Session Notes
Adventure 13A03: The Gearwork Dungeon

Downtime

Selena asks for a report on the Golden Order's missing weapons. Yrion and Kavan take care to blame the gang leader Dorven and her employer Thinvold Zell for their disappearance - S'harr, they explain, was framed by evildoers who have "got it in for troglodytes". The report satisfies the Golden Order, and quartermaster Yeglin expresses his personal thanks by gifting Yrion a magical longsword called Shadowjumper that none of the other paladins want to use. Fortunately, unlike Strikefast, it does not talk, and its only noticeable downside is a tendency to be jumpy and suspicious.

Larkspur and Willan report from Gooseport shortly after the party returns. Valser got back a day or two after the PCs left for Horizon. A day later he was furiously asking in the Golden Goose if anyone had seen a band of hobgoblins, who had allegedly raided his "goods store". Since then the number of shifty-looking Shadowport types around the village has increased, though he may soon have difficulty paying for them since the word has gone out in Axis, Glitterhaegen and Horizon that his watch-geese aren't to be trusted. Twelfth Legion anti-smuggling sloops from Bronzebridge have been patrolling more regularly along the north coast of Sword Point, following a tip-off from Selena.

Yrion gets a job guarding a caravan which is travelling to Axis. Yria and Soril go with him – Yria wants to search out smithing facilities for her perfect armour, while Soril is after information about the mysterious Master Ebroc. Soril's search is largely unsuccessful, though he meets a thief who overheard two members of House Valentyr (one of the Great Families of Axis) mention the name while she was trying to steal from them.

Kavan travels to Glitterhaegen to visit a contact of his: ***Anra Dusthollow***, a busy and cheerful Folk who runs a soup kitchen in the slums outside the city along with other disciples of the Priestess. Breaking the party's promise to the ettercaps, he tells her everything about the threat to the Priestess, including the stolen weapons and the involvement of another Icon. Anra says she will inform the Cathedral.

Selena suggests that the heroes formalise their group by giving it a name and registering it with the Guild.

The Call

A few days after Harvest Day, the PCs' guild pins glow. "Adventurer! If you would be so good as to report to Bladeby Adventurers' Guild, we have a quest that is relevant to your interests!"

Once they have assembled, Selena tells the party that she is sending them on their first expedition to tackle a Living Dungeon. Beraldor, the drow ranger from the party that lost Strikefast, will be their guide.



Beraldor

Beraldor gives them the briefing:

- A living dungeon is rising in the underworld below the northern fields between Axis and Glitterhaegen, a territory inhabited by drow but claimed by the Dwarf King.
- The dungeon seems to be some sort of mechanical contraption that moves at speed and erratically, suggesting that it is being controlled somehow.
- The ruler of the drow in the area, ***Rondo Silverheart,*** has put together a plan to assault the place after learning of it from contacts among the Stone Diviners, a group associated with the Dwarf King.
- If it maintains its current trajectory, the dungeon will breach in an abandoned dwarven mining area close to a drow village called Stonehelm. The heroes should be able to get onboard there. If they succeed, anything they find is theirs.
- They must leave at first light tomorrow.

The party has time to make some last-minute purchases. Kavan buys enough oil to keep his lantern alight for several days. Soril buys spikes and rope.

Stonehelm

The voyage to the northern fields is uneventful. The heroes are put ashore at the port of Bengar's Catch some 10 miles west of Glitterhaegen. Beraldor leads the party to a concealed entrance in a rocky outcrop in Bitterwood, and down a steep narrow path into the dark. After an hour or so of travel, the party reaches Stonehelm, a small village of drow mushroom farmers. Round stone huts are built into the walls of a large cavern and fresh water cascades down the damp walls. The whole cavern is dimly lit by elvish glow globes hanging from the roof and phosphorescence from the giant mushrooms that grow on and between the houses.



Stonehelm

The heroes rest up and prepare with a lunch of mushroom stew, while Beraldor checks the route with the bored-looking guards and obtains a rusty key. He leads the heroes down one of the myriad paths leading down and away from the village. They reach a wooden door labelled "Danger – mine workings - Do not enter" in Elvish script, which Beraldor unlocks. The passage beyond is low and square and slopes steeply downwards. Deeply incised grooves in the floor indicate that this was once the main shaft of a mine. Side passages soon start to branch out from it. The air is dry and dusty, but it isn't quiet – there is a faint grinding sound and the floor vibrates.

Beraldor listens at a side passage and turns into it. "We're going to have to hurry. It's almost here." He quickly leads the party through a maze of passageways as the grinding gets louder and dust begins to shake from the ceiling. Finally he locates the passage he was looking for, and encourages the heroes to dash down the narrow passageway. They round a corner – and run straight into a group of 4 fierce-looking dwarves who are blocking the path.



Edlan, Brilla, Thordir, Thorgrun

"Stop right there!" shouts the leader, a woman with a black topknot. "You're in dwarf territory. This dungeon is ours for the taking!"

Beraldor immediately disputes this claim, claiming Adventurers' Guild precedence, which goes down badly. The heroes decide not to join in. Yrion enquires if they will still get paid. Meanwhile the vibrations and noise increase in intensity. Chunks of rock start dropping from the ceiling. Just at the point at which it looks like combat is inevitable, one of the dwarves glances over his shoulder into the cavern beyond. "Boss – it's here!" The leader curses and menaces the party with her spear. "Don't follow us!". She runs off after her companions, who are unshipping rope hooks from their shoulders.

The heroes ignore this and enter the cavern just as the dungeon bursts through the floor, knocking over everyone except Gwindor and Kavan. It is shaped like a round tower with a conical cap, but very wide and made entirely from an iron shell. Magic flares from the top as it disintegrates the rock in the chamber ceiling and continues on. The heroes pick themselves up just in time to see the dwarves swinging themselves up to a narrow vent just below the cap. Brilla is the last one up – "so long, fools!" she taunts as the vent screws up into the ceiling above and vanishes. Beraldor curses.

The dungeon continues to rise through the floor of the cavern. Yria and Gwindor spot another larger entrance come into view and they make a run for it. Gwindor leaps on board and throws down a rope that Kavan and Yria scramble up. Soril floats up using his new levitation spell, but Yrion just misses the end of the rope. Beraldor gives him a boost up but loses the chance to scramble aboard himself. "Good luck!" he yells as the entrance rises into the ceiling and he disappears from sight.

Level 1: The Welcoming Party

The heroes find themselves in a short corridor that leads into a small chamber that is empty except for a table and chairs. A set of iron dice, two piles of very small garnets, and plates containing what look like lumps of coal sit on the table. Near the back of the room, 2 strange-looking humanoids – about the size and stature of dwarves but with black skin and flaming hair and beards - stand on guard by the only exit, along with two gearwork automatons consisting of iron barrels festooned with gears and pulleys, surmounted by brass dwarf-shaped "heads" bolted onto thick rods. "Intruders! Burn them!" yells one of the creatures. The automata trundle forward on little wheels, brandishing clicking pincer clamps and spinning saw-like gears.



Azer

Soril is the first to react. He gestures into existence a ghostly mage hand that picks up a handful of gravel from the floor and flings into the spinning cogs of the nearest automaton, unfortunately with no effect except for a shower of sparks. The azers move to a pair of levers set into the right-hand wall of the room and prepare to pull them. Before they get the chance, Gwindor steps into the room, beating out a drum roll that grows in intensity and culminates in a powerful sonic blast that smashes both azers and one of the automatons against the far wall. Yria charges forward and lands a solid hit on the remaining automaton; it tries to grab her with its pincer and grind her with the spinning gear, but misses with both attempts. Yrion, thinking that contributing to this fight is hardly worth it when his sister is taking all the glory, runs forward and pokes lackadaisically into the automaton's innards with Shadowjumper. There is a crunching sound as his sword tip hits something, and the automaton explodes in a shower of cogs and gears.

The heroes catch their breath and examine the room. Kavan rapidly figures out and demonstrates the effects of the levers – one causes a portcullis to slam down across the room's entrance and the other triggers flame jets that roast anyone left trapped in the passageway. The party had a narrow escape. Kavan resets the portcullis in case the heroes need to make a quick escape but disables the fire jets just in case. Meanwhile, Yria and Gwindor examine the automata and find their control crystals, sadly both smashed beyond repair. Soril and Yrion pocket the garnets that the azers were gambling with.

Level 2: The Smith

The party continues through the other exit from the room and down a set of stairs. The heat builds as they descend, warm draughts rising up the stairwell. Ahead the sound of ringing metal, whirring gears, and spinning widgets gets louder. The bottom of the stairwell opens into a large L-shaped chamber that turns out of sight to the right. The visible section has large iron tables stacked with brass gears, iron cables, and iron barrels and wheels. From around the corner, the repeated ringing of metal starts again after a whooshing sound and a blast of heat.

Soril and Yrion creep forward to see what's round the corner. The first thing they notice is a twelve-foot-tall humanoid creature – perhaps an ogre? - wearing a leather apron and heavy gloves hammering a metal sheet on a large anvil. A huge iron vat of molten liquid bubbles in the far corner next to a dark passage leading further into the dungeon, kept simmering by blasts of fire that occasionally erupt from nozzles in the floor. An azer stands near it, awaiting instructions to pour the brass into the iron forms on the floor nearby. Just before he dodges back, Yrion also spots a crossbow-armed construct standing beside the right-hand wall, half concealed by a table covered in gears, pulleys and cables.

The party hastily concocts an ambush plan. Soril grabs a small piece of chain and rattles it, deepening and amplifying the sound and magically throwing it so that a metallic clinking and rumbling appears to come from the dark passage. The smith turns to look and the azer leaves his post to investigate. Yria and Gwindor loose arrows at the smith; Yria's misses but Gwindor's thunks into his shoulder. The smith roars and turns around – and the heroes find themselves looking into the face of a cyclops.



Molkides the Smith

The party focus on attacking from range. Gwindor's second arrow misses, but Yrion scores a solid hit that sends the cyclops staggering back. Kavan follows up with a throwing crescent that causes a nasty bleeding wound and Yria picks up a round metal former and frisbees it into his stomach. The cyclops grabs a wrench and glares at Kavan, who is transfixed long enough for it to go thudding into his arm. "Get them, Ashtoth!" he shouts.

The azer runs forward, but as he does so, Soril finishes an incantation and makes a small gesture. The fires in Ashtoth's eyes go out, leaving blank black orbs, and he grabs a sledgehammer and smashes it into his master's head. Molkides staggers back, mortally wounded, and slumps over the handled wheel that controls the vat. A wave of molten bronze splashes onto the floor, damaging Ashtoth. The gatlinger fires but has no direct line of sight of the heroes, who have retreated round the corner, so its shots go wild.

Gwindor moves forward to fire again, but Soril holds him back. "The spell's still working!" he says. "Wait and see what he does!" The advice proves wise, as Ashtoth assaults the gatlinger, knocking off several chunks. After a few seconds, Soril indicates that the spell has faded. Yrion and Kavan charge in before Ashtoth has a chance to recover and land meaty blows that take him out, while Yrion and Kavan grab a table to act as a defence against the gatlinger. This proves unnecessary as it malfunctions when it fires, popping several cogs.

Gwindor has moved behind a table on the far side of the room and pops up to fire an arrow into the gatlinger's innards. "I've softened it up for you!" he yells. Yrion pulls back his bow to fire and the string snaps, narrowly missing his eye. Kavan casts a javelin that pins the gatlinger against the wall and Yria administers the coup de grace.

Digging into the gatlinger, Soril finds its control cube, but it has been cracked by Gwindor's arrow. He casts a mending cantrip to repair it and does the same for Yrion's snapped bowstring. Yria navigates through the pools of cooling brass to rifle the pockets of the cyclops' apron, finding a pair of fine fire opals.

Level 3: The Engineer

The exit from the room turns a corner and becomes a slope leading down to the next level. Soril spots a grill hanging open and concludes that the dwarven raiding party must have come this way. There is a constant noise of machinery - gears click and grind against each other and with each crank, the party can sense the dungeon spin and move slowly upward.

The source of the noise becomes apparent as the ramp opens into a room about a hundred feet in length. The far wall consists of spinning interlocked gears, some twice as tall as a human. Fire flares from a wide opening in the floor in the far corner where a dwarf is shovelling black rock. An eighteen foot tall black-skinned fire giant dressed in engineer's overalls and wearing goggles emerges from a side room and stands next to a pedestal platform on the right, with a female cyclops trailing after. She quickly spots the heroes, despite their attempts to hide, and booms out, "Good, more workers. I am Xeromas, your new master. Philidae, constructs, prepare them for assembly!" Two more dwarves emerge out of side chambers, and that's when the party sees that they have iron rods piercing the flesh of their dead limbs and exoskeletons made of gears that allow them to move. They also look very familiar.



Xeromas the Fire Giant

Round 1: A battered cleric and sleepy dwarves

The dwarves advance and take swings at Kavan and Yrion while Xeromas digs into her iron satchel and flings a red hot gear at Yria, which fortunately misses. Kavan casts an invocation of war that energises the whole party and blesses Yria with godly strength, causing her to glow with cold white light. Philidae the cyclops advances on Kavan and glares at him. He once again proves susceptible, standing still as she swings her deadly flaming maul into his ribs, leaving a smouldering hole in his armour. Soril, betting that the undead dwarves' brains are still functioning, makes a soothing series of gestures in their direction, and the two dwarves slump unconscious. Yrion and Yria team up on Philidae – Yrion distracts her, while Yria lands a decent hit. Gwindor, who has hung back, fires his bow at Xeromas, scoring a solid blow. "Hang tough!" he yells at Kavan, accompanying his words with a drum roll. Kavan feels slightly better.

Round 2: A cyclops' one weakness

Xeromas throws another red-hot gear at Yria, which hits this time, leaving a nasty gash in her leg and setting the padding of her armour on fire. Edlan, the third dwarf from the far end of the room, runs in and also tries to hit Yria, but misses. Soril casts a spray of distracting shifting colours at Philidae and Edlan. Yrion once again distracts Philidae, taking the opportunity to touch his sister on the arm and murmur "you're it" while pouring healing energies into her. Yria pulls herself up and with a yell splats Philidae's single eye with Strikefast. Philidae flies backwards and goes down. Kavan calls upon his deity once again, raising his shield to the heavens, and heals himself, while Gwindor sneaks up behind Edlan and runs him through.

“Move it!” he yells at Yria, who smothers the fire that was threatening to catch hold and advances on Xeromas.

Round 3: The fourth dwarf

Soril has run out of useful spells and decides to investigate the rooms from which the dwarves emerged. He finds a workshop filled with tools, gears, cables, pulleys and sharp iron rods. In the centre of the room is a table, and strapped to it is Brilla, the leader of the dwarf expedition party. She has had iron rods inserted into her legs, and gears and pulleys screwed into her flesh and bone, but she is still alive. “Free me” she whispers. Using his last remaining cantrip, Soril makes a knocking motion and the straps come undone.

Back outside, Xeromas pulls out a flaming wrench and swings it underarm into Yria, who is sent flying backwards. Yrion helps her up and charges forward, but his blow goes wide. Yria runs after him and strikes Xeromas on the leg, while Muffins leaps from her shoulder and claws at Xeromas’ backside, distracting her. Gwindor joins in the distraction with a jeering, mocking song about “the useless engineer” that causes Xeromas to cover her ears in distress. The party is surprised when the song is interrupted by a yell as a battered and barely standing Brilla throws herself into the fray.

Round 4: The salmon leap

Kavan has been directing healing magic into Yria, which is just as well because Xeromas strikes her once again with the wrench, knocking her over. Soril feels a resurgence of his colour spray spell and channels it at Xeromas, sending her staggering backwards. Seeing his chance, Yrion makes a salmon-like leap upwards, catching Xeromas’ belt, from where he climbs her like a tree and slashes at her neck with Shadowjumper. Xeromas collapses and Yrion winks out of existence for a moment, reappearing unharmed at ground level. “Useful sword, that,” he says.

Aftermath

Kavan heals Brilla with the last of his spells, while Yrion searches Xeromas’ body, finding some valuable diamond ear studs in the left ear of the severed head, and Soril claims the dwarven gemstones and jewellery that he finds among the ex-dwarves’ personal effects in the workshop. Gwindor and Kavan puzzle over a control box they find attached to the wall, which has an odd moving picture on its surface as well as several levers and a couple of control wheels. Eventually Kavan figures out that the moving picture is a highly stylised representation of the dungeon in its environment, and Gwindor works out that the levers and wheels control the dungeon’s speed and direction. With this information they guide the dungeon to an empty cavern close to Stonehelm and shut it down. Gwindor extracts the central control device, a larger version of the crystal cube found in the constructs, so that the dungeon cannot be reactivated.

Brilla is not exactly grateful for the rescue (“you shouldn’t have been here in the first place”) but grudgingly admits that she owes the party and will put in a good word for them with the Dwarf King. She stomps off while the heroes make their way back to Stonehelm, where Beraldor is waiting for them, along with a tall, elegant drow who turns out to be Rondo Stoneheart. As thanks for their efforts, he gifts them a wondrous item, an earth node crystal that can cause a highly localised earthquake once per day. The party returns to Bladeby.