry that. I'll sling her over my shoulders.

GM: The trip is not as pleasant as it could be, but you meet with no opposition. By the time you stop to rest Chichi's body has had rigor mortis set in and things become less pleasant, but you reach the village of Tonwu by noon the next day.

Sid: I'll hire a carriage to take me to the city and pay for her raising.

GM: The trip is uneventful. The clerics demand a hundred more than you have, though.

Sid: Will they hang onto the body for a couple of hours while get the money?

GM: Sure, but how are you going to get the cash?

Sid: You remember Laura Tenderhorn?

GM: Ah. Yes, you have no difficulty and soon Chichi is alive once more. And with that I think we'll stop for today. Paul, Barmy, if the two of you will whip up new characters and if anyone sees Garry see if he still wants to play with us?

Dr. M.: A charming time. I doubt very sincerely that I'll play with you again, but thanks for the chance.

Dr. J.: Indeed, it was a treat. I may drop by again, but don't count on it.

All pack up their accessories and disperse.